



Mail-merge made easy

(part 1)

Of all the support calls we get on the LoanLinx Help Desk most are not about our software at all. They are more often on one of two subjects: networking (of the computer-hardware kind) or mail-merge.

It seems that mail-merge causes more headaches than almost any other computer-related task and, because of that, it often gets put into the 'too hard' basket ...which is a pity, because mastering this technique can add significantly to your bottom line, as well as ease some of your time pressures.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

Motivation

Why bother with mail-merge in the first place? Writing to your clients, prospects or referrers is certainly no substitute for a personal phone call or visit, but it's another arrow in your quiver to help you achieve your sales targets and to maintaining that professional edge.

In a growing business it's just about impossible to speak to everyone regularly, so why not supplement that personal contact and have less stress by *automating* some of those tasks?

By keeping your name, and perhaps even your face, top-of-mind with your clients and referrers you will continue to build credibility and be seen as a long-term professional. While competitors may have a marketing 'blitz' from time to time, a regular communication from you, over months or even years, will show stability.

Putting your computer to work by using some simple mail-merge techniques will help you achieve this.

Make a list

Don't let the fear of the 'how to' of mail-merge put you off (well, not just yet, anyway). Why not make a list of the types of documents you would like to send out if you had the time and resources? Here are some suggestions:

Clients

- Post-interview thankyou letter

- Conditional/unconditional approval letter by email or SMS (yes, SMS can be done through mail-merge)
- Birthday or Christmas card (or Australia Day, or Grand Final day or When-Old-Wins-the-State-of-Origin Day or Any-Excuse-You-Like Day!)
- Post-settlement follow-up (maybe 7 days, 30 days, 6 months etc.)
- Fixed-rate expiry reminders
- Loan Review offers
- Function invitations
- Newsletter (print or email)

Referrers

- Thankyou letter for referrals
- Updates re referred clients
- Birthday and Christmas cards
- Function invitations
- Industry-focused newsletters (email)

These are only suggestions. Ask your team for their ideas – there are many opportunities and most brokers are missing out because they simply don't have (or don't implement) the necessary procedures.

Clean up your database

When I ask brokers who are considering using LoanLinx what state their existing client database is in, there are some red faces around! Often there are some records in Outlook, others maybe in Excel, still others just on aggregators' systems and (shock, horror) some just on paper in a filing cabinet somewhere.

Just for a moment, imagine you were planning to sell your business next week. How much more do you think it would be worth if you had all your clients, prospects and referrers properly stored on a database, fully listed and categorised? And, importantly, not residing on a third-party computer out there in the ether somewhere, but securely on your own internal computer. Clearly, a well-organised database, held on your own private system, is worth money!

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The best solution is an industry-specific database which can handle the special fields required by the lending industry but *any* database would be better than none. But do make sure you have only one 'live' database, to avoid the need to update more than one set of records.

Once you gather all your contacts into the one place you will then need to review it for accuracy, as far as you are able. This would include cleaning out duplications and ensuring compliance with the Spam Act and the new Do Not Call legislation. A good database should have fields to help you with this.

You should also make sure that you don't end up sending two copies of a mailer where one will do. Most loans are for two parties – typically Mr and Mrs – so your database design should

your hard work, gives your clients the wrong impression.

Selecting the recipients

There's a good chance you won't want to send *each* document to *every* contact. For example, borrowers who had loans settle last month will be a different group to those who have fixed-rate expiry dates coming up soon. So you need an easy system to do what's called "filtering", allowing you to target each mailing appropriately.

With any luck the CRM system you have chosen will do the filtering work for you. As an example, the second screenshot below shows how LoanLinx allows easy selection of clients who had loans settle in July 2007.



lend itself to allowing a joint mailing with a special Mailing Title field which you can modify to suit each client (see illustration).

Nothing makes a worse impression than receiving a letter with you or your partner's name incorrectly presented. If John Smith and Sarah Jones are a de facto couple, Sarah may not appreciate the letter being addressed to 'Mr & Mrs Smith'!

And where the borrower is a trust or company, or three or more parties, you need the flexibility to address mail appropriately, e.g. 'The Directors' or 'The Smith Family Trust & Robert Jones'.

Nirvana is achieved by a database that will also let you customise the Greeting (salutation) field to suit the client. That way baby boomers could be addressed as 'Dear Mr & Mrs Smith', gen-Xs as 'Hello John & Suzie', gen-Ys as 'Hi Guys' ... and I daren't think about gen-Z!

This sort of flexibility also helps you avoid having to use formal names. ('Dear Giuseppe Mario Alfonso Moretti & Mrs Maria-Cristina Traviata Moretti' somehow doesn't have quite the same friendliness as 'Hello Joe and Maria'!)

So take care when choosing your CRM database to ensure you don't end up having a restricted system that, despite

If you don't have a CRM like this you will have a fair bit of work to do to select your target audience. At the very minimum you should be able to export your database to Microsoft Excel and then do the filtering from there, but this can be fiddly so is best avoided.

By the way, don't forget to ensure your CRM allows easy one-off merging (for things like a loan-approval letter

or thankyou note), in addition to a group-mail function, as this can save an enormous amount of time in preparing routine correspondence.

Drafting your letter

Putting aside the technicalities of mail-merge for a moment, a good idea is to simply draft your mailing piece as if you were talking to one of your valued clients. Just start typing.

There are many resources out there (including some just for the lending industry) so we won't go into what to say or how to say it here, except that you should make it your own. Use a style that is 'you' – as if you were having a conversation with your client. Convey your warmth, feeling and personality. (You're not a bank, so don't sound like one!)

For the purpose of this exercise, leave out the Client name and address and specific loan details for now, as we'll be merging these in the next step. Make sure to save the file and have a backup.

In Part 2 we'll get right down to the actual merge, using Microsoft Word 2003 – which is used by most brokers – and using examples of a single-merge such as a loan approval letter and group merge for bulk mailings. There will even be a technique to help with loan applications.

With the right preparation, as suggested above, you'll find it much easier than you imagined! **FB**

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