



Mail-merge made easy

(part 2)

In Part 1 we covered some of the preparation steps needed to mail-merge your Clients and Contacts. Here in Part 2 we'll get down to the nitty-gritty of the 'how to'.

It's worth the effort to learn these mail-merge skills. Mailing your Clients and Referrers is cost-effective as well as a time-saving way to stay 'top-of-mind' with them – especially if you can automate the process!

In case you didn't see the last article here's a quick summary of the preparation necessary:

Preparation

- Work up a list of all the documents you might want to send – from Thankyou notes to newsletters – there are numerous opportunities at different stages of the loan process – before, during and after.
- Get your database organised – mainly your Prospects and Clients but don't forget your referral (or potential referral) sources. A well-organised database is worth money if you ever plan to sell your business, but it's absolutely essential if you are to add mail-merge to your marketing mix.
- Make sure your CRM has appropriate fields to allow you to address recipients appropriately, catering for de facto couples, trusts or companies. Also check it properly handles the *Unsubscribe* and *Do Not Call* functions required under law.
- Ensure your CRM system allows you to be able to target each mailing to an appropriate audience such as potential investors, first-home buyers etc.
- When drafting your letters be 'yourself' – have a warm and inviting manner as if you were speaking face-to-face. Don't sound like a bank!

At the end of the last article I suggested you draft a sample letter, leaving out the merge fields. Now we can start adding those fields from your database.

The following instructions apply to a 'group' mailing, not a single letter to a single contact, however the same principles apply to both.

Linking from your data

The best option is to go straight from your CRM application to your word processor – which is how programs like LoanLinX work – but a second choice is to export your data to Excel and use that as your data source.

We'll use that method in this tutorial as most programs will have data export as an option. For example, in Outlook 2003 it's **File** ⇨ **Import and Export** or in LoanLinX it's **Utilities** ⇨ **Data Export**. Choose the Microsoft Excel format in each case.

If your CRM has not allowed you to filter the data (that is, selecting just the records you need) then you will need to do it within Excel using **Data** ⇨ **Filter**, but this is not for the faint-hearted. Far better to let your CRM do it!

“...think hard before giving out your list to third parties ... you may be exposing your database to unnecessary risks”

Once exported, take a moment to give the spreadsheet a final check-over to ensure the data looks correct and unsubscribed names are excluded. If permanent changes are needed they should be done in the original database and exported again.

Save the Excel file and give it a meaningful name such as "Clients – Loan Reviews, Oct 07.xls".

The merge

Most brokers have MS Word 2003 installed, so we'll use that as our example. Just follow these steps:

1. Open your sample Word document (or create it and save a copy).
2. Click **Tools** ⇨ **Letters & Mailings** ⇨ **Mail Merge**.
3. You'll notice that the Mail Merge Wizard appears, to walk you through the steps.
4. You should also see the Mail Merge Toolbar (if not, switch it on through **View** ⇨ **Toolbars**).
5. Follow the wizard according to your preferences (eg. letters or email etc.).
6. When asked for the recipients, choose the 'existing list' option and select the spreadsheet you saved earlier.
7. The Address Block and Greeting Line options are a bit complex – you can skip them and we'll see an easier way to include these fields below.
8. Click 'Complete the merge'.

At this point you will only see your draft document – with no Client names or addresses. That's because we haven't inserted any fields yet. However, the data is attached to the document in the background, so it's probably a good idea to save the document again at this time.

Now we can get down to inserting the fields where we want them, using the Mail Merge toolbar:



It would be worthwhile sometime to look at all the options on the toolbar to see what they do – there's a lot of power there but, for now, it's just worth remembering that you should generally work along it from left to right.

We don't need the first two buttons as the wizard has done those for us. The third button is useful for previewing the clients again and even allows some filtering out of unwanted names (although this is best done back in your CRM).

9. Locate your cursor where you want the Client name(s) and click the sixth button – 'Insert Merge Fields'. A list of fields from your database will appear. Highlight the required field and click Insert.

(This is where the usefulness of special database fields such as Mailing Title and Greeting come in handy, since they can be customised to suit each Client).

10. Repeat this for all the other required fields (although you may find it better to close the box and re-position the cursor each time).
11. Lay out your fields throughout the document in the way you prefer and save the document again.
12. If you click the eighth button on the toolbar [< < > > ABC] it will alternate the view between the fields names (contained within chevrons) and the actual Client names. You should end up with something that looks like the 'before & after' shots below.

TIP: You can't type in the field names along with the chevrons – you need to insert them using the method described in Step 9, above.

13. With the names displayed, you can preview your letters with the Next Record/Previous Record arrows to ensure they look as you expect.

<p>25 October 2007</p> <p>«Mailing_Title» «Mailing_Address_1» «Mailing_Suburb» «Mailing_State» «Mailing_Postcode»</p> <p>«Greeting»</p> <p>Good News regarding your Home L</p> <p>It's now been almost twelve months si</p>	<p>25 October 2007</p> <p>Mr J Smith & Miss S Jones 23 Sails Court Beachside Qld 4078</p> <p>Hello John & Sarah</p> <p>Good News regarding your Home Loan!</p> <p>It's now been almost twelve months since ...</p>
--	---

[YOUR LOGO HERE]		Loan Submission Cover Sheet	
From:	Better Finance Pty Ltd, Brisbane, Qld, 4567 Phone:(07) 4567 8900, Fax:(07) 4567 8901 Email: admin@betterloans.com.au		
To:	ANZ Bank, Fax: (02) 3456 7890		
We have pleasure in submitting the following loan for your approval. Please review the notes below while assessing the loan for approval. Thank you.			
Name(s) of Applicant(s):	Adamson, Terrence Graham Adamson, Rosanna Tina		
Finance Date:	25/04/2007	Status:	Urgent
Loan Product:	ANZ Breakfree		
Loan Amount:	\$ 250,000	LVR:	55%
Purpose:	home purchase		
Security:	First mortgage over: 45 Waves Road, Forest Lake with an estimated value of \$450,000		

14. Don't forget that you are not restricted to personalising the letter with just the name and address. If your CRM allows export of loan details, for example, then there's no reason why you can't include this. For example, in "Your \$250,000 investment loan with ANZ" – the fields shown here as shaded would be personalised for each recipient.
15. When you are happy with the result you can Merge to Printer or Merge to Email as appropriate. (If you are printing on pre-printed letterheads make sure you have left sufficient room in your document. Just print a single record to test it.)


By the way, creating a merge to an email is a terrific idea for newsletters or other updates. It's easy, quick and low-cost. When I was in lending I used to send out hundreds of emails to local referrers via email and had great results. Also, one

franchise owner I know mail-merges from his LoanLinx CRM directly to email and is then able, in conjunction with a service provider, to send SMS alerts to Clients. The possibilities are endless!

Naturally you need to be SPAM Act compliant and ensure you update your CRM with unsubscribe information immediately.

There are some other great opportunities for brokers to use mail-merge, too. For example it's just as easy to merge data to pre-populate forms such as Finance Broking Contracts or application forms. Above is an example of a Loan Submission Cover Sheet where all the data fields have been merged automatically. This not only saves time but reduces transposition errors as well.

As a final tip, think hard before giving out your list to third-parties, including aggregators, for them to manage your mailings for you. Not only does it make it hard to maintain two lists and to manage unsubscribes or bounces but you may be exposing your database to unnecessary risks. Managing it in-house, with a strong, lending-specific, private CRM, gives you maximum power and maximum security.

Putting your computer to work in this way will not only help you build your business, but protect it as well! 

- Chris Mills is MD of Linx Software Pty Ltd, developers of the LoanLinx broker management system. He can be contacted on (07) 5474 2800, chris@loanlinx.com.au or www.loanlinx.com.au