We got around three

devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20151124-00

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In this story about Restoration Hardware's mail order extravagance, there is a little statistic:

> Industry surveys from groups like the Direct Marketing Association estimate that catalogues get average response rates of four to five per cent.

That reminded me a story back from the days when Microsoft sold Fortran PowerStation, the development suite for the scientific programming language. A developer from the Windows 95 team decided to try a change of pace and switched into sales and marketing, and he wound up working on Fortran PowerStation.

One of his attempts to drum up interest was to include a reply card in a periodic mailing to subscribers of some general computer programming magazine. This was back in the days when people subscribed to computer programming magazines, like, in print. Also back in the days when the publishers would send out little playing-card-deck-sized blocks of business reply cards for various products.

As he explained it to us, "We sent out around ten thousand cards. They say that a typical response rate for a direct mailing is four to five percent. We got three."

Okay, three percent is a bit low, but given that Fortran is not exactly an up-and-coming product, it's still quite respectable.

"No, not three percent. Three responses."

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