

Elements of a Successful Direct Mail Campaign

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Introduction

Successful direct mail campaigns rely on several important elements, two of which stand out above the rest. This article details the top two elements, as well as provides extensive tips on how to launch a successful direct mail campaign.

Direct mail can be expensive to produce and send. In order to build profit into your campaign, it is imperative that these two elements lead the way.

The Top Two Elements:

- A good mailing list that reaches your market; and
- An enticing, strong offer that compels your market to respond.

Once you firmly establish these two elements, you can then focus on the remaining pieces of a successful direct mail campaigns, including:

- pre-planning;
- mailing and postage design;
- piece design
- letter copy;
- response techniques; and
- follow-up.

The Mailing List

The following tips will help insure that your mailing list reaches your market. An accurate and well-targeted list dramatically increases your response rate.

- Maintain a list of customers and inquiries as an in-house list. This is the best list you will ever use.
- When purchasing a list, choose an experienced and reputable mail house or list company. Ask what type of clients they have serviced in the past.
- Ask these questions of a mailing list recommendation:
 - Does this list reach the typical buyer of my product or service?
 - Is the age level or income level appropriate?
 - When was the list last updated?
- Clean your list by removing duplicates.
- Scrub your list for erroneous addresses. Nearly 30% of all direct mail is undeliverable as addressed—resulting in tremendous waste and expense. The scrub process can be automated using specially designed software and databases. Here is where Certegy's mailing services can help. Certegy will check your database against the industry standard Coding Accuracy Support System (CASS) certified database. CASS is a process designed by the U.S. Postal Service to improve the accuracy of any mailing database. At the same time, the software standardizes addresses to meet postal automation requirements.

The Offer

To obtain the most profitable response, you must present a strong, compelling offer. Stimulate the reader to respond now with an irresistible inducement. Some components of your offer may include a free trial period, a free gift for responding, a response deadline to qualify for the offer, or attractive terms compared to your competition. Present your offer right at the beginning of the letter, and summarize it again at the end. Define clearly how you want the reader to respond to this incredible offer. Make the offer something they won't want to refuse.

To define this offer they won't refuse, think in terms of the prospect's needs, wants, and desires in relation to solving pressing problems, soothing worries, or alleviating fears. Begin with a pressing question or statement that directly addresses how your offer is solving the problem. Keep the reader's attention and use headlines addressing the problems and solutions throughout the letter. Resolve concerns with your offer's benefits. For example, the following headline addresses a pressing problem and offers a solution.

Too Much Debt?
Consolidate your bills today with our no-fee, 0% Visa Card.

A good direct mail letter holds the prospects interest long enough to read your request for action. Repeat the irresistible offer and provide the call to action at the end of the letter.

Once you have cleaned up your list and defined your compelling offer, you're ready to plan the rest of the campaign.

Pre-Planning Tips

- Check out your competitors' promotional materials as a reference tool.
- Identify your target audience. This step coincides with the making of your list.
- If purchasing a list, order it early.
- When outsourcing writers, designers, or printers, get references and ask for samples of previous work.
- Check with your Post Office on postal rates and design before preparing artwork or reply card.
- Ask for input from your printer and mail house. Leverage their experience to save you money, especially if using non-standard designs that may incur more postage costs.
- Ask the printer about types of paper options.
- Proofread several times. Have one person proof for content accuracy and one proof for typos and errors.
- Save costs by finishing the design and making all changes before typesetting.

- Ensure the timing is correct—be aware of holiday periods and seasonal issues.
- Mail to yourself to determine the timing.
- When possible, test different copy on sample markets.

Mailing and Postage Design Tips

The following tips focus on money-saving strategies concerning postal service regulations.

- Determine what class of mail you will use and print the proper *indicia on the piece. When outsourcing to a mailing service, they will advise you on their indicia.
- When using a self mailer, make the fold at the bottom and the opening at the top to conform to automated mail machinery.
- Leave room for the address label.
- Do not place any copy in the barcode clear zone.
- Make sure your design falls in the proper size limitations to classify in the desired postal category. A professional mailing service and your local post office can advise.
- Be aware that unusual designs such as a square may incur surcharges for being out of ratio for postal equipment.
- Be aware that glossy paper will not hold meter ink. When using glossy, print an indicia on the piece.
- Consult with your mailing company early for more impact in helping your mail speed through the postal system and in saving you postage.

Reminder: When it comes to direct mail, remember that Certegy's expertise and large volume mailing services can save you time, money, and hassle. We do all the work so you don't have to!

***Indicia** - An authorization stamp issued by the post office that allows mailers to not affix postage, and instead have the post office debit from their postage account. For example:

First Class
U.S. Postage
Paid
[Company Name]

Piece Design Tips

These design tips focus on the actual structure of the direct mail piece.

- Think benefits! Include benefits on the reply card, in a P.S., and on the envelope.
- Use the final part of the letter to remind the reader of your offer and your guarantee.
- Intersperse longer copy with graphics and headlines to keep it interesting and ease the eye.
- Use easy-to-read typefaces such as Times New Roman.

- Emphasize key points with capital letters, bold facing, underlining, color, and paragraph indents.
- Use your envelope to sell and to encourage the reader to open it.

Letter Tips

A letter is the most common form of direct mail. Many companies hire a professional marketer to create direct mail pieces. Should you decide to do it yourself, you have the direct advantage of knowing the in-depth features and benefits of your products and services. Sometimes you are too close to the subject, however. Be sure to have someone critique your letter, preferably someone who is not as familiar with your services or products.

When writing your direct mail letter, refer back to the previous section and define a compelling offer. Remember, a strong offer is the foundation for your letter.

- Make your content meaningful, interesting, and beneficial to the reader.
- Start with persuasive selling. Stay positive and focus on benefits. Benefits are the reasons people will buy—don't focus on the features of your product or service, but link features with benefits.
- Hook your reader with the irresistible offer.
- Keep the copy short, clear, and simple—without using jargon.
- Use headings, subheadings, and bullets to break up the copy.
- Write with an active, not passive voice.
- Limit the use of bold, italics, and underline. Used sparingly, it will add emphasis.
- Clearly state your offer, and restate it again at the end.
- Make it easy for your customer to respond. If possible, provide alternate ways to respond—by phone, fax, email, or Internet. Highlight your phone number.
- Guarantee satisfaction.
- Add an important message in the PS, which is often the most frequently read part of the letter.

Response Techniques

Here are a few techniques that may improve your response rate.

- Ask for a response more than once.
- Make it clear to your readers what to do next. Confusion is your worst enemy.
- As mentioned previously, provide alternate ways to respond—by phone, fax, email, or Internet.
- Include a postage-paid business reply card or envelope. Mention your offer again in the response card.
- Provide a toll-free number.
- Include words like “free” and “no risk, no obligation.”
- Show a picture of your product or brochure.
- Have the reader “act now” or do something.
- Educate your employees for proper responses.

Follow-up Tips

- Track your responses. How many people called or ordered?
- Follow up the mailing with a phone call.
- Prepare the next campaign, linking it with the current campaign.
- Develop a new offer and compare the results with the current offer.