

● The direct-mail industry welcomes the new opportunity to design ads of any shape.

By **RANDOLPH E. SCHMID**

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WASHINGTON — Coming soon to your mailbox, advertising shaped like a sports car or a stop sign, a hula doll or hamburger. Indeed, almost anything an artist can conceive.

Customized MarketMail begins Monday, offering advertisers a chance to think outside the envelope and send material that really shows their products to buyers.

The first mailing, to southern California, will be simulated boxes of Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

Other designer ads are in the works.

A card showing a shiny new motorcycle, for example, cut into the shape of the powerful two-wheeler. Or an oval hamburger, lettuce and onions sticking out from the side, a bunch of grapes, a sad-eyed bulldog puppy.

It's a battle for audience attention, said Nick Barranca, postal vice president for new products. Customized MarketMail will allow businesses to make their products stand out.

Even though it's not cheap or simple, leaders of the direct mail industry welcome it.

It's an "exciting new development," said H. Robert Wientzen, head of the Direct Marketing Association. "There's no doubt that CMM is the shape of things to come."

And Tom Becker, president of ShipShapes in Park Forest, Ill., one of the companies designing these new ads, praises the idea as an innovative way to reach customers.

With new restrictions in the works for telemarketing and spam advertising, companies are looking for better ways to deliver their messages, Becker said.

The final decision on whether it works, of course, is in the hands of the public.

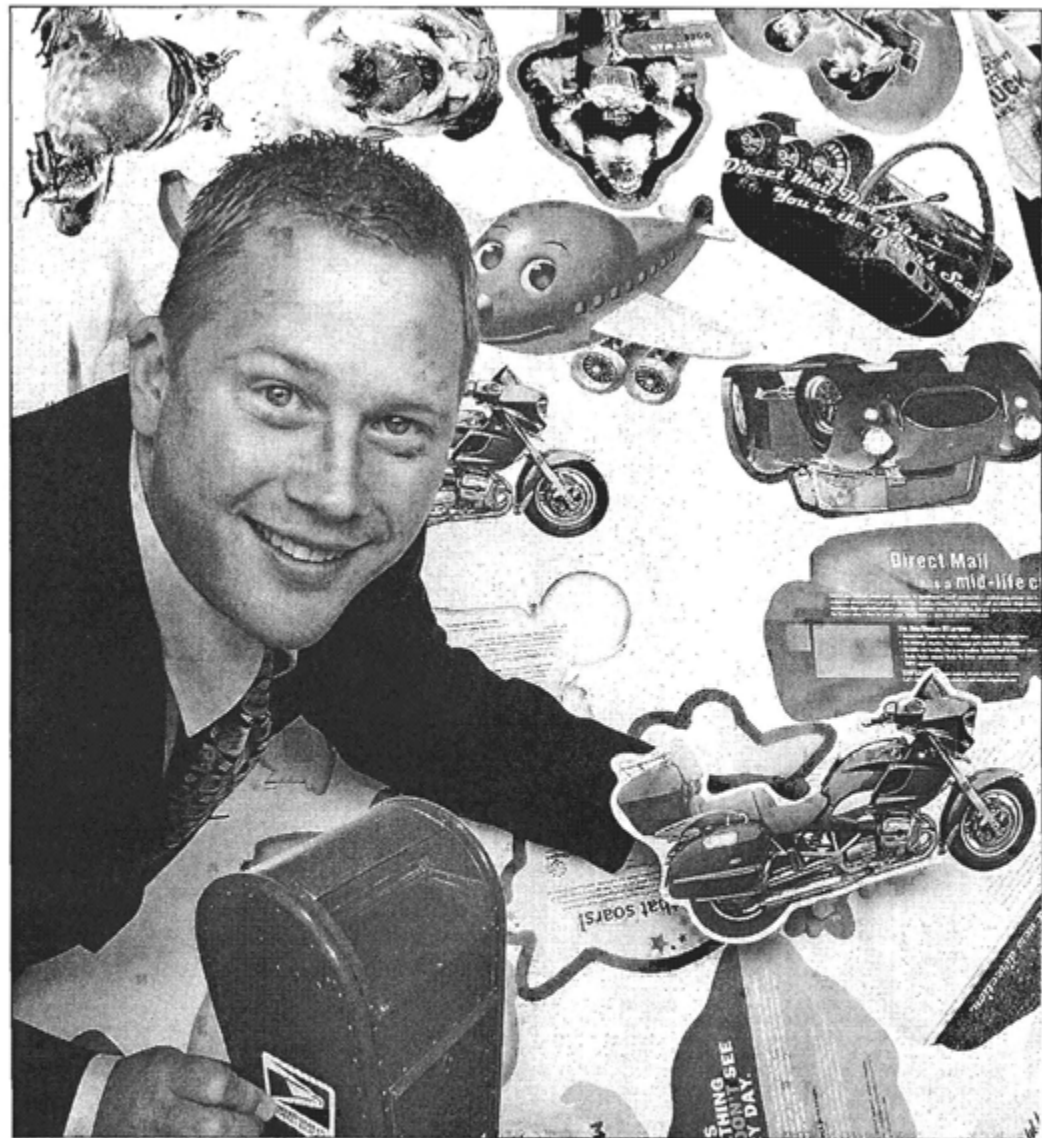
To help gauge acceptance, at least some of the ads will be coupons.

For example, the simulated box of doughnuts in the first ad, targeting Orange County, Calif., offers recipients a dozen doughnuts for a dime when they buy a dozen and bring in the ad.

If customers bring in lots of the coupons, the advertisers will know it was worth the effort and money.

They'll be paying a premium to send the ads.

Current advertising mail rates vary according



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Tom Becker, president of ShipShapes, holds samples of Customized MarketMail that his company is producing for direct mailings at his Park Forest, Ill. office, on Thursday. Beginning on Monday, the post office is allowing mailings of different shapes and sizes.

to the size and weight of the envelope, but often are lower than the 37-cent first class rate because businesses get discounts to presort much of the mail and deliver it to bulk mail centers or local post offices.

The new customized pieces will cost 57.4 cents each to mail — 46 cents for nonprofit organizations — with a minimum of 200 pieces. Pieces

must be not bigger than 12 inches by 15 inches weighing no more than 3.3 ounces.

And since these items can't be handled by postal sorting machinery the sender will have to bring them to the local post offices where carriers will take them for delivery, or bring them in large envelopes to a bulk mail center which will forward them to local offices.