



# To Mail or Not to Mail

## When you should consider using direct mail

With all the interactive and newly emerging media that's available to direct marketers, many of you may wonder if and when you should still use direct mail. While media choices continue to grow, when used appropriately, direct mail remains a direct marketing workhorse for carrying your message to your targeted audience. Here are suggestions for how, when and why to use it.

- Fifty-six percent of Americans surveyed by InnoMedia say receiving mail is a pleasure. Translation: Unlike confronting their e-mail inboxes, 56 percent of people receiving traditional mail don't dread opening their mailboxes.
- Sixty-seven percent of Americans feel traditional mail is more personal than Internet communications, according to research from the U.S. Postal Service. Use this to your advantage. Make sure your letters have a signa-

ture below the closing, not the name of your company. And yes, it can be preprinted. Send ink-on-paper birthday and anniversary cards to customers and clients. Use data and digital printing to tailor relevant messages to the individual so you're not wasting your reader's time.

- Among Gen Yers (born 1977-1994) and Gen Xers (born 1965-1976), more than 70 percent sort their mail immediately, and 66 percent read it every week, reports the USPS. For these groups, look for strategic opportunities to integrate direct mail with new and interactive media to support your business goals. These generations also typically receive less mail than others. This means it's easier to stand out.
- Even though most personal communications for Gen Yers and Gen Xers arrive electronically, young consumers invest time with their

direct mail knowing it is advertising. They are motivated to receive information to help make buying decisions. Give them what they want, making sure to tailor it to the audience. Use branded direct mail

to send them to your store or a landing page to download coupons for books and fashions. Mail postcards with the top three reasons to consider your MBA program or car dealer-

ship, then send them to your Web site to download an application or price-comparison checklist. Show them you are tuned into their needs and behaviors.

- Studies show direct mail is favorably received by young consumers because it's tangible—they keep and browse through catalogs; it's private—there's an advantage to NOT being able to forward it to everyone in someone else's address book; and it's secure—58 percent still prefer receiving and paying bills by mail.
- Use direct mail when your objective is to saturate a geographic area or radius with an appropriately personal and relevant message.
- Believe it or not, there are people who are more comfortable receiving and responding to direct mail than e-mail, even when they have e-mail addresses. For example, marketers of products and services for older seniors (75+), continue to use direct mail to generate leads and sales. These seniors are motivated readers that open and keep direct mail. NOTE: Don't assume that because you have e-mail addresses for any age group, e-mail is the preferred medium for hearing from you. Ask for their preferences, then test to make sure that *what they say* matches with *how they respond*.
- What do you do when tests confirm e-mail is the most cost-effective medium for marketing to your customers but you don't have e-mail addresses

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A local Outdoor Lighting Perspectives franchise uses postcards with digitally personalized images and copy to invite neighbors to see new OLP installations in their areas before calling for a free demo in their own front yards.

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for your entire customer base? Direct mail is the answer. I recently wrote e-mail copy for a magazine renewal that outperformed the direct mail letter 4-to-1. However, publishers have e-mail addresses for only a fraction of their subscribers, so direct mail continues to play an important role in their renewal programs as they build their e-mail lists.

- Does your business model include “farming” or developing pretransaction relationships with prospects in a specific area? It’s difficult to saturate or farm a ZIP code area using opt-in e-mail lists, so once again direct mail is your answer. That’s why direct mail continues to be used by real estate agents, HVAC contractors and plumbers.
- Is it important for you to put a product sample or swatch into your prospect’s hands? Even with the added cost, this direct marketing technique is cost-effective for overcoming the objection, “I don’t believe it.”

- Mail is more private than e-mail according to 66 percent of those participating in a recent U.S. Postal Service study. They said the Internet is not a substitute for mail. Sixty-eight percent also said mail is more secure.

- Direct mail can be an effective tool for generating Web site traffic with increased user satisfaction. In a study by comScore Networks, financial services Web site visitors who received Web-related direct mail were 57 percent satisfied with their site experiences compared to 52 percent receiving online communications and 44 percent that received neither. Direct mail boosts site visits and engagement with content by setting expectations for what’s there and where to find it.

- Direct mail can be used when you have a strong visual or tactile story you want customers to be able to hold in their hands and easily retain for later reference. While e-mails can be printed out in color, they

normally print on an 8 ½” x 11” sheet of white paper. Consequently, they stack neatly and have less visual impact, all looking the same. Direct mail, on the other hand, is memorable in appearance, sticks around longer and often gets passed along to other potential buyers.

- If direct mail has been your primary prospecting tool, continue using and testing direct mail against other media. Don’t jump ship without testing. And don’t base media decisions on one-time sales. Track results over time to measure the lifetime value of customers generated via different media.

The key to deciding if and when to use direct mail is to apply common sense and basic direct marketing principles. ■

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