



Stretch Your Postal Dollars

15 tips to maximize your 2006 direct mail investment

The new year is a good time to review your direct mail efforts and look for opportunities to get more from your investment. Whenever you're paying for postage, you want your mail piece to work as hard as possible to achieve your marketing goals.

With that in mind, here are 15 suggestions to help you maximize your direct mail investment in 2006.

1. Ask customers for referrals. Customer-referred prospects generally convert at a much higher rate than other prospects. Request referrals on your order form, a blow-in response card, bounce-back package insert, or anywhere else it's appropriate. Referral programs work well for both B-to-B and B-to-C marketers.

2. Use dot-whacks. Dot-whacks are problem-solvers and inexpensive creative tools used to focus attention on your offer; add versioned messages to base letter copy; promote deadlines or your Web site; and much more. Apply dot-whacks to outer envelopes, letters, order forms, catalog covers, statements, even packing slips and shipping boxes.

3. Extend your mailing's response cycle. Add a component such as a peel-off label reminder or static-cling decal to extend the response cycle of your mail piece.

4. Generate Web traffic. Showcase your URL on every piece of mail

you send—letters, order forms, brochures, postcards, shipping boxes, etc. Don't just give the address; give specific reasons to visit the site, and measure the traffic and sales generated.

already paying the postage to mail the statement, use it as an opportunity to build customer loyalty. Include a thank-you message, make a special "preferred customer" offer, cross-sell a product or

A customer newsletter is an excellent communication vehicle—if you give recipients a compelling reason to read it. For example, this newsletter from a Missouri-based heating, air conditioning and plumbing company provides readers with tips to beat an increase in heating and cooling costs.

5. Test free samples. If you think this isn't an appropriate offer for your product, think again. This concept is a proven winner for eliminating one of the most common buying objections—"I don't believe it!" You may be surprised how quickly this offer more than pays for itself.

6. Transform account statements and invoices into relationship-builders. Since you're

service related to the one most recently purchased by the customer. One of my favorite department stores includes a 20 percent-off coupon at the bottom of its statements. It's an added benefit for using the store's credit card.

7. Ask for customers' opinions. Insert a brief survey of no more than three to five questions in mail pieces, catalogs or even outgoing shipments. Once

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again, you're already paying for postage, and people love sharing their thoughts. They also appreciate knowing their opinions are valued.

8. Ask for new product ideas or product enhancements for existing products or services. Do this in direct mail solicitations, statements and orders.

9. Tap the power of suggestion. Use the P.S. in your letter, the dot-

whack on your envelope, or a corner snipe on your sales brochure to suggest passing along the mailing to others who may be interested. This is an effective way to reach decision-influencers who otherwise aren't on your mailing list.

10. Attach a repositionable routing slip. This is another tool to encourage individuals to pass along your mail piece. If you can't afford affixing an actual sticky note, print a look-alike on your letter or outer envelope.

11. Strengthen (reposition) your customer newsletter. If you're spending money to create, produce and mail a newsletter to customers and prospects, make sure its content focuses on topics of interest to the reader. Write articles, offers and calls-to-action with your reader in mind. The best practice is to use the word "you" twice as often as you use the words "I" or "we."

12. Apply the 80/20 rule. Don't treat all customers the same. If 80 percent of your sales comes from 20 percent of your customers, make sure that 20 percent knows how much you value them. Don't send your best customers the same letter or offer you send to everyone else. Treat them like royalty. Aside from a versioned letter, you can add a special-offer dot-whack or change the envelope teaser. It doesn't have to cost much money to show your best customers they're appreciated.

13. Use package inserts. If you're shipping orders without your own product inserts enclosed, you're missing an opportunity to cross-sell, upgrade and test. Package inserts don't have to be expensive to be effective—and the shipping cost already is covered.

14. Team up your traditional and electronic mail. If you normally send out a series of USPS mailings, test transforming that series into an e-mail pre-announcement and follow-up for your traditional USPS mailing.

15. TEST. Testing doesn't have to cost much, but it's your insurance policy for when a control mailing starts to falter. Test teaser copy, mailing formats, offers, lists and list segments, timing, and all those elements most likely to increase your response significantly.

Here's to your direct mail success in 2006! **||**

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