

Deliver Profits with Direct Mail

By June Campbell

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If you are in business, you might want to consider using direct mail to find new customers or drum up more business from your existing ones. If using a print broker or a direct mail agency isn't within your budget, you might opt to do the mailing yourself.

Experts say that increasing your leads through direct mail is both an art and a science. However, you'll improve your response rates if you keep these "secrets" in mind:

1. Your mailing list accounts for 60% of your mailing's success. It must contain recipient's name (not just the title) and must reflect your target market. Additionally, it must be fresh, groomed to remove duplicates and incorrect postal codes, and recently updated.

You can rent lists for \$75 to \$140 per 1,000 (M) names. However, if you want "selects", expect to pay an additional \$5-10/M per select. (For example, if you want names of advertising managers working in Chicago and Hong Kong, you might be asked to pay for three selects -- one for advertising managers and two for the geographic locations.

As a rule of thumb, the better you can target your market, the better it will be. For instance, if you are selling a golf book, you could send the mailing to every postal address within a zip code (expensive), or you could target the list to members of golf clubs or persons who have expressed an interest in hearing about golf-related products.

2. A direct mail package outperforms a self-mailer by a 4:1 ratio. Typically, a mail package includes an outside envelope, a one or two page sales letter and a reply device. The less-expensive self-mailers are not sent in an envelope.

3. Postcards are the most economical means of direct mail. Moreover, the recipient does not have to open them to read the message.

4. Personalized messages perform better than non-personalized. Messages sent by first class mail that at least give the appearance of being hand typed and hand stamped will outperform those that appear to be bulk-mailed. Yes, first-class is more expensive, but perhaps you can cut corners in some other area.

5. The call-to-action part of your mail-out is critical. Be sure to tell your recipients what it is you want them to do, and provide a compelling reason why they should act. For example, you could include a no-risk, no-obligation offer that encourages recipients to contact you promptly for more information.

Or, create urgency through time- limited offers, mention of an upcoming event, etc.

6. Put a teaser, testimonial or strong benefit statement on the envelope. You must induce the recipient to open the envelope, or all is wasted.

7. Encourage the recipient to contact you. Ask for the contact and provide more than one way in which the recipient can act. If you include a postage-paid Business Reply Envelope, you will only pay postage on the actual responses that are mailed.

8. Your sales letter can contain long copy, but only if it is written to hold interest. Write in a conversational manner, avoid jargon, write at an eighth grade level, and use an authentic-looking signature. As in any copy, use eye-catching headlines and stress benefits not features.

9. Remember to add a PS. After the envelope and headline, it's the most read element.

10. Analyze the results of your mail out, and learn from it. Use tracking so you know how many sales or contacts resulted from your mailing. Ask customers how they heard of your offer. If (or more likely, when) undeliverable mail is returned to you, remove these addresses from your list.

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