

Going Postal: Not a Bad Idea

By June Campbell

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When's the last time you checked out your Postal Service's web site?

You might be surprized at the valuable business information you can find. It's difficult to speak in specifics, given that readers of this article are international but each country's postal service has different terminology, regulations and rules. However, a visit to Australia Post, Canada Post and the US Postal Service web sites revealed similarities.

Did you know the following?

1. There are many ways to reduce your shipping costs.

As an old buddy of my mine says, you can get it good, cheap or fast. Pick any two. That's the rule of thumb for shipping products.

Typically, the larger the product and the faster you want it delivered, the more you will pay. However, there are other considerations. The physical dimensions of the product, the weight and even the density can impact on the cost of shipping. If you ship a lot of items, spend some time with a postal service consultant to decide your most cost - effective method of packing and your best choice of shipping options.

Your postal consultant can also offer security advice -- insurance options and information about protective packaging materials that safeguard your items.

2. You can save money with bulk mailings.

You might qualify for a discount if you have a high volume of material to be mailed and shipped. For example, the US Postal Service allows discounts for Parcel Post mailings of 50 items or more, but you must first obtain a Mailing Permit and pay an annual mailing fee. Most postal services have similar options. You pay a lower price if you meet minimum requirements and because you do some of the work -- like presorting by postal code -- yourself.

Bulk mailing is available for envelopes, postcards and parcels.

Tip: Include as much material as you can for the price you're paying. Adding some advertising

material to an envelope containing your invoice might not elevate the price per unit and will do double duty.

3. You can Send Unaddressed Bulk Mail

Use economical, unaddressed bulk mail to deliver your advertising and marketing content directly to targeted neighborhoods. You can target according to geography, demographics or lifestyle clusters. When you combine this with a Business Reply service, you can build your own databases of customers who you can then target with personalized, addressed mail.

Prices for unaddressed mail will vary, according to quantity, size, weight, etc.

Ask your Postal Service consultant if they can help you establish the best geographic territory for your mailing. For example, Canada Post's Householder Counts and Maps feature pinpoints the counts of houses, apartments, farms and businesses throughout the country, along with letter carrier routes.

4. Business Reply Services Help you Build your own Databases

The reply is prepaid. Business Reply Mail allows your customers or potential customers to communicate with you at no cost to themselves. Most postal services allow business reply for cards or envelopes. Use envelopes when confidentiality is a factor; cards work best as magazine inserts or similar.

Pricing will be based on specifications.

Ask your postal consultant if they have a template to assist you in designing your card or envelope, or check the web site for this type of service.

4. Your Postal Service Offers Tools to Small Businesses

This will vary, depending on the country you live in. However, look for databases, online ordering of shipping and other materials, courier services, help with ecommerce web sites, package tracking and more. Australia Post offers inventory management, telemarketing, warehousing and fulfillment services as well.

Spend some time on your Postal Service's web site. You might be pleasantly surprised at what you find.

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