

Three Cost-effective Ways To Use Direct Mail

By Larry Brophy

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Two of direct mail's biggest benefits are:

- Its pinpoint targeting ability
- Its ability to deliver a full and complete sales presentation of any length

This makes direct mail a highly effective way to repeatedly expose your prospect to your salesmanship -- and positively influence his or her decision. Here are three direct mail marketing strategies (as opposed to single-shot mailing ideas) that virtually any business can put to work to achieve better, more profitable results.

1. Repeatedly mail the same letter or direct mail package to the same people.

If your sales letter or direct mail package is generating an acceptable number of orders or leads, don't hesitate to mail it again and again to the same direct mail list. The basic premise for recommending this strategy can best be summed up in five words: "People quickly forget," and "Things change."

Consider this: The average person is exposed to well over 1,000 sales, marketing, and advertising messages every day. And the vast majority of these messages don't even so much as register a blip on the mental radar screen. Of the handful that do register, most are forgotten within two weeks.

Another reason this strategy works is change. Your prospects' lives are constantly evolving. Many highly successful direct marketing organizations such as Dow Jones & Co. and Geico Corporation routinely practice this strategy of repeatedly mailing the same message to the same people.

How frequently should you send your direct mail? Quarterly is probably a good idea for starters. But, as with everything else in direct mail, test to determine the optimum frequency.

2. Send a series of mailings to the same people

Before starting a direct mail program like this, make sure your list contains qualified prospects. The emphasis is on "qualified". Give careful thought to what you want to say and how you want your campaign to unfold. For example:

- In your first letter, highlight the biggest benefit of your product or service.
- Then, in letter two, take this benefit and amplify and expand on it.

- In letter three, take another key benefit and do the same.
- And so on.

Let say, for instance, you sell recreational vehicles. One of your follow-up direct mail letters would focus exclusively on visiting national parks.. Plus, you'd include several maps and beautiful four color photos of parks in their area.

And don't stop with just four direct mail letters.

Depending on your sales cycle, you may want to send six letters, four post cards and three cover letters. In every mailing, always give a reason and a method for responding. Always ask for some kind of action.

3. Mail a series of post cards

For example, Shannon Schiedel of Archadeck created a series of post cards for his custom-designed wooden patio deck firm. Here's a brief synopsis of how the program unfolded:

Card one

The oversized postcard warns the 15 closest neighbors that Archadeck will soon be building a deck in their immediate vicinity. It apologizes in advance for any noise or inconvenience. A full color photograph shows a workman framing a new deck. The headline reads: "Good Times Under Construction".

Card two

The second postcard sent after the project is completed suggests that maybe it's time that the recipient build a new deck too. It leverages the power of implied referral; "Your neighbors at 1234 Maple Street did. And they selected custom design and quality craftsmanship, with moderate pricing..."

The cards were mailed to immediate neighbors sharing the household demographics of their customers. The campaign generated substantial top-of-mind awareness and, most importantly, many new projects.

The bottom line, as any successful salesperson knows, is this: You've got to stay in front of your prospect through repeated contacts -- whether that's through direct mail, by phone, in person or, as is most likely, a combination of activities. (Not just any contact, mind you, but meaningful, informative, educational, persuasive contacts).

And direct mail -- salesmanship in print -- is one of the most effective and profitable tools any business has at its disposal with which to achieve this repeated contact. It's the ideal way to build relationships that lead to increased sales.

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