

PRINTtips

Post Cards Perform Direct Mail Magic

If direct mail is part of your company's marketing plan, then preparing a self mailer for print may be a task you will have to undertake or supervise. As with any marketing piece, copy writing and design are part of the preparations. But for a direct mail piece you will also need to consider the requirements for mailing.

Post Cards as Self Mailers

Though a post card may not immediately come to mind when you think of a self-mailer, this can be a very effective direct mail marketing piece. Since post cards do not have to be opened to be read, you may be able to engage the reader with eye-catching graphics or an attention-getting headline. For example, vivid color blocks can draw the reader in to your copy without the reader's conscious decision to participate. This allows you to make the most of the seven-to-ten-second window of opportunity to interest your reader.

The Postage Paradox For Post Cards

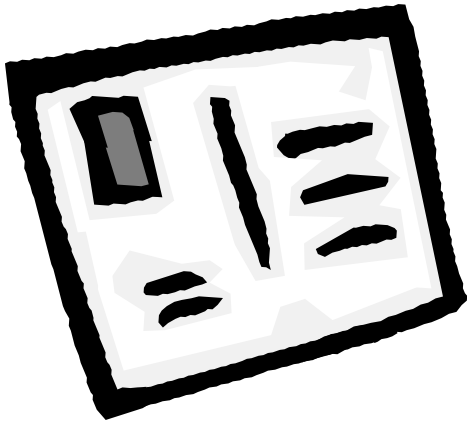
There is an interesting anomaly in the postage rates for post cards. If your post card fits the United States Postal Service (USPS) definition of a post card – that is, it does not exceed 4 1/4 x 6 inches – then the postage rate for first class presort is actually less than for standard mail. (*Standard mail* is the USPS term for what some people call third class or bulk.) The first class presort rate for post cards ranges between 19¢ and 16.1¢ per piece mailed depending on how the post cards are addressed, sorted and

presented to the post office. In contrast, the postage rate for standard mail for the same post card (4 1/4 x 6 inches) ranges between 25.3¢ and 17.7¢ per piece mailed.

The Advantages of First Class Mail

Mailing a post card at the first class postage rate has definite advantages. First, the post card receives delivery priority over all other classes of mail except Priority and Express. Secondly, it is eligible for *ancillary services* such as forwarding and address correction at no charge or at rates lower than for standard mail. Here is an example: if the post card is undeliverable as addressed (UAA) and has *Return Service Requested* as the ancillary service endorsement, then the post card will be returned at no charge to the sender along with the new address or with the reason for non-delivery.





Using a First Class Post Card to Update A Mail List

Because the ancillary service of *return service* is available at no charge, post cards are an excellent way to update your mail list. For less postage than it costs to mail a letter, you can get the information you need to keep the addresses in your mail list current. And with approximately 7% of the population moving every year, this is an important part of mail list management.

When Is a Post Card Not a Post Card

If a post card exceeds 4 1/4 x 6 inches, then the USPS classifies it as letter mail for the purpose of determining postage. So despite the advantages of using a post card size for mailing, when you need more room for your message than can fit on 4 1/4 x 6 inches, you will have to move to a larger size.

One popular size is 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches – half of a sheet of letter paper. This size offers advantages in printing, since it is a clean cut with no waste out of an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet. For example, if you want to take

delivery of 1000 post cards, it will take a press run of only 500 sheets to produce a yield of 1000. However, since the USPS considers this letter-sized mail for the purpose of determining postage, it now becomes advantageous to consider using the standard mail class for your mailing.

Postage for a 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 post card mailed at the standard rate ranges between 25.3¢ and 17.7¢ per piece mailed, depending on how the post card is addressed, prepared and presented to the post office. The comparable rates for first class presorted mail are 28¢ to 25.5¢ per piece.

These rates are good for all letter-sized mail – up to 6 1/8 x 11 1/2 inches. This invites the interesting prospect of an over-sized post card measuring 6x9 inches or even a full 6 1/8 x 11. These “super size” post cards are eye catching in a stack of mail because they will be either taller or longer than the rest of the mail pieces.

The Importance of the Aspect Ratio

Regardless of the size you select for your post card, you will need to pay close attention to two things: the *aspect ratio* and the mail panel. The aspect ratio is the relationship of the length to the height of the post card. It is calculated by dividing the length by the height. To qualify as letter mail, the aspect ratio must fall between 1:1.3 and 1:2.5. If you mail often, you might want to request a handy template of letter

sized mail dimensional standards from the USPS. Contact the USPS Business Center that services your ZIP code by logging on to <http://pe.usps.gov> and clicking on *Postal Links*, then *Postal Locator*, then *Postal Business Centers*. Request Notice 3A. You may also benefit from requesting Publication 25, *A Guide To Business Mail Preparation*.

Effective Use of the Mail Panel

Contrary to common usage, the mail panel on a post card does not need to take up the entire right half of one side. An addressing area of 4 inches wide by 2 1/4 inches high is sufficient for most ink jet addressing machines or for affixing labels. And this area does not necessarily need to be at the bottom of the post card – it can also be at the top or even appear as a block positioned mid-way up the post card.

When positioning the mail panel, remember this important rule – to meet the aspect ratio, the mail panel must be oriented so that the length is greater than the width. If the width is greater than the length, the post card will be subject to a surcharge for size.

In this issue we have presented information that we hope will be useful when you are designing your next post card. We'd also like to remind you that we would be happy to relieve you of remembering all these things by designing for you. Just call any of our friendly customer service representatives for help.

Consider A “Pre-Mailing”

If you are preparing to launch an expensive mailing (such as a catalog or a complicated direct mail piece) and it has been a while since your last mailing to the list, consider a post card “pre-mailing” to update the addresses. If you mail a post card that does not exceed 4 1/4 x 6 inches, include the *return service requested* endorsement and take advantage of the first class presort card rate, then any mail undeliverable as addressed will be returned to you free of charge.

This will allow you to make the address changes and deletions prior to the expensive mailing, saving both postage and printing charges. With a clean mailing list, you will gain greater confidence that even standard mail will be delivered as addressed. Finally, if correctly worded, the post card can serve as a teaser or suspense builder to set up the main mailing.

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

Ancillary service endorsement:

Instructions in a prescribed form that tell the USPS what to do with mail that is undeliverable as addressed. There are four ancillary services: address service, return service, change service and forward service.

Aspect ratio: The ratio of the length to the height of a mail piece. Calculated by dividing the length by the height. To be considered letter mail, the aspect ratio must fall between 1:1.3 and 1:2.5.

Bulk mail: Term applied to all mailings, regardless of class, that consist of a specified minimum number of pieces prepared and presented in trays or sacks with appropriate Statement of Mailing.

Directional: An address element.

The four directionals are north, south, east and west.

Indicia: A printed marking on a mail piece located where a stamp would be. Contains information on the class of mail and the bulk mail permit holder.

Lettershop services: Mailing services associated with preparing mail for postage discounts. Includes services such as addressing, folding, collating, inserting, sealing, metering, preparation for postage discounts and delivering prepared mail to the USPS.

Standard mail: One of three mail classes, formerly known as third class mail. Mistakenly called bulk mail.

UAA: Undeliverable as addressed. Reasons for lack of deliverability may be that the addressee has moved or that one or more addressing elements (such as directional or apartment number) are missing.

USPS: United States Postal Service. The official name for what is commonly referred to as the Post Office.

TRICKS & tips

It may sound simplistic to say that when designing a post card, you should consider what your reader will see first. However, we all have seen too many instances where the side of the post card containing the mail panel was apparently considered less important than the reverse. Think about a time when you received a post card – beautifully designed, full color and all the selling information

occupying one entire side — but you almost missed it because the side with the mail panel was so unappealing or uninteresting.

Remember that many people who look at your post card will receive it directly from the postal carrier, who will have the stack of mail sorted with all addresses facing the same way. The first view the reader will have of your post

card will be the mail panel and whatever design elements you have included on that side of the post card.

Be sure you get off to a good start — and capture the reader's attention in the first critical seven to ten seconds — by considering the mail panel and address as part of your overall graphic design scheme.

Q.
I have a post card design that simply won't work in horizontal orientation. Is there any way I can orient the mail panel to meet the aspect ratio for letter-sized mail?

A. There certainly is! The USPS determines whether a post card meets the aspect ratio by the orientation of the mail panel, not the post card itself. So after you design the post card with a “portrait” orientation, rotate it 90 degrees to “landscape” orientation before you create the mail panel.

