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PRINTtips

Direct Mail Marketing... How to make it more effective



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Q: When is the best time to market your business?

A: All the time.

Marketing – making people aware of your business, its products and services, and convincing them to buy – is a fundamental activity for any business and a requirement for sales growth. Broadly defined, marketing encompasses almost everything a business does, from providing good customer service, to having a consistent look in printed materials, to networking, to sales calls.

One of the most popular methods of marketing is direct mail – mailing something of interest or value to customers and prospects. Especially for small businesses, direct mail is favored over media advertising (newspaper, magazine, radio, and television) because it can be directed at people who are likely to be interested in or receptive to receiving information on your product or service. The direct mail marketing piece not only describes the product or service in a way that provokes interest from the recipient; it also tells the recipient what action to take next, and may even give a deadline for responding.

What to expect from a direct mail campaign

If you haven't consistently used direct mail as a marketing method, there are a few things you should know so you can tailor your expectations – and your marketing budget – accordingly.



Tip 1

If you are going to use direct mail, use it repeatedly.

Mailing periodically and regularly (such as monthly, every six weeks, or quarterly) puts your name in front of customers and prospects and helps establish familiarity and recognition of your business. In addition, most businesses offer more than one product or service. Regular mailings allow you to tell your company's story and highlight individual products and services. Finally, regular mailings mean you are putting your contact information in the hands of prospects and customers again and again. You aren't relying on them to remember, keep, or find the contact information.

Tip 2

Have a strategy for your list.

The most important determinant of response rate is the mail list. Send a well-designed and printed

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“...having a mix of your top customers as well as selected prospects you are actively working with...”

“A newsletter informs, educates, and provides useful information for both customers and prospects.”

mail piece with a great offer to the wrong audience and the response rate will be disappointing. So what is a good list strategy? We think it is having a mix of your top customers, as well as selected prospects you are actively targeting. By including your top customers, you will be reinforcing their decision to buy from you and also reminding them of other products and services you offer, that they may need, but are not presently buying from you.

Note that we don't recommend mailing to all your customers. For most businesses, sales follow the Pareto principle (also known as the 80/20 rule). This principle states that 80% of consequences stem from 20% of causes. Translated to sales, this predicts that 80% of your sales come from 20% of your customers – by definition, your top customers.

To determine which prospects to include on your list, develop a profile of your top customers, then select prospects who match the profile. Include on the list the number of prospects it takes to bring the list size to what you have determined fits your direct mail marketing budget. Keep these prospects on the list for a predetermined number of mailings, then rotate them off, to be replaced by a new prospect segment.

Tip 3

Don't expect a single mailing to produce spectacular results.

The success of direct mail marketing is based on cumulative effect. If your budget allows you to mail 5000 pieces, it is better to mail three times to a list of 1600 rather than one time to a list of 5000. The mailings should be closely spaced (3 – 4 weeks apart) and can use the same mail piece all three times.

What shall I mail?

If you are ready to use direct mail in a consistent, regular way, you may be wondering what to mail. There are a number of possibilities; these are four of our favorites.

Newsletters

A newsletter informs, educates, and provides useful information for both customers and prospects. That's why we send you Printips. Our objective is to remind you who we are, to provide information that will help you manage your printing budget better, and to let you know the full scope of our products and services.

Post cards

Post cards have a wide variety of potential uses. They can be used for announcements, such as a sale, an open house, a change in contact information or business hours. They can be used to introduce new staff members or to spotlight staff. They can explain your products and services, either individually or overall.

There are two special features of post cards that you should be aware of. The first is that the United States Postal Service has a postage rate for cards (defined as a minimum size of 3 x 5 inches to a maximum size of 4^{1/4} x 6 inches and rectangular in shape) in the first class rate category that is lower than the postage rate for standard mail (formerly called third class mail). The advantage of using the card rate is that address services – returning the mail piece to you if not deliverable as addressed, and providing an updated address when available – is free.

If you are not using the card rate, then there is another interesting option for the size of the post card. It can be as large as 6^{1/8} x 11^{1/2} inches (as long as it is rectangular) and still mail at the postage rate for letters. This opens up the possibility of creating an oversized post card which provides more room for your message and is very eye catching.

Personalized letters

A letter containing an inside address and the name of the recipient is a good way to tell your company story. When you are composing the letter, remember to write it from the perspective of the recipient. The easiest way to do this is to

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answer the recipient's unspoken question, "What's in it for me?"

White papers

A white paper presents technical, statistical, or other information in a formal style. It allows you to showcase your expertise on a particular topic of interest to your customers or prospects. White

papers are often regarded as very useful and are saved by the recipient.

We're ready to help

We are ready to help you establish or continue a comprehensive approach to put direct mail to work for your business. Call us at 513-248-2121 to arrange an appointment.

"When you are composing the letter, remember to write it from the perspective of the recipient."

The Sales Letter

The sales letter is an essential part of a direct mail package sent in an envelope. Here are some ideas for writing an effective sales letter.

Tone: be friendly and personal and write conversationally (that is, as if you are talking to the reader). Use the second person (you).

Format: use a standard format – one inch margins, 10 or 12 point type (depending on font), adequate spacing between paragraphs. Include a P.S. that contains your main message, asks for the order, or makes an offer. The P.S. is always read.

Sense of urgency: create a sense of urgency for response by giving a deadline for reply or offering something for the first number of responders.

After you have completed the letter, put it aside for a while, then read it while pretending you are the recipient. Note your reaction – were you convinced or did you decide to ignore the letter?

When you have a draft you are satisfied with, ask someone else to read it and offer suggestions for improvement.



"...by giving a deadline for reply or offering something for the first number of responders."

Q. *I need a brochure to include in my direct mail marketing piece. What elements should I include in it?*

A. There are four universal elements that are important to include in your brochure. They are: the introduction, the product or service description, the differentiation statement, and the response information.

The introduction normally is part of the brochure cover. Aim to have the cover quickly

communicate what you do in a visually appealing way so that the reader will be drawn into the body of the brochure.

The description lists the products and services you offer. State these in a way that emphasizes benefits to the reader, not features of the products or services. Also use this section to establish your professional credentials and experience.

The differentiation informs the reader why you are a better choice than your competitors. Make this section simple and understandable, perhaps by using a bulleted list.

The response section tells the reader what to do next and provides everything necessary to respond – contact information, order form (if appropriate), and a deadline for taking action.



"...use this section to establish your professional credentials and experience."

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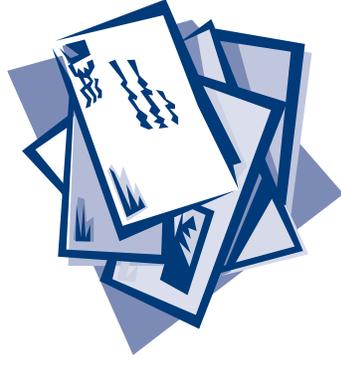
**Direct Mail
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Envelopes: When using an envelope for your direct mail marketing piece, remember that people open envelopes from the back. Therefore, be sure that the envelope inserts face the back (flap side) of the envelope. This is especially important, as AIDA (attention, interest, desire, action) depends on the recipient reading material in a specific order.

Post cards: When using a post card, remember that the postman organizes the mail with all the addresses facing the same way. This often means that the first thing the recipient sees is the side of the post card that contains the mail panel. Therefore, make sure this side of the post card is as well designed and eye-catching as the reverse. If you haven't captured the recipient's attention in seven seconds, they may never turn the post card over to see the other side.

Mail Panel: When using a post card, consider cutting down on the



size of the mail panel. The mail panel must conform to USPS requirements, but especially on large post cards, that does not mean the mail panel must occupy one-half of one side of the post card.

Letters: Use a Johnson Box – a headline above the text of the letter – to state the main message of the offer or catch the recipient's attention.

Capital letters: In general, refrain from using all capital letters anywhere in the direct mail piece. They are hard to read, take more of the recipient's time, and reduce the impact of the mail piece.