



October 2006

PRINTtips



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Post Cards: The Work Horse of Direct Mail Marketing

A post card is one of the most versatile, inexpensive, and effective tools you can have in your marketing tool kit. Compared to the effort and cost of a brochure or a traditional direct mail package mailed in an envelope, a post card is quick, easy, and a great way to stretch your marketing budget. In addition, some kinds of post cards will help you keep your mailing list updated.

What is a post card?

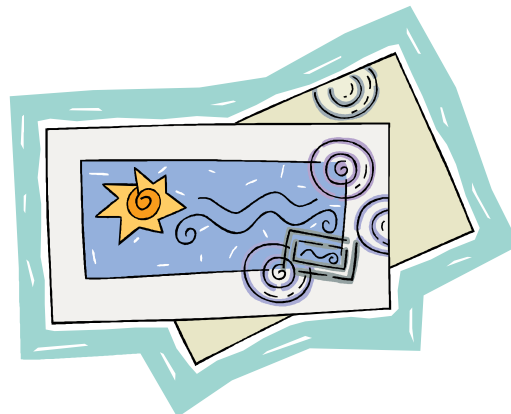
Think of a post card as a miniature billboard – a design space that can hold

- a photograph of a new product, a staff member, or your location
- a handwritten message to customers
- a published article
- a reminder of an upcoming event
- a request for an appointment
- a mini newsletter
- a discount coupon or admission ticket
- a newsworthy happening in your company

The advantage of a post card is that it does not have to be opened to be read, and if creatively designed, can have impact far beyond its size and cost.

Post card sizes

Perhaps when you think of a post card, you think of two sizes: 4 ¼ x 5 ½ inches (one-quarter of an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper) or 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches (one-half of an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper). These two sizes are common and popular, in part because they fit on a standard letter-sized sheet of paper.



To the United States Postal Service (USPS), a post card is a *self mailer* – something that is not in an envelope. A self mailer can be either a single ply like a post card, or can be folded over like a brochure or an invitation. It can also be a wide variety of sizes – from 3 ½ x 5 inches to 6 ⅛ to 11 ½ inches.

Postage for post cards

Depending on its size and shape and the quantity being mailed, the postage for a post card could be any of four rates: first class, first class presort, standard presort, or card. First class and first class presort are the highest postage rates, followed by standard presort. The card rate is the least expensive postage rate.

The card postage rate

The card rate is worth understanding. It is a subclass of first class mail, which gives the mail piece delivery priority over standard mail. (*Standard mail* is the term adopted by the USPS in 1996 to replace the term *third class mail*.) In addition, like all first class mail, the card rate comes with address services – the USPS term for letting the mailer know when a mail piece can't be delivered as addressed.

Post Cards: The Work Horse of Direct Mail Marketing (continued)

“With a clean mailing list, you will gain greater confidence...”

Here’s how these three things – lowest postage rate, delivery priority, and address services – can be used to advantage. Let’s say you are planning to mail a very expensive mail piece – a large catalog, or a sophisticated traditional direct mail package. If you do a “pre-mailing” of a post card at the USPS card rate, you will be able to update your mailing list and minimize the amount of undeliverable catalogs or letters for the expensive mailing. By sending post cards at the card rate 4-6 weeks prior, you will receive returns and can make the address changes and deletions. With a clean mailing list, you will gain greater confidence that even standard mail will be delivered as addressed. Also, if correctly worded, the post card can serve as a teaser or suspense builder to set up the main mailing.

Qualifying for the card postage rate

To qualify for the card postage rate, the post card must be a minimum of 3 ½ x 5 inches and a maximum of 4 ¼ x 6 inches, single ply, and meet the USPS *aspect ratio*. The aspect ratio is the dimension of a mail piece expressed as the ratio of the height to the length and is used to determine whether a mail piece fits the definition of rectangular. The aspect ratio is calculated by dividing the length of the mail piece by the height. To qualify as rectangular, the aspect ratio must fall between 1:1.3 and 1:2.5. If there are at least 500 pieces in the mailing, the post cards can be presorted to gain a postage discount. If the post cards are addressed with a delivery point bar code, there is an additional postage discount for automation-compatibility with USPS mail processing equipment.

One important thing to keep in mind about the card rate – the popular post card size of 4 ¼ x 5 ½ does not meet the aspect ratio requirements for automation-compatible postage discounts. If you would like to have this discount and also the economy of getting four post cards from a standard letter-sized sheet of paper, then size the post card at 4 x 5 inches or 4 ⅞ x 5 ½ inches, both of which meet the aspect ratio requirements.

Using oversized post cards

Sometimes getting the lowest possible postage rate is not the marketing objective. When you want an

eye-catching post card, consider an over-sized or super-sized version.

As we mentioned earlier, a popular post card size is 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches – half of a sheet of letter-sized paper. This size offers advantages in printing, since it is a clean cut with no waste out of an 8 ½ 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.

On the other hand, it is such a popular size that many post cards in a batch of mail may be this size. To be more eye-catching to the reader going through a batch of mail, consider some alternative sizes. For instance, we like 6 x 9 inches – this size is half an inch higher and wider than the popular 5 ½ x 8 ½ inch post card so it will “stick out” in a stack of mail. Even more compelling is a “super size” post card measuring a full 6 ⅞ x 11 ½ inches. And because the USPS considers any size between 4 ¼ x 6 and 6 ⅞ x 11 ½ inches to be letter-sized mail, all three sizes of post cards – popular, oversized, and super-sized – mail at the same postage rate. Do remember that you will have to use a stock with a higher base weight to satisfy the USPS standards for thickness, stiffness, and tear strength.

Using post cards for personalized direct mail

One-to-one marketing – personalizing a mail piece with specific information about the recipient – is much more feasible technically with post cards than with a traditional direct mail marketing package. Particularly if the personal information appears on the same side of the post card as the address, it can be more economical than you may think to take advantage of this proven marketing technique.

Post cards: the work horse of direct mail marketing

We hope you have some new ideas about how to use post cards to make your direct mail marketing more effective. We would be glad to help you plan a series of post cards that will accomplish your marketing objectives while fitting within your budget for printing, mailing, and postage. Call 513-248-2121 to make an appointment at your location or ours.

“If there are at least 500 pieces in the mailing, the post cards can be presorted to gain a postage discount...”

Increase Your Card's Effectiveness

Knowing some tricks about the design and placement of the mail panel on a post card can significantly increase the effectiveness of the card's marketing message. Imagine that you are going through your mail, either at home or at work. Most likely you are viewing it as presented by the letter carrier – with the addressing area all facing the same way and sorted by size of the mail piece.

In the case of a post card, are you looking at the well-designed, eye catching side of the card, or are you looking at the mail panel? How much care was taken to design the side with the mail panel for maximum marketing impact?

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 1 ½ inches high is sufficient for affixing most labels, and 5 inches wide by 2 ¼

inches high will usually accommodate a delivery point bar code put on the mail piece during inkjet addressing.

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. One of our favorite tricks is to size the mail panel at 6 x 2 ¼ inches and position it across the entire width of the post card. This creates an unobstructed rectangular area of 6 x 1 ¾ inches above the mail panel that is very easy to design.

Remember that a poorly designed or positioned mail panel may prevent you from qualifying for the best postage rate. For that reason, we suggest that you have us look at the mail panel before you commit to press. Just call 513-248-2121 for help.



“Contrary to common usage, the mail panel on a post card does not need to take up the entire right half of one side.”

Q. *The design of my post card simply won't work in a horizontal orientation. Will my postage rate automatically include a shape surcharge?*

A. Maybe not! If you can orient the mail panel itself in a horizontal position, you can still use a portrait orientation for the message portion of the post card. This is because the USPS determines whether a mail piece meets the aspect ratio (the ratio of the height to the length) from 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 and see if you can find an appropriate place that will allow you to comply with requirements for automation-compatible postage discounts.



“... USPS determines whether a mail piece meets the aspect ratio...”

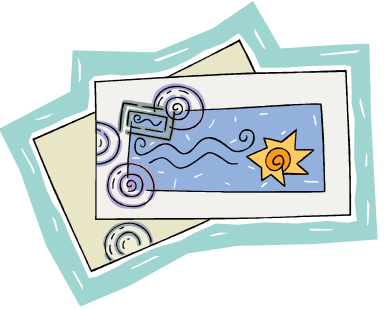
How to Keep Your Mail List Updated

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**Post Cards: The
Work Horse
of Direct Mail
Marketing**

A post card can be an excellent way to keep your mailing list updated without incurring the cost of return postage.

The USPS offers a postage rate called *card* as a subclass of first class mail that is actually lower than the comparable rate for standard mail. And since first class mail includes address service, you will automatically be notified at no additional cost if the post card is not deliverable as addressed.

To gain this advantage, you must meet two requirements. First, the size of the post card must be no smaller than 3 1/2 x 5 inches and no larger than 4 1/4 x 6 inches. Secondly, you must provide specific instructions to the USPS for what action to take if the mail piece is not deliverable as addressed.

There are four types of address services, but only one will always return the mail piece at no cost to you - *return service*. The wording to



use is *return service requested* and it can be placed under the return address; between the return address and indicia or stamp; or above or below the indicia or stamp. With this wording, called an *endorsement*, a mail piece that cannot be delivered as addressed will not be forwarded, but will be returned to you along with either an address correction or the reason for non-delivery.