



PRINTtips



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TechneGraphics, Inc.
Park 50 TechneCenter
2002 Ford Circle
Milford, OH 45150
(513) 248-2121
Fax (513) 248-5141

Web site:
www.techgra.com

File Transfer site:
www.tgidirect.net

FTP site:
[ftp.techgra.com](ftp://techgra.com)

Email:
info@techgra.com

Taking it to the Street... How Good is Your Mailing List?

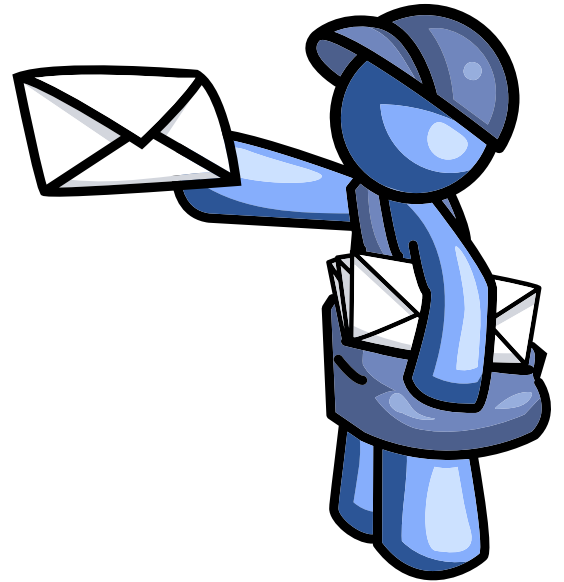
If you're a regular reader of Printtips, you know we strongly believe in the power of direct mail marketing as a way to build business. Keeping your company or organization's name in front of customers helps to reinforce their decision to use your products and services; for prospects, it creates name recognition; and for both groups it builds *top of mind awareness* for your brand.

The success of any direct mail marketing campaign is determined by three factors: the quality of the mail piece itself; the offer; and the mailing list. Of these, the mailing list is significantly more important than the other two. In fact, the Direct Marketing Association attributes 60% of the success of a mailing to the list itself and just 20% each to the mailer and the offer.

The secret to an effective mailing list

The secret to an effective mailing list can be stated in one word: *accurate*. Accuracy starts with getting the right individuals or businesses on the list - those who have an established interest in your product or service, or those who share the same demographic characteristics. Gender, age, income, level of education, and geographic proximity are all examples of shared demographic characteristics.

Another measure of accuracy is the quality of each address. The individual or business name must be complete and correctly spelled; the street address must contain all necessary elements, including secondary information (*i.e.*, unit,



apartment, space, etc.) and street suffix (*i.e.*, street, avenue, boulevard, road, drive, way, lane, etc.); and the city and state must have the correct ZIP or postal code.

An effective list has a data field for every unique element in the mailing list, even if it occurs rarely. List managers develop data entry conventions such as using standard abbreviations for street type (St., Ave., Blvd., etc.) and secondary address elements (Ste., #, Sp., etc.), and enforce the standards by not allowing creative data entry (such as entering a company name in the place reserved for the name of a person).

Mail list structure

Maintaining data quality is a function of how the mail list is structured and how fully data entry standards are developed and enforced. It is particularly important that the list have

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the right number of fields to contain all the name and address information, and to size the fields so there is enough room to hold the information without extensive use of abbreviations or truncating.

The first step in structuring a mail list is to determine the total number of unique data elements and to create a separate field for each one, no matter how infrequently it occurs. For example, if your mailing list contains just one foreign address, you will need to create a *country* field as well as any additional fields required by the country's postal system (i.e., for example, addresses in Puerto Rico require an *urbanization* code). If you want to include a middle initial for an individual's name, you will need a *middle name* field and refrain from entering the middle initial into the fields reserved for first name or last name. Similarly, a list that contains both individual and business names will need a *company* field so that the business name isn't entered into a field used for the individual's name.

People's names consist of five basic parts: prefix (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., Rev., Sen., etc.); first name; middle name or initial; last name; and suffix (Jr., III, DDS, Ph.D., etc.) The importance of maintaining separate fields for name elements in a mail list becomes clear when searching for duplicates in the list. If an individual's name is separated into its constituent parts in a mailing list, it is much simpler to identify duplicates than if the first name and last name are in the same field.

Software for maintaining a mail list

Since a mail list is really a data base of elements needed to form an address, it is best to maintain it in a software program such as Microsoft Access that is designed for data base management. While it is easy to use the spreadsheet program Microsoft Excel to set up columns and tabular displays, it is not the first choice for mail list maintenance. And don't use Microsoft Word for your mail list even though it has a mail merge function.

Merge/purge and de-duplication

Merge/purge is one method of improving the quality of a mail list. In this process, two or more different name and address files are combined (merged) into one list and duplicate records are identified and deleted (purged). *De-duplication (de-dupe)* is the same process but using only one list. One of the main benefits of merge/purge and de-duplication is to ensure that a single individual or business receives only one mail piece.

Identifying duplicates requires a set of rules to define what constitutes a duplicate. Addresses can be compared to addresses only; or names to names only; or names and addresses compared. Matches can be exact (meaning every element is identical) or near (meaning *Bob Peterson* or *Rob Peterson* would be considered a match to *Robert Peterson*).

Move update

We are a very mobile population. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that on average, about 1 in 6 Americans move every year. However, some demographic segments move more often - about one-third of renters move each year, compared to about 10% of homeowners, and about one-third of adults in their early 20s.

What this means for you as a mail list manager is the importance of verifying that an individual or business is at the address you have on file. One way to do this is to mail at least every 90 days and to use an *ancillary service endorsement (ASE)* on the outside of the mail piece. The ASE tells the USPS what to do with the mail piece if the individual or business has moved. Another way is to compare your mail list to the database maintained by the USPS of individuals and businesses who have turned in change of address notices. We provide this service, called *move update verification*, to our customers; for more information, contact us.

Mail list enhancement services

If you have carefully compiled your mailing list and maintained it well, you may benefit from

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enhancing the list with additional information besides what is required to address a mail piece. A business list can be enhanced with information such as SIC code, annual sales, and number of employees, while household income, phone, gender, and other demographic information can be added to a residential list. Data append produces a profile of your customers which can be used as the basis for selecting prospects that match the profile.

Your mail list: a valuable marketing tool

Because your mail list can be a valuable marketing tool, it is worth the effort to compile and maintain a good one. We will be glad to discuss your plans to use your mailing list for a marketing effort, and to provide information on how to improve its quality, accuracy, and recency.



“... Data append produces a profile of your customers...”

The Power of the Post Card

As businesses and organizations continue to integrate print-based marketing with online activities, many have discovered the benefit of using a post card to introduce and drive prospects to the web site. And while a post card can be any size, there is one we highly recommend for this purpose: either 4x6 inches or 4¼ x 6 inches.

This size falls into the USPS classification of *card* which is a subclass of first class mail. Due to an anomaly in postage rates, it actually costs less in postage to mail a card than a larger post card.

And because the smaller card is first class mail, it receives all the first class mail services – delivery priority and free notification back to the mailer if the card is not deliverable as addresses.

When designing the card, keep in mind how the letter carrier will present the mail. Most likely, it will be sorted with the address facing the recipient. Be sure you include enough tantalizing information on this side of the post card to ensure that the recipient will turn it over and read your main message.



“When designing the card, keep in mind how the letter carrier will present the mail.”



“A call to action can be made even more powerful by adding wording that notifies that reader that there is some risk in failing to act immediately.”

Include a Call to Action

No matter what kind of marketing material you are sending to your mail list, it is a good idea to include a *call to action* – a clear instruction of what you want the prospect to do – and something that creates a sense of urgency about taking the action.

Here are some examples of a call to action:

- Call for more information
- Bring in this coupon
- Buy this and we’ll include that for free

A call to action can be made even more powerful by adding wording that notifies that

reader that there is some risk in failing to act immediately. Expiration dates, a statement of limited supply or scarcity, or a qualifier are all ways to create a sense of urgency.

See what happens if we add a sense of urgency to the call to action:

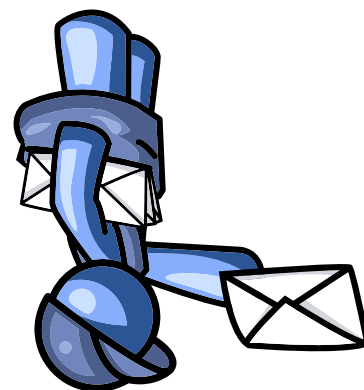
- This is a limited-time offer – call by next Tuesday
- Coupon will be redeemed for the first 50 people
- Buy this and we’ll include that until supplies run out

Please Route to the Printing Buyer

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513-248-2121
Fax 513-248-5141
www.techgra.com
info@techgra.com

TECHNE GRAPHICS INC.
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Millford, OH 45150



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