



25 WAYS

To Improve Your Direct Mail Response

Direct mail or junk mail?

Your mail programs are competing with thousands of others—vying for the time or attention of the reader. Want to increase your response? Read on...below are 25 tips to help bolster your direct mail response.

Target

Before beginning any direct mail campaign define your target market, and be specific. Create a concise list of potential and/or existing clients. When defining your target market it pays to study the specific nature of your audience; where they live, what they do, how old they are, are they male or female, do they speak a common language, (computer terminology, legal language...). In doing so, you are sure to increase readership.

Whether you choose to purchase or use an existing list, telemarket the list to verify the contact information. After you have developed your database, update it. A follow-up to that same list within two months will pull 40-50% of the first mailing.

Simplify

Say what you have to say, quickly. Make your direct-mail copy simple and easy to read. It is important to remember that the attention span of most prospects can be measured in milliseconds. Your goal should be to write copy that excites and involves prospects. You can begin simplifying your message with these rules:

- For every 100 words you write, keep 70 or more of them down to one or two syllables.
- Keep paragraphs to six lines or fewer.
- Try not to use more than two commas per sentence.
- Use typefaces that are proven and easy to read.
- Use short sentences (they are easier to read and understand)
- Use short paragraphs (make sure the paragraph contains just one thought)

Stress Benefits

What's in it for me? When possible show how your product or service solves problems. Customers are more interested in what your product or service will do for them than in the product features. The more benefits you provide, the better the response. Why? Because people buy benefits, not features. Try to quantify the benefits. The reader must be able to weigh the cost of your service against the benefit they will reap using an alternative product or service.

Personalize

Speak directly to the prospect. People respond better if they believe you understand their needs. All direct mail pieces should be "you" oriented. To your prospect, it's the most important word in world, after his/her own name.

Increase Frequency

Mail to your customers more often. If you're mailing to them four times a year increase the frequency of your mailing to eight or ten times. If you increase your frequency by 25% you should increase your sales by at least the same percentage. Consider mailing to your best customers more often. Research suggests that you will do 60-75% better on the second mailing.

Stick to the Subject

A direct mail piece should have one objective: to get your recipient's to take action. Keep it simple and to the point.

Vary format

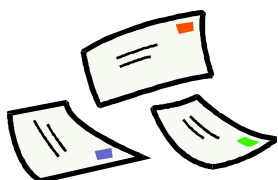
Alter your format when mailing by using self mailers, large envelopes, boxes, three dimensional packages, colored envelopes, and stickers that smell like your product (*yes ...they are available*) so that prospects do not automatically recognize a mailing as yours.

Follow Up

Make it easy for your prospect to respond. The phone, fax, web site, and e-mail should be prominent and easy to locate in the piece. Make it simple to buy the product or receive information. The world now revolves around ease of use and speed of response. If you're first or most complete, you win. Provide customers with a short response form they can fax back, or a business envelope with a stamp to send their reply. Follow-up promptly when receiving a request for information.

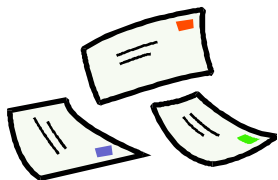
Keep it Positive

Keep your message positive and upbeat. If you are going to say anything negative, accentuate it with the positive.



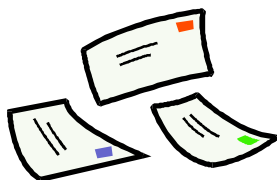
Grab attention

The use of color is appealing to the eye and grabs attention. Even a splash of a single color can improve readability. Attractive graphic design can take a mail piece a long way. Show your reader what you are talking about. Ideally, direct mail is about grabbing the attention of your target market quickly and then holding it. *And remember, the envelope is just as important visually as the inside piece.*



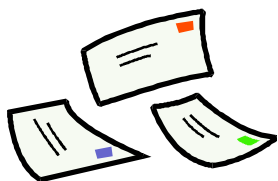
Back-up claims

Whenever possible, include proof of your claims. Refer to research studies or specific testimonials of satisfied customers and supplement the information with photographs. Including photographs makes the customer's statement more believable.



Be Creative

Develop a personality for your business. The fun part of direct mail is that you design the piece to fit your audience. End a page of copy in the middle of a word or sentence, encouraging your reader to turn the page. Fold a brochure through the middle of a graphic.



Use Buzzwords

Words such as SALE, WINNER, FREE, NEW, NOW are simple buzzwords that can do the whole job. Words like this have heavy emotional power. What word would get you to glance at the rest of the message? After all, sometimes all you get is a glance!

Create Contests

Want to increase your response, create contests. Crossword puzzles and holiday contests, among others tend to initiate response. Make it fun and rewarding. Everyone likes to take a break from their daily routines, and have a little fun. By tying a reward to the contest you also receive feedback on who is reading your mailings.

Make an Offer

Of every element in a direct mail piece, the most important is the offer. Make the offer interesting. Before developing the piece jot down a dozen or more ways to present the offer. The offer is the reason a certain percentage of your audience will respond, and many times it is the difference between success and failure. Try tying in several offers, and letting your customer choose which is best for them. After all, customers are not created equal, each of us has different needs and desires.

Create Urgency

Build immediacy into the piece. Provide the reader with a reason to take action by including a specific deadline. By nature, people procrastinate. Be sure to give them at least one reason to act promptly. You may consider featuring the time limit at the top of the letter. *Offers that provide a specific date win every time over a piece without one.*

Proof it

Before producing the final version of your direct mail piece have it proofread. It is best to hand the copy to someone who is not close to the subject, and have them read the copy back to you. Listen carefully to where they put the emphasis and pauses.

Study Competition

Every direct mail piece is competing with yours. Follow the C.A.S.E. method (copy and steal everything), you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Collect the direct response solicitations you receive in the mail. Learn from what others do well and not so well.

Ask for the order

Be specific. Ask your audience to do something. Be sure to always address the order promptly and thank your customer for the order (or feedback).

Be honest

Be honest and straightforward. Focus your efforts on conveying a message consistent with your core functions. Eliminate false claims or exaggerated statements. Customers are more likely to express negative emotions than positive experiences.

Offer Free Gifts

Offer your customer something of value for reacting to the offer. Free gift offers are more effective than discount offers, and almost always increase response.

Direct Mail Tidbits

The average person spends seven seconds looking at the envelope

Once the prospect opens the envelope, it takes eleven seconds to decide whether to keep it or toss it.

Prospects spend two seconds, on average, scanning the enclosures.



Use “Letter” Paper

Print your letter on a sheet of paper that looks and feels like a letter. Stick to colors that are traditionally used for business correspondence. Avoid coated papers that make your letter look too much like an advertisement. Using lightweight paper will save postage and allow you to put more into your envelope.

State the guarantee

State your guarantee boldly, in strong words and repeat it often. Customers want to be sure that they will see the value in your product. By guaranteeing satisfaction, you are essentially eliminating the risk involved with purchasing.

Use Current Events

Use current events as a way of developing ideas and concepts for your mail piece. Even more important, use them to celebrate special events, holidays, or any major news topic to initiate a response.

Test, Test and Test

Test your direct mail efforts by trying different ideas and concepts. Break up your mailing into smaller components by targeting a specific audience and evaluate the response. Change the size of your envelope. Try different papers. Target different audiences with different ways of expressing your message. Test a self-mailer or postcard, instead of a letter. Not every method will work for every product. By testing you can determine what works best for your audience.

Conclusion

Taking the time to study your audience and develop a direct mail piece that focuses on the benefits that your product or service offers is critical. Remember, maximizing direct mail success depends first on the lists you use, second on the offers you make, and third on the copy and graphics you create.