

Marketing Minute ~ Direct Mail Myths & Myth-takes

What sets the smart business owners and managers apart from the rest is that they are willing to take the time to really understand Direct Mail. There are many myths surrounding Direct Mail, as well as some 'myth-takes' you want to be aware of. And remember, Direct Mail refers to anything you send people in the mail — letters, brochures, postcards, etc.

The Myths

We often hear 'Direct Mail doesn't work.' This may be due to the fact that so many of us are customarily tossing most of the mail we receive in the trash. The truth of it is that 90 out of 100 people may throw the mail away, but if even 5 just glance at it, 5 more read it, and one of those 5 buys from you, you may well have a highly profitable mailing. Direct Mail is a numbers game and you have to enter into it in the knowledge that most of your mailings will probably go unread. When Direct Mail is done well, it can make your profits soar. When done badly, it can eat away at your marketing budget. So, talk with an expert in Direct Mail for their suggestions as to what may help you.

The second myth is that there is a magical percentage conversion rate that a successful mailing campaign should receive. For instance, you should expect 3% of the people you mail to buy from you. This is not true. There are many factors that affect the mailing results: your special offer rate or price, how your offer is presented...if it looks compelling so that it demands the reader's attention. Direct Mail is statistically predictable, when you embark on the campaign by testing it on a small scale first. The results of that small scale testing can almost dictate the results you can expect with a larger mailing. For instance, if you send out 2000 letters and get 20 responses, you can predict with some certainty that if you send out 4000 letters (to the same demographic group) you will get somewhere in the region of 40 responses. Another reason to test your mailing on a small scale first is, very importantly, if it doesn't work, you are not out a lot of money

Any mailings you consider will fall into two categories: The first is mailings to your existing customers. The second is mailings to potential new customers. There are some basic fundamentals when you are mailing to potential customers:

- 1) Remember to test any Direct Mail campaigns for new customers on a small scale before a larger campaign.
- 2) Consider testing renting mailing lists relevant to your target group.
- 3) Always include a letter with any brochure you send, it will increase the response rate.
- 4) Make sure that the contents of your mailing focus on the benefits of your product or service. You want it to be about your potential customer and what you can do for them, rather than just being about you.
- 5) Don't limit Direct Mail to pure selling. You can use it to say 'thank you' to customers. You can ask for referrals, or introduce your customers to a company you've partnered with, just about anything you can think up.
- 6) If you repeat a successful mailing three weeks later, you can expect a response rate around 50% of the original.
- 7) Test mailing postcards. They are cheaper than a normal mailing and in some cases will produce a higher response rate.
- 8) If you follow up a mailing with a phone call, you can increase the response rate by up to 1000%!

The Myth-Takes

In order to make a Direct Mail campaign work, it's important to avoid common pitfalls. Mistakes can be in your copy, your list, and even on what you put on your envelope. Here are ten common mistakes people make that sabotage their mailings.

- 1) The biggest mistake is to send to the wrong mailing list. Know your demographics...know your customers' interests. A good rule to follow is that if a person has \$750 invested in your particular category, he or she is ripe for your sales pitch. There are many mailing lists who target your category.
- 2) Not testing enough. Analyze sales details constantly. Follow up an 'A' mailing with a 'B' mailing. Check for response rates for each.
- 3) Not personalizing your mailing. Your letter or postcard should carry as much personalization as it can. In a letter, you can put the customer's name on it. On a postcard, work it so that it looks like it is just for the reader.
- 4) Spend all your time on the brochure instead of the letter. Most people will read the letter first. If you can't sell your prospect in the first paragraph, your product or service won't sell at all. First, sell the benefits, then the features. How is it going to improve the person's life? Put the main benefit in the first sentence and let it stand alone.
- 5) Go crazy with adjectives. Adjectives actually slow your copy down. State the facts and the benefits. Don Hauptman, author of the famous mail-order ad, "Speak Spanish Like a Diplomat!", says that when he writes a direct-mail package, more than 50% of the work involved is in the reading, research and preparation. Less than half his time is spent writing, rewriting, editing and revising.
- 6) Save the best for last. A great many copywriters are so enthralled with the beauty of their work, they save the most compelling reason for buying until the end of the letter. The same thing happens with TV commercials. The logo is only mentioned at the end. You HAVE to make your point at the beginning. Some time-tested openings for letters include:
 - Asking an intriguing question
 - Addressing the most pressing problem or concern of the prospect

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- **Arousing curiosity**
- **Leading off with a fascinating fact or incredible statistic**

Start the offer up-front, especially if it involves money; saving it, getting something for an incredibly low price, or making a free offer.

7) Starting with the product—not the prospect. Avoid ‘manufacturer’s copy’ that stresses who you are, what you do, your business philosophy and history, and the objectives of your company. They provide reassurance, not sales. You and your products are not important to the prospect. The reader opening your sales letter and brochure only wants to know, “What’s in it for me? How will I come out ahead by buying your product instead of someone else’s?”

8) Ignore the magic words. They are ‘free’ and ‘you’. This mistake of not using the magic words can dramatically decrease the response to your mailing. General advertisers, operating under the mistaken notion that the mission of the copywriter is to be creative, avoid the magic words of Direct Mail, because they think those magic phrases are clichés. Say free brochure, not brochure. Say free consultation, not initial consultation. Say free gift, not gift. Saying a free gift for you is even better.

9) Ignore the solution to the problem you’re trying to solve. Successful Direct Mail focuses on the prospect, not the product. The most useful background research you can do is to ask a typical prospect, “What’s the biggest problem you have right now?” The sales letter and brochure, and postcard should talk about that problem, then promise a solution.

10) Forget about the envelope. Remember your envelope is your first contact. Use strong teaser copy and/or an odd shaped envelope. They attract attention.

Direct Mail is a huge subject, and I’ve only touched upon some basics here. If you are thinking about doing a Direct Mail campaign of any kind, be sure to talk to an expert first and get some guidance. This can make all of the difference between a successful Direct Mail campaign and spending marketing money and getting no return.

