

Excellence in Direct Mail

Most of us have a negative view of direct mail marketing, associating it with the piles of “junk mail” we have waiting for us daily, much of which goes straight into the garbage. Many of us wonder why companies keep sending us junk mail when they know that the majority of the recipients are going to simply throw it away. The reason is, because, overall, as a marketing tool that is measurable and generates sufficient response rates, it works.

Not all direct mail is created equally. Some marketers can't help resisting the urge to trick you into opening the envelope, as if somehow your reaction can be positive once you realize you have been tricked. And some marketers see direct mail not as a direct response piece, but rather as a way to raise awareness, so while partially effective, they miss the opportunity to exploit the piece to its full potential. Most marketers know, however, that only a small percentage of their list will respond, but that the numbers they are playing with are so large that the low response rate still makes it worthwhile. And that's why direct mail is such a staple in so many companies' marketing mix,

Most direct marketers will tell you that a successful campaign boils down to the accuracy of the list (both in terms of the extent the names and addresses are correct and in relation to how close the people on it actually meet the demographic you are aiming for), the offer or incentive presented, and the creativity of the piece. These elements are all critical from the perspective of the direct mail portion of the process, but the overall marketing program should also include information capturing and tracking and analysis.

To create an excellent direct mail campaign Tudog offers up the following hints:

Direct Mail Basics

- You Must Have the Right List – the list is the heart and soul of the direct mail campaign. You need to know who you want to target and you need to know how to target them. If you are sending your direct mail piece out randomly your rates of return will be so low as to deem the campaign a waste of funds. The gentle balance between worthwhile and waste comes from the accuracy of the list. Whether you base it on known interests, existing buying habits, age, income level, or even geographic location, make certain that the list you are using represents the market you seek to target.
- It's All in the Offer – people respond to direct mail because they contain an offer that is either unavailable through another channel or delivered to them conveniently (right to their home). The offer you serve up will greatly influence the efficacy of the campaign. Whether your offer includes a price incentive or a convenience, the power of the offer will determine the power of your campaign.
- Get to the Point – keep in mind that people are not going to go over your direct mail piece in fine detail. You have about 10 – 20 seconds to get to the point and tell them what you are selling, what the benefits are, and the special deal you are offering. You need to do this quickly so they get the message, and clearly, so they understand it. Any additional time or effort you may require will significantly lessen the chances your piece gets read and elicits a buy response. You need to make sure your copy is crisp and your message is on target.
- Looks Count – too many direct marketing campaigns fall on the basis of the way their direct mail piece looks. The graphic design of your piece is critical because

it will be one of the primary drivers in determining whether the recipient reads the copy. You need to make sure you balance your graphics between eye catching colors and bold text and the danger of becoming cheesy and overly promotional (many people are turned off by what they see as a hard sell). You can find subtle ways to emphasize what you want to stand out and create a look and feel to your piece that increases the chance it will be read.

- Tell Them What You Want Them to Do – you cannot expect people to make the effort to figure out what it is you want from them. If you do not present your call to action clearly they will throw your direct mail piece away unless they are so interested in your offer that they are willing to invest time into determining how to continue. The clearer your call to action, the more likely people will follow up.
- Get Them to Open the Envelope – If your direct mail piece is enclosed in an envelope, then you need to print something on the envelope that will make the reader open it. This should not be something misleading like “official document”, but rather something that gives an indication of the offer inside like “great savings on...” If you mislead, you may get the reader to open the envelope, but then they will discover the deception and toss your piece out of annoyance. You are better off crafting an offer that is genuinely of interest and using it to motivate the reader to open the envelope.

Capturing Information

- Test Different Versions – measuring the results of a direct mail campaign and determining the right piece can be enhanced through the testing of a number of pieces in different markets and tracking response rates. Once you have a piece that outperforms the other you can send it to additional markets and test its response rate. As the piece performs, you will be able insights into what is driving its success (such as color schemes, location of offer, type of offer, etc.) and use this information to construct additional campaigns at later times.
- Mail in Phases – sending different direct mail to the same address over a period of 8 weeks at 2-4 week intervals will allow you to learn both which piece is performing best and how many pieces on average your mailing list requires before you maximize your response rate.
- Request Mail Returns – every mailing list has dead addresses from people who moved since the time the list was compiled. By keeping them on your list you are not only wasting printing and postage funds, but also offsetting your statistics as the dead addresses are counted as no response. By asking the post office to return non-deliverable mail, you will be able to update your list and keep it clean.

Tracking Results

- Embed Tracking Elements – you will be able to tell which piece generates which sort of response by embedding in each piece a code that needs to be used by the customer in order to exploit the offer. The codes, varying for each piece, are then traced back and the calculation can be made.
- Keep Track of ROI – the last thing you want to do is keep sending out mail campaigns that fail to recover their own costs (let alone generate revenue). You need to make sure you have a good handle on your costs and the ability to track every sale generated from the campaign. That way you can understand how much money was used to generate how much revenue. If the ROI is insufficient

(or negative) then you know you either have to adjust the campaign, try new lists, or create a new offer.

Not every direct mail campaign works and using this tactic requires some tolerance for trial and error. The important thing to remember is that direct mail allows you to bring your offer into the homes of people you specifically target. If you choose your targets well, construct a piece that merits attention, and present an offer that is worthy, you will be welcome in their home, and they will reward you with a purchase.