

## 7 Ways to Make Your Direct Mail More Effective

by Karen J. Marchetti

Effective Direct Mail follows the key principles of Direct (or Response) Marketing -- principles that many marketers who focus on Brand/Awareness Advertising may not be aware of. Like Public Relations, Market Research, and Brand/Awareness Advertising, Direct Marketing is its own body of knowledge. Here are some tips for making your next Direct Marketing effort via Direct Mail work harder for you.

### 1) Design your package to have one clear objective

Decide whether you want your package to complete a sale, generate a lead, or generate retail or web traffic -- and focus on one product at a time. In general, asking your package to do more than one thing, or sell more than one product, will depress response. (Catalogs – pieces designed to sell multiple products – follow their own unique subset of Direct Marketing principles.)

Decide what you want your responder to do and how the responses will be received -- phone, fax, response card, coupon brought in to your retail location, web site, web landing page, etc. Giving the responder some options for responding (for example, phone and web) will usually be more effective than one response option only.

### 2) Make a strong, compelling offer

Be sure you design an attractive offer to encourage your audience to respond, and include a deadline for that response. ("**Call for more information" is the most boring offer you can make!**) If you're generating leads (and you actually DO want them to "call for more information"), think about what you could include in that product information packet that would benefit the responder – and really motivate them to respond to get it. For example, maybe you could include a free "10-Point Checklist on Choosing the Right . . ." to encourage response. Make your offer easy to understand, point out the benefits to the reader – and make them feel they have to have whatever it is you're offering!

### 3) Refine your mailing list as tightly as possible

If you're looking for response rates substantially above the norm, try to more finely target your mailing list. Remove more questionable prospects and mail to a smaller group of high probability names. If you are purchasing outside lists, use lists that allow you to select names based on actual individual or household-level information (as opposed to estimated information via census averages) whenever possible. Look for lists of purchasers of products similar or related to yours. For business lists, look for subscriber files, as they are the most accurate – and the most targeted -- files available.

#### 4) Make it easy for your audience to respond

Personalize your response card or coupon with the customer name and address to save the responder time. If you can't personalize both your letter and response device, spend your money on personalizing the response device. Anything you can do to make it easier for your audience to respond will increase response.

#### 5) Write your copy from the audience's point-of-view

You are usually writing to a disinterested audience (i.e. people, in general, aren't just waiting to read the mail you've sent them), and you have precious few seconds to catch their attention. Don't make the mistake of "talking to yourself"; your letter should talk **directly** to your audience. How do you accomplish this? Be heavy with the word "you", and light on the words "we", "our", and your company's name. Write exactly the way you'd talk to someone face-to-face – and use the same sales process you'd use if selling face-to-face.

People respond to benefits -- not product features. Benefits tell the customer "what's in it for me?" Be sure to emphasize the benefits of your products in your copy.

#### 6) Design your program to learn from your investment.

If you've been conducting just one big mailing per year for a product, consider breaking up your program into a series of smaller mailings. This will allow you to test something in each mailing (offers, lists, envelope headlines, letter "lead-ins", emotional appeals, etc.). Careful testing will help you determine the most cost-effective components for your future efforts – and help your marketing dollars go further.

Be sure to carefully track results from every direct mail effort. Plan to set up a responder file of prospects, and note in each customer file the offers each has received and which they've responded to. Keep track of how your customers are obtained (the offer, positioning, and list used) for future marketing efforts.

#### 7) Run the numbers before proceeding.

Make sure your direct mail program makes economic sense before you begin. Compute your **breakeven sales quantity** (marketing cost divided by net profit per new customer) – which tells you how many new customers you'd have to generate to cover your marketing costs. Then determine your **breakeven response rate** (breakeven sales quantity divided by pieces mailed). If the project would have to achieve a very high response rate to breakeven, you may need to rethink your effort (by either increasing your price, reducing the cost of your marketing effort, or considering the lifetime value of each new customer) before proceeding.

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