

23 COMMON MISTAKES OF DIRECT MAIL CAMPAIGNS

Avoid These Common Blunders to Ensure a Good Response

When done correctly, direct mail is highly effective. Use these 23 points as a checklist to help you develop and implement the most effective direct mail campaigns, while avoiding the most common errors.

❶ A “Call to action” is missing or hard to find

Once you’ve succeeded in getting a customer or prospect reading your direct mail piece, you’ve got to tell them what step they should take next to accept or further investigate your offer. Put these Calls to Action at logical places within the promotion (for example, toward the top and also at the bottom of a letter).

❷ Forgetting to test

Direct mail marketing is the art of continual improvement. Try different approaches in design, copy, packaging and offers. Eventually you’ll find a combination that is really strong, which is called the “control.” Then you can test promotions against your control, altering variables such as the offer, or the design, or the entire promotion versus a whole new approach. Testing or trying to beat your control is known as a “split-run” mailing.

❸ Too much hype

Practice the art of generating excitement without hype. Buyers are savvy these days. Your first task is to establish trust — hype simply undermines this.

❹ Bad grammar

Yes, the whole world is free styling with text message language right now. But don’t allow your direct mail marketing to succumb to lazy writing. Remember, you’re a business. Buyers are looking for attention to detail in the products and services they choose.

❺ Boring headline

If the headline doesn’t catch their attention, it doesn’t matter how good the rest of the copy is. People typically decide to continue reading based off of interest in the headline.

❻ Not studying what works

Direct mail marketing has been around for many decades, and hundreds of lessons have been learned. Study what has worked and what has not by reading the greats. It’s not unlike

any other investment you might make — become familiar with the investing experts in the field. It will pay off.

7 No follow-up plan

Congratulations. You've just finished your direct mail campaign. Now what? Most experts suggest four more "touches" in the coming weeks and months — people don't always act right away. The first touch is often just getting you on their radar screen. Email is also a good option for following up. Many business-to-business marketers choose all three — a mailing along with an email, and then a follow-up phone call.

8 Cluttered design

If you feel like you're short on space to say what you want to say, you probably are. Consider a larger mail format or simplifying your message. If you try and say too much the message will get lost entirely, because people don't want to spend their time looking at a cluttered design (just as they don't like to spend time in a cluttered room).

9 Not direct enough

Your direct mail marketing piece should be designed for your audience to take action. Be specific. Valuable offers with a time constraint are a great way to get a prospect to contact you.

10 Bad copywriting

Typos and rushed writing reflect poorly on your company, just as if you never mowed the lawn in front of your office. Hire a professional copywriter if you have the budget for it. Professional copy and design are expenses that generally pay for themselves in the form of increased response.

11 Targeting not on target

Do you really know your customers? When's the last time you did a customer survey to learn what motivates them? Consider sending your current customer list to InfoUSA — we can fill out many of the demographic fields you may not have on file to give you a clear picture of your customer base. Knowing your customers and prospects well makes all the difference in direct marketing success.

12 Going cheap on the postage

Sometimes it makes more sense to pay a little more. If it doesn't get there at the right time, the whole effort could go to waste, or at least valuable days of revenue could be lost.

13 Lacking creativity

The direct mail landscape is crowded. Creativity is how you get noticed. Hire or build an accomplished creative team if you have the budget. Or brainstorm ideas yourself. But remem-

ber that a strategically creative idea, delivered to a relevant audience, can take your product or service to the next level — and even make your fortune. Direct mail history is full of these creative success stories.

14 Not integrating with other marketing

Many small businesses and entrepreneurs have missed opportunities to tie direct marketing in with other campaigns. For example, large retailers have become successful at integrating direct mail with email campaigns, boosting response dramatically.

15 Missed opportunity to drive traffic to web

Your web presence is critical to your business, so why not use direct mail marketing to drive traffic there? It's a perfect opportunity to capitalize on your mailing, even if many prospects don't buy directly from you the same day they receive your offer. A memorable domain name will help with this.

16 Botched Contests

Contests are a great way to get interaction with your customers. But if the contest isn't executed smoothly, it can hurt your company's reputation. Don't rush into it. Contests are best with several months of planning.

17 Shoddy design or printing

Remember, your name is on it, and people will gather a first impression of your company from it. Make it sparkle.

18 Lack of branding

Establish and build your brand identity so that you don't have to introduce yourself with every new marketing initiative. Branding creates recognition, and recognition is a form of trust.

19 One hit wonder mentality

If you're going to send just one direct mail piece and expect huge results, you'd better hire the best marketing team you can find, because that's a major challenge. Direct mail marketing is an ongoing effort that pays off with time — both in the way of prospect familiarity, and in the improvements you make with each mailing. If you're learning something each time, it was valuable so long as you build on that learning for the next mailing.

20 An unreliable printer

A bad printer can ruin your careful plans and hurt the response of the mailer. A good printer will suggest the right options based on your goals, not on price markups. A good printer may also be able to offer you strategy and insight where you lack experience. Make your printer a part of your team, and feel free to pay them a bonus when the response is good on a mailing. It's good luck.

21 Not having a plan

Have a plan in place so that your direct mail marketing becomes strategic. It can be as simple as writing key mailing dates on a calendar and trying to meet those dates. But put something on paper and record the results of each mailing. When you look back years later it will be clear why the plan was important.

22 Wrong size

A mailing that is too big will waste money or get damaged in mailboxes; too small will look cramped. Even these considerations are secondary — the best approach is giving your offer or message the space it needs to be effective. This means giving your copywriter and designer a lot of freedom to choose the mailer size.

23 Taking all the fun out of it

The purpose of the “split run” is not just to test different mailer sizes. The core purpose is actually to give you the freedom to test ideas against one another. If you have an exciting new idea for a mailer, nurture that enthusiasm and go for it on a small test sample. Remember, regardless of profits, you’re almost always going to learn something with each mailing. So go ahead and swing for the fences now and then. More often than not, you will be surprised by the results, and that’s what makes direct mail worth all the effort.

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