

# THE CORNERSTONES OF DIRECT MAIL SUCCESS

## *How to Build a Profitable Direct Mail Campaign*

According to an article in *DM News*, as many as 94% of consumers say they take action on promotional offers they receive in the mail.

But how do you make your mailer into an offer that is chosen by consumers? **The World Advertising Research Center's "best practices" briefing states that successful direct marketing depends upon four elements:**

- 1 A clear understanding of the features and benefits of your product or service.
- 2 Identifying and mailing to an audience that needs or desires those features and benefits, usually through a targeted customer or prospecting list.
- 3 Understanding the prospects as thoroughly as possible – through research and analysis – and building an offer as relevant to those prospects as possible.
- 4 A contact program and/or marketing firm dedicated to managing and developing the relationship between your company and your customers and prospects. Trust and familiarity with your brand are pivotal factors in both securing the first sale, as well as achieving repeat business.

### HAVE A TARGETED LIST

The success of a direct mail campaign depends upon a targeted list, the offer and then “everything

else”– this includes the design, copy (messaging) and the size and shape of the mailing piece.

While direct mail experts sometimes disagree about the relative importance of these elements, they generally agree that the list and offer (including the features of the product or service and its pricing) are the first elements to test and focus your efforts upon.

Whether or not your mailer attracts attention depends upon its relevance to the reader. While an attractive creative approach can eventually take your promotion to unexpected and very profitable heights, it is a relevant offer that will make your direct mail piece stand out amongst competition.

People pick up and read about things they need or otherwise interest them. If your prospect doesn't have a lawn, an attractive and valuable landscaping mailer won't get a response. If they have a lawn but no budget for landscaping, same story. But if they have a lawn and a household income of \$150,000, an attractive and valuable landscaping mailer will be potentially considered.

### TEST YOUR MAILING RESULTS

When you feel your price-point is right, your offer is hard to resist and you have the best prospect audience available, send what you feel is an attractive mailer to a test segment to confirm that you're on the right track.

With the offer phase completed, the second phase of testing should focus on the creative choices (messaging, design, size and color of the mailer etc). Focus on creative testing while holding the list and offer static – if you mix the variables up you won't know why the response was particularly good or weak for each subsequent mailing.

Direct mail success is built one mailing at a time, through diligent testing and then adaptation to your ongoing discoveries. Three important rules for testing include:

- 1 Make sure your test quantity will give you reliable results. A 5,000 prospect list test is usually adequate to get a feel of the responsiveness for a particular audience and a mailer.
- 2 Spend at least 10 percent of your budget on testing. Many direct marketers eventually come up against this situation: "If I only knew that was going to work twice as well, I would have begun mailing it years ago."

Fortunately with a strategic process in place, you won't have to face leaving several years of sales revenue on the table. If your instincts tell you to try a

new approach, just mail a smaller "split run" of your new idea against your current "control" mailer.

Be sure to hold the creative static so it doesn't influence the outcome – or hold the offer static if you're testing a new creative approach.

- 3 Test the big things until you have a winner on your hands. Major breakthroughs are only possible when you test the key variables – such as the offer, the pricing, the audience or the headline etc. You can focus on fine-tuning the piece once your foundation is strong and the mailer is getting a positive response.

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