



Designing Direct Mail Pieces That Get Opened

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Lester Wunderman says there are 19 things all successful direct marketers know. Three of the most important are:

- The consumer, not the product, is the hero. Focus on the consumer, not on your product.
- Communicate with each customer as a prospect of one. Everyone wants to be appreciated, recognized and liked. Make your offer and message relevant to your customer. CAP Ventures' 2003 survey on personalization showed that 69 percent of consumers preferred highly personalized hard-copy direct mail to non-personalized direct mail offers.
- Answer the question, "Why should I?" Know your target's main objections and overcome them in your message and offer.

Even the best direct marketers face challenges with every program. With each direct mail effort, ensure you can answer the question, "How do I get the consumer whom I'm communicating with to open the mail and be moved to respond?"

According to a survey last summer by the Cable & Telecommunications Association for Marketing, more than half of U.S. adults prefer receiving advertising and promotional material through the mail as opposed to 1 percent who prefer telemarketing.

The U.S. Postal Service's five-year strategic plan talks about the "mail moment" that occurs when Americans reach into their mailbox looking for something special, something of value or something important. Even consumers who eschew "junk mail" will scan everything in the mailbox for that special offer from a trusted source that will make their roses bloom faster, their golf swing straighter or their abs firmer. How can you ensure that your offer is perceived as something special, something of value or something important?

Mail that gets opened has four important qualities: It represents a tangible, personal communication; it connects with the recipient in a striking way; it has a compelling feel, an inviting look and a provocative line of copy that makes the recipient feel important; and it provides an experience.

The outer envelope is the most important component in your mailing. If your envelope does not get noticed, it will not get opened. Your envelope has to be eye-catching and stand out from the rest of the mail in the box. It must generate interest for the recipient. Finally, your envelope has to create a sense of urgency so it does not get put aside or thrown away unopened.

Pique curiosity. Create chaos in the pile of standard size envelopes. Three of the four envelopes in your prospect's daily "mail moment" will be #24, white-wove, #10 or #9 envelopes. Envelopes that are bigger, smaller, bulkier or shaped differently will attract attention. However, "important mail" comes in #10 and #9 envelopes, and many marketers, particularly financial services companies, use a standard envelope to convey that sense.

A large, clear window or a second window can be used to show off a colorful travel or book brochure, a plastic card or a time-sensitive offer to lure the reader inside. Leading the reader inside with a provocative statement, leading question, promise of a benefit or that limited-time offer creates a sense of urgency that gets your envelope opened on the way back from the mailbox.

Bulk it up. Call it the "Crackerjack theory," but it is hard to resist the allure of something special inside. A plastic or paper card adds dimension to a package and draws the recipient inside with the hint of value. A credit card marketer saw the response rate rise more than 30 percent by adding a plastic card to a #10 package. Premiums and freemiums add intrigue and help get your package opened when you add a drill bit guide for the woodworker or a ball marker for the golfer. Check with your supplier to ensure the added bulk in your package still qualifies for automation discounts.

How does it feel? Adding texture to an outer envelope helps differentiate your package from the rest of the pile. Embossing or foil applications add a touch of class and make the recipient feel the offer must be important and, therefore, she must be important. Ask your supplier about varnishes to add glitter or texture.

Solve the puzzle to get inside. Interactive devices on the outer envelope attract attention. They include side pulls, double windows, zip strips, labels and stickers, perforated reveals and repositionable notes. Repositionable notes look like self-adhesive notes on your outer envelope. The USPS reports no operational problems getting these notes through the mail, and the customers it surveyed saw increases in response rates of up to 45 percent from this interactive device. Ask suppliers about interactive devices available for your program.

Make it easy to read and relate to. The baby boom generation is reaching for its reading glasses, and they are not enjoying it! That personalized offer will be appreciated more if it can be read at less than arm's distance without those glasses. Make your offer and message relevant to your customer. If you are selling to women, show a woman using your product. Prospects should see themselves in your offer, and customers should see that they are known and appreciated for the business you already have with them.

Make it easy to respond. Once the mail gets opened, keep the momentum going by creating a response device that is easy to use and, even more important, simple for your fulfillment company to process. Campaigns have been ruined by forms that need to be folded by an engineer to fit in the reply envelope or that provide only tiny spaces for critical information like credit card numbers. Remove the barriers to responding and reduce any perceived risk by showing your product or service is guaranteed and that it is the best offer for them.

Mail that gets noticed is mail that gets opened. Make your mail piece the highlight of the "mail moment" with a singular, targeted message, an intriguing way to get to the offer and an easy way to respond.

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