

11 Steps to Direct Mail Success

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Even direct marketing professionals need to be reminded about how to keep their direct mail successful. This list summarizes the basics and some new approaches to old principles that both experienced and novice marketers will find useful.

1. Is the mailing competitively priced and within budget?

The direct mail package must sell the client's products or services at an acceptable cost per sale.

Before starting the creative development, determine how much you can afford to spend to make the sale. This means knowing what various direct mail formats cost. Engineer the package based on the available printing technology to leverage cost efficiencies. This also means paying attention to postal rates and paper stocks that fit within the weight limitations.



2. Is there a sense of unity to all components?

This question explains why the industry typically calls a direct mail piece a "package". A package positions a mailing piece as a cohesive whole. Each element supports the other. This also explains why professionals do not take an existing brochure and attempt to incorporate it into a direct mail package where it doesn't fit.

All elements fit graphically. The pieces are designed to literally fit together at the letter-shop level where the Business Reply Envelope allows proper clearance for machine insertion into the outer envelope. And depending upon the chosen format, the personalized letter or response form that drives the package shows through the window on the outer envelope for reliable delivery to the recipient's address.

Each element, except for the outer envelope and Business Reply Envelope, stands alone reiterating the offer, the key product benefits and the call to action with web site address, telephone number and company mailing address. The respondent often discards certain elements of the package. When later returning to the saved piece, the buyer must know how to purchase and be reminded why she saved the piece in the first place.

3. Does the reader know exactly what's expected of him/her?

Don't assume anything about what your customer knows or understands about your product. Make a clear call to action by including a time sensitive offer both with words and graphics. Include a coupon response form even though you expect 90% of your responses to contact you by phone. An order form says, "I want you to respond to me."

4. Have you touched on all benefits?

Here's the place to answer ALL of the customer's objections. Talk about lost opportunities if he fails to respond and what he gains by responding now.

11 Steps to Direct Mail Success

5. Is the offer easy to understand?

This is not the time to try and sell everything you have by offering multiple options. The KISS principle proves true here, because asking the recipient to make too many decisions in a long list of options means a delayed decision, and ultimately the death knell to your response rates. Make your offer easily understandable with one or two options at most.

6. Is the letter personal --- from one human to another?

Don't sell organizational goals or what you are trying to do from your perspective. Talk to the prospect about their needs, not yours. Sell your ideas, products or services as if you were writing a personal note to your mother, brother or friend, one person at a time. Talk about the benefits the respondent will enjoy by responding immediately to your offer.

7. Do you substantiate all claims?

Use testimonials from happy customers as a powerful tool to substantiate your claims. If you have scientific evidence, customer research or any form of external evidence to support your product benefits, then by all means, use them.

8. Do you have a clear image of your audience?

What is your customer profile? Don't deal only with the demographics, but also understand the psychographics.

Are you dealing with young women between the ages of 20 to 35? Do they own their homes, or are they renters. But more importantly, are they working outside the home? Are they pressured by household responsibilities combined with job pressures? Do they have children? If so, how many?



Once you understand her stress and greatest fears and unrealized dreams, then you are ready to write to her with persuasive language speaking directly to her needs. Talk with her about how your product can help relieve some of her stress and help her get closer to her dream.

9. Do they have the same clear image of your company or of the person writing the letter?

The communication goes two ways. What can you assume the recipient knows about the writer or the company that is writing to them? Is there already knowledge of what you offer, or even better, have you identified an emotional bridge between the customer and the company?

That is why the sender of a letter --- or an email --- is an important part of the marketer's arsenal. For example, do not send a lead generation letter from the sales man-

11 Steps to Direct Mail Success

ager who might come across as merely selling to fill his quota. Instead, send it from the product leader or inventor of the product because his passion for the product sounds more believable.

10. Are you “honest” with your audience and does your presentation reflect that characteristic?

Yes, I know. It is hard to believe that honesty is still the best policy. But genuineness in this advertising-drowned society seems to work as it always has. That is why real customers rather than the copywriter write the best testimonials. Believable testimonials talk about the good and do not shy away from areas that could be better.

I am not suggesting that the sales piece should feature a list of true confessions, but powerful messages contain an element of honesty. The customer is not stupid and the message conveys your respect for all of your customers. The customer knows that you are not perfect, so your company provides money back and satisfaction guarantees with readily available customer service people who have published phone numbers and email addresses.

11. Do you lead with your strongest sales argument? Does the copy “flow”?

Your product or service offers many benefits, but which one will likely lead future buyers to consider buying your product? If you had 3 seconds to get your prospect’s attention, what would it be? After all, in today’s overburdened communications arena, that’s all the time you will get regardless of whether the message is on a web site, a print advertisement, a broadcast advertisement or a direct mail package.

Ideally, this key benefit is both unique to your offering and important to the prospect. But unique selling propositions today are more rare than four leaf clovers. So the best you can usually expect is to select a winning, main selling proposition.



Conclusion

Listen to the results even if they defy your most cherished opinions.

The guiding principle throughout these 11 Steps to direct Mail Success revolves around the idea that knowledgeable direct marketers stand a better chance of winning if they test and then listen to the results. That means listening to the test results even if they contradict your personal opinion.

Bear in mind that the recommendations in this article reflect hundreds of direct mail tests and millions of responses. So these standards are not compiled from what respondents have said, but rather what they actually do. In fact, when presented with the statements made in this article, most direct mail respondents would deny that these are the types of things they respond to. But the evidence is irrefutable.

So does this mean that one cannot do better with new ideas? Certainly not. But new ideas should disprove these principles first through controlled A/B split testing before concluding that they do not work. Go with what works first, and only then proceed to test concepts that might displace what you know works.

11 Steps to Direct Mail Success

Here's the answer to the question, "What does Ted Grigg and dmcg do?" We perform the following functions.

- Turnkey direct mail campaign planning and implementation.
- Test strategy development for maximum rollout potential.
- Multi-media campaign planning and implementation for lead generation programs.
- List research and database building.
- Creative concept development.
- Back-end sales analyses.

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