

Direct Mail – Not What it Used to Be

The number of businesses using direct mail marketing now compared to how many used this medium 10 to 15 years ago is staggeringly higher. More and more marketers understand its effectiveness and are on the bandwagon - especially Mortgage Brokers.

Years back the novelty of receiving an advertisement in your mailbox was such that any direct mail pieces were not only looked at but mulled over. Not so anymore. The term 'junk mail' was coined sometime since then and I'm sure you've thrown out your fair share of unread pieces enough to understand why. So, what can you do about it as a marketer? How can you ensure you get the biggest bang for your direct mail dollar? Now more than ever, you have to understand how to put together a direct mail piece. More than ever you have to really target your mailing to go to a specific market. And more than ever you need to be patient and learn how to campaign – because that is the key to success. Don't get me wrong... direct mail is not dead – and I don't see it dying any time soon. It is still the quintessential part of the largest company's campaigns. **Because it works.**

In this article I will teach you some of these three topics:

- **Designing a direct mail piece**
- **Targeting your specific market**
- **Campaigning**

A Great Design

Many people think that the quality of any graphic design is determined by how aesthetically pleasing it is: Although making the card look good is important, this couldn't be further from the truth. The only true measure of any design, at least commercially, is "How well does it pull?". By pull we mean what type of response does it elicit? Does it pull in calls, or pull people into the store? In essence, does the design accomplish what it set out to do?

From this fact it is not a reach to come to the conclusion that the merit of a graphic designer is based on the performance of his or her designs. You may be able to put together the most beautiful ad that the world has ever seen, but if it doesn't make the phone ring it isn't worth the paper that it is printed on.

You need to make designs that are not only attractive but, more importantly, that get the response needed to turn a profit. You want to ensure people see your ad and want your services. In short, if the ad doesn't make you any money, it's not a good ad.

To BE or Not To BE

Easy. Say there is a monkey loose in your office and you can't seem to get any work done. The only solution is to catch the little distraction and FedEx him back to the jungle that he came from. Question: How do you catch a monkey? You have to get into his head, think like him. You have to "BE" the monkey to find out what is going to bring him close enough for you to catch him.

Every potential customer is like the monkey. They are going to do whatever they want unless you can persuade them to listen to you. You have to get into their head, think like them, "BE" them. A monkey is a simple animal so you can probably get his attention with the stereotypical banana.

Human beings on the other hand are extremely complex. Then you add in the fact that the mailing list is targeted and it can get quite challenging. To help you answer the question of what you should say in your ad, you should use three things:

- **Reasoning**
- **Experience**
- **Research**

Take an unrelated subject to your own industry – sometimes its better learn that way. Pick something. Say you have an upscale Italian women's shoe boutique. You want to appeal to women that like that sort of thing. Get in her head. What would make her want to buy from you? Remember, she gets bombarded with advertisements every day. What can you say that really draws her in? How about "Tired of Wearing the Same Styles as Everyone Else?" Have a graphic that supports the message - show a fantastic pair of shoes or better yet a good looking woman with a great pair of shoes on.

Now pretend you are a family man or woman with a household income of the \$75k with revolving debt of \$15K and you've got two kids! Kids can be pretty expensive. So, why would you like to refinance?

Find a Specialized Mailing List

If there is one thing I can't say enough it is that the most important part of your mailing campaign is your mailing list. It is vital that you put the right amount of energy into learning about lists – who to mail to – so that your mailing efforts aren't wasted. There are a few different ways that you can get an adequately targeted list.

As always the first step is to determine who your target market will be. Say you want to market to homeowners. Good, now we have narrowed it down to only 291,324 people in your area. As a minimum, your mailing campaign should send to the same names three times. So all you have to do is send out 873,972 postcards at \$0.185 per piece & you get the point. We need to narrow it down some more.

So how do you accomplish the narrowing of your list? Many factors can be considered, including age, gender, zip code, annual salary, profession and numbers of children are some of the more common qualifiers. It may take a while to figure out what combination works for your specific product. Don't worry about political correctness when considering whom you should mail to. It is perfectly acceptable to test certain lists that may be considered "stereotypical". Many times these lists will work well. But you never know until you test them.

No matter how great an idea you have about a certain market, ALWAYS DO A SMALLER TEST MAILING FIRST! Average test mailings run around 1000-1500 names. Once you see acceptable returns on the smaller mailing then you can jump in with the larger numbers. Test, test, test!

The purpose of special mailing lists is to target a specific type of customer for your specific type of business. The eventual end result is more customers and a better bottom line. And this is what we all want, right?

Repeating Your Message

cam•paign *n.*

1. A series of military operations undertaken to achieve a large-scale objective during a war: *Grant's Vicksburg campaign secured the entire Mississippi for the Union.*
2. An operation or series of operations energetically pursued to accomplish a purpose: *an advertising campaign for a new product; a candidate's political campaign.*

intr. v. **cam•paigned, cam•paign•ing, cam•paigns**

To engage in an operation planned to achieve a certain goal: *campaigned through the jungles of Vietnam; campaigned for human rights.*

[French *campagne*, from Italian *campagna*, *field, military operation*, from Late Latin *campania*, *open country, battlefield*, from Latin *campus*, *field*.]

Definition number 2 above is the one we're using. But from studying the entire definition along with the derivation (the word origin) you can see how all the definitions tie together. Campaigns for marketing are, in a nutshell, a series of advertising steps including repeat mailings that are strategically planned so that there is maximum benefit (more new customers) for your business.

Nota bene (that means "take note" in Latin – and I do mean take note): If you are not doing repeat mailings then you are flushing money down toilet. Sorry, I know. The truth sometimes hurts.

Why is this true? One mailing of one postcard once is barely going to get anyone's attention for more than the minute they see it. Think about it. How many times have you seen the same TV commercials over and over? A one shot in the dark postcard mailing is not going to change your business, your bottom line, your life or your anything.

So, if you are not up to confronting that you need to do a campaign then maybe you shouldn't be in business. And that may sound harsh – it is harsh. It's a harsh world. And I want you to succeed in it.

There is another reason. **Credibility** In some cases people will hold onto your postcard for a while. They can hold onto your postcard for six months. They may even hold on to your card for three years. But in most cases they'll think "Oh, I may need that some day" and then while tidying up they'll throw it away. When you repeat your mailings to those same people and they see your image, logo, slogan, and message over and over you become credible to them. Your chances of them responding just got greater. Repeat mailings cannot be repeated enough.

To give you an example, I call it the **Trickle Down Effect**:

Say you send out 5000 postcards.

Out of that 5000, 150 hang onto your postcard.

Out of that 5000, so many call the 1st week.

Out of that 5000, so many call the 2nd week.

Out of that 5000, so many call the next month.

Out of that 5000, so many call in 6 months.

Out of that 5000, so many never call...

There is a dwindling inflow from that first mailing and therefore can give a false impression of what occurs from one mailing. Someone sends out a postcard and says, "I only got four responses from my mailing!" But there is a whole dynamic that is going on that is continuing from that one mailing way after the person who sent the mailing expects things to happen. Think about it. Do you jump at every single advertisement that you get bombarded with that you think is a good idea? If you do, you are either a millionaire or broke. But most likely, you see some advertisement that catches your interest and say to yourself that you'd like to check that out some day. Then, you see it again and remember that you wanted to check that out one day. And then, you see it again and this time you decide to check it out.

You want continuous and consistent growth. So what do you do? Look at this scenario:

What if,

You send out 5000 postcards one week and you have all that going on that I mentioned above.

You send out 5000 the next week and you have all that going on that I mentioned above.

You send out 5000 the next week and that dwindling flow chart is going on, on each one of those outflows.

What is going to happen? Eventually it is going to snowball – it's coming in from all different places!

You are really putting your communication out there consistently in a big way.

And yes, it costs a lot of money to do it. (Once you have your list which you'll use over and over – only paying for it once – postage is more than 55% of your costs) So, **FIND THE MONEY**. If you are going to borrow money to do a business, spend that borrowed money on marketing!

Start with a list and mail to one list one week, another list the next week and another list the following week. Then you rotate those lists – again. And again. And again.

Now you ask - what if you only have one list? You can still rotate one list. And it is always good to put it on a spreadsheet or a flow chart to track what you are doing and what you have already done.

For instance: You get one list of 6000 identities. You can mail to 2000 one week, 2000 the next week and 2000 the third week. Then you rotate. There are your three different lists!

A campaign is mailing to the same people over and over and over again. The point is you want to hit your prospects with different communication about the same thing or hit them with different products with the same look and feel or both. The rest will come.

Because what you are building with a marketing campaign is credibility. You are building your business through communication. You are communicating consistently, so much that people will believe you (credibility) and they will respond; they will come, they will spend.

1744, Benjamin Franklin published and mailed the first direct marketing catalog which sold scientific and academic books. Direct Mail has come a long way since then, so DON'T let your piece get lost in the mail, so to speak, make it stand out by applying these three basics of successful marketing:

- **Being**
- **Targeting and**
- **Repeating**

Good luck!

About the Author

Joy Gendusa founded **PostcardMania** (www.PostcardMania.com) in 1998, her only assets a computer and a phone. By 2005 the company did over \$12 million in sales, employed over 100 people and made *Inc. Magazine's* prestigious *Inc 500* List as one of the 500 fastest growing companies in the nation. She attributes her explosive growth to her ability to choose incredible staff and her innate marketing savvy.

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