

## How To Get More From Your Mail

Direct mail remains one of the best ways of generating highly targeted sales leads.

You can promote your business with simple inexpensive post cards, dimensional mailing pieces, self-mailers, or with sales letters. You can target any segment in any market with pinpoint accuracy. For the most part you can reach these ideal prospects for less than \$1 each.

One of the easiest ways to grow your business selling is by being able to sell your customer more than one time. The best way to do this is to carefully cultivate and nurture an ongoing relationship. Relationship building is one area where direct mail shines. A well-crafted multi step direct mail campaign provides your business with a tremendous opportunity for profitably building relationships.

However with most companies being inundated with mail from any number of sources, it is important to make sure that your direct mail campaign strongly separates you from the herd. Sending out your company brochure with the standard cover letter will get you poor, if any results. You need to do more than the minimum. Here are some tips to help you maximize your mail.

### List

The most important ingredient in your recipe for direct mail success is the list. Simply put you can have the right offer at the right price at the right time, and if you send it to the wrong list - it will bomb.

Sometimes in our hurry to get a direct mail list put together we forget the best mailing list of all-our customer list. Existing customers are far easier to sell as you've already built the necessary trust. Before you go to the time and expense of assembling and testing a rental list take a look at the customer list residing in your own database.

There are two types of rental lists, compiled, and response lists. Lists are typically rented from list brokers for one time use, annual use, or unlimited use.

Compiled lists are lists that have been put together based on common criteria. A compiled list might consist of every accountant in Ontario. Compiled lists are available in directories, on the Internet, in the Yellow Pages, and a whole host of other sources. The Thomas Industry Register is an example of a compiled list. There you'll find industries grouped together by type, size, address, and other common factors.

Response lists are lists that are put together based on people responding to offers through the mail (or other direct response media). Response lists can be ordered with

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astonishingly detailed prospect criteria. You could, for example, purchase a list consisting of subscribers to Fortune magazine in northwestern Toronto who are maintenance executives who also subscribe to Manufacturing Today magazine, and have bought a Honda Civic in the last two years.

Response lists are typically more expensive to rent than compiled lists. They will also receive a higher rate of response to mailed solicitations. When you rent a list be sure to ask if you can test a smaller quantity before rolling out your promotion.

The most important criteria in all mailing lists are accuracy and focus. We live and work in a highly mobile society. A list that is even six months old can be highly inaccurate. Obviously sending your direct mail piece to an incorrect address is counterproductive.

A reputable list broker will provide you with advice and lists that will help make your mailing a great success. Here are a few other tips about getting the most from your lists:

- Focus on whom you are sending the piece to, setting criteria such as geographic location, type of product and the number of years a company has been in business.
- Making your list out of specific company types or industries will allow you to write copy that is more focussed and thus more interesting to your targets.
- Try to get the full name of your potential clients, as opposed to sending your mail to a position name. “John Smith, C.E.O.” is going to get you further than simply writing “C.E.O.” Equally important is not sending a duplicate copy of your mail as this looks unprofessional and limits the effectiveness of your message.

## Offer

Second in importance only to your mailing list, your offer can make or break your direct mail campaign. This is an area where many direct mail campaigns fall short. Your offer needs to be provocative, action oriented and meaningful in order to get results.

### Hard Offer

Hard offers are offers in which prospects will either make a purchase or will have some form of direct interaction with your company. “Call us today for a free demonstration of the XMY 552 photocopier at your office.” is an example of a hard offer. “Order a six month trial supply of our Mighty Miracle Stain Remover.” is another example of a hard offer.

Hard offers produce fewer sales leads than soft offers but they tend to be of very high quality. Hard offers work best for low dollar value sales of basic products and services that are easily understood by your target audience.

### Soft Offer

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Soft offers promote the initial step (usually free) in the sales process rather than the final sale. “Contact us today for your copy of ‘Photocopier Purchasing’ our free guide to buying the best photocopier for your business.” is a typical example of a soft offer.

These are also known as two-step offers. Soft offers produce the maximum number of possible leads with a slightly lower quality than those of a hard offer.

Soft offers work best for high dollar value or complex sales that may not be easily understood by your target market. They also provide you with an excellent first step in your selling process. Here are some other tips about offers:

- Your soft offer should provide something of value to your prospects. Let your prospects know you’re willing to give them something for free, because this shows that you’re confident in your company.
- If you aren’t selling trivial products, then you shouldn’t be afraid to offer something of value to potential customers.
- Your offer should be noticeable within your sales materials and laid out in a way that attracts attention.
- Stress benefits in your offer not features
- Remember the overriding concern of your reader is “What’s in it for me?”
- Any offer made by you needs a strong call to action with an incentive for action. You need to give recipients a reason to act - or they won’t.

### **Copy**

Once you’ve assembled your list and crafted your offer you need to carefully consider how you’re going to address your readers. Before you write a single sentence you need to spend some time seriously thinking about the conversation already going on in the head of your prospect.

Prior to copywriting your direct mail campaign it’s vital to clarify your objectives and practice empathy. Practicing empathy in your copywriting will do more for your direct mail campaign than having a Ph.D. in English. Some considerations are:

- Who in the company are you going to be addressing?
- What are the major concerns within your target market?
- What business problems keep them awake at night?

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- What do you hope to get across with this mailing campaign?

Consider their likely goals and aspirations, as well as the areas they probably feel are problematic. Write an itemized list and really think about what their key two or three concerns might be. This way your copy will be written *for* them instead of *at* them.

## Sales Letters

The most effective way to promote your business by direct mail is with sales letters. Sales letters provide you with the room to tell your whole sales story and consistently outpull post cards and self-mailers.

Think of sales letters as paper salespeople who tirelessly sell in print. A well-written sales letter duplicates your sales efforts, will never miss any key selling point or closing argument, and can greatly reduce or eliminate the need for the initial front line, pioneering, or missionary work currently being done by your staff.

Sales letters have one thing in common with newspapers - the **headline** is the key. The purpose of the headline is to draw the reader into reading the next paragraph. A good test for any headline you might be considering for your sales letter is that if read on its own it would still make sense. Your headline has accomplished its mission if it successfully raises curiosity and encourages the reader to read the next few sentences in your sales letter.

For best results you should write your sales letter as if you're having a one on one conversation with your prospect. Be sure you're writing it *from their standpoint*. Since you aren't physically there to handle any objections be sure your sales letter answers any objections or questions you think would likely arise if your prospect was sitting across from you at their desk.

Remember when you're writing your sales letter that many people scan the subheadings to find the key areas that are of interest to them. For this reason every subheading in every subsequent paragraph should build on the one preceding it.

Don't worry about your sales letter being too long. Do worry that it's too boring. The point to remember is to keep it interesting and keep your reader engaged. Break up the text, use lots of subheadings and bulleted lists.

## Call to action

When you make a face to face sales call at some point in the process you need to ask for the order. If you don't ask for the order you won't get many sales. For the same reason your sales letter needs to ask for the order to complete the job. This is done by the call to action with which you end your sales letter.

The three key points to keep in mind are:

- You need to be very specific in your call to action.

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- You need to offer an added incentive for prompt response.
- You should always use a P.S. at the end of your letter.

Here are some other points for you to ponder to capitalize on your copy:

- You need to make sure that it is readable. Keep it simple, you want to attract buyers, not test how well people can read.
- Make sure your copy is solution centred and doesn't focus on problems.
- Copy must be prospect - centred remember that your readers are primarily concerned with *their* specific problems.
- Utilize bullets in your copy to break up long blocks of text.
- Consider using single sentence paragraphs as a way of breaking up the copy.
- Using more than two fonts is a stylistic faux pas, keep it simple and professional.
- Use words like guarantee, introducing, new, or save, in order to draw attention to benefits of your company. Back them up with testimonials as proof.
- Get to the point with your copy - prospects are busy people.
- Start with you major benefit as they may not read any more than the first paragraph.
- Make sure that everything you write is properly spelled and is grammatically flawless.
- Write in a personal, conversational manner, but refrain from using any slang.

Those on the receiving end of Direct Mail are used to general offers and useless mail. So make sure your copy makes your company stand out.

If you're offering an expensive or complicated service or product, most companies will want to get to know your company first. For this reason sell *your company* to your client. Don't just show what your company does, show why your company is the *best* at what it does.

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## Envelope

In many ways your envelope can be the key difference between success and failure. Your company can spend up to \$15,000 on the copywriting of a powerful salesletter. Your mailing package can include brochures, lift notes, four colour business cards, and all of the latest grabbers. The sad fact is that all of this is useless *if it doesn't get read*.

There are a few things you can do to greatly increase the odds of your direct mail making it into the office.

First, you need to be aware of the concept of the preliminary sort. The vast majority of mail is sorted at the post office-by the recipients. When people receive their mail they usually perform the preliminary sort over a recycling box or wastebasket. If your letter has the offer written on the envelope or is mailed with bulk postage it will very likely never make it out of the post office.

Second, you need to be aware of the secondary sort. The mail that makes it past the preliminary sort will end up being sorted within your target business. As with the preliminary sort it's imperative that your envelope looks like personal correspondence.

You need to do everything in your power to avoid having your direct mail being dismissed as junk mail and recycled before it is opened. Here are a few tips that will help your masterpiece make it through the mail and on to the desk of your intended:

- Making your letter look like a personal letter is a good idea - say no to logos
- Consider using your personal name and address on the envelope
- If possible, you should hand write the address and name on the envelope
- Where possible use stamps instead of a postage meter or indicia
- Use quality envelopes for the same reason you should use quality paper, it shows your clients they are worth the extra cost and effort.
- Don't neglect the power of postcards as an effective marketing component in your direct mail campaigns. They are short, to the point, and have no envelope to separate your message and offer from your clients.

## Testing

Direct mail is part art and part science. Creative work is the art, testing is the science. This means it's subject to great debate. Should you mail on a Monday or wait until Friday? Is it better to use stamps rather than a meter or indicia? Do discounts offered in percentages outpull those with a specific dollar value? For best results should you use

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teaser copy on your envelope or make it look like a personal letter? All of these questions come with a variety of staunchly defended answers that have been proven true by testing. The two golden rules of testing are as follows

1. Test small but meaningful quantities first
2. Only test one element at a time

There is no end to what can be tested in direct mail but for best results you should focus on testing your lists, offers, copywriting, and envelopes.

## Lists

Test small quantities of any list first before rolling out a large campaign. You have to be sure that your sample size is large enough to provide you with statistically meaningful data. When we test lists we never use fewer than 500 names. If your list total is small your only choice is to test in smaller quantities and cross your fingers. When testing also be certain to make the test diverse in terms of geography, company type, company size, and other factors so you get a true picture of the strength of your list.

Your list broker can help you with your testing requirements. Ask for an nth (random) sample of 500 names on the list your considering and test it out before you rent the rest of the list. If the list broker won't provide you with an nth sample of 500 names you may have to rent the whole list. In that case pick 500 random names and send out your test mailing to them. Unless you like living dangerously **always** test your list before sending out large quantities.

## Offers

Make sure that you put different offers on each of your direct mail pieces, if potential customers aren't interested in one of the offers, they may be more interested in the next offer.

It can often be very effective to combine a hard and a soft offer in a single sales letter. For example, your primary objective might be to get a prospect to request a call from one of your salespeople (a hard offer). Your secondary objective might be accomplished with a soft offer – such as your prospect request a copy of your latest free report.

Gauge which combination of offers is the most effective and roll it out.

## Copy

Test your headlines. Test long copy versus short copy. Test different combinations of benefits. Test putting your paragraphs in different order. Test you layout. Test your order form. Test your P.S.

## Envelope

Test size and colour, window envelopes versus closed, company name versus personal address, stamp types and colours, handwritten addressing, and paper stock.

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## Other Factors For Success

### Timing

The timing of your direct mail campaign is crucial. Sending mail that will arrive on a Monday or a Friday runs the risk of it not being read because of the increased mail traffic. The best choice for timing is to try and get your mail to arrive in the middle of the week. There is less mail traffic, so your potential customer can focus more on what you have to offer.

You obviously shouldn't send mail when you expect a lot of people to be on holidays, such as Christmas. The summer time is also a risky choice for timing because a lot of people will be on vacation.

Conversely, many of our B2B clients feel that mailing at these traditionally slow times is good as prospects tend to pay more attention to what's being mailed. Utilize several mailings at various times and gauge the response. Find out when **your** prospects will be most receptive of your offer.

### Frequency

When testing reveals a winner roll it out don't limit yourself to one mailing. Repeating your mailing can have a great effect. Sending a series of direct mail letters, and making each a little bit different gives potential customers more information to work with concerning how they should perceive your company.

### Follow Up

Direct mail is a powerful way to attract attention and prospects to your business. But is rarely enough on its own. Following up your direct mail campaign makes is very important to ensure success.

You'll *dramatically* increase the results of your direct mail campaign by following up on the phone. In fact one of the best ways to get the most from a direct mail campaign is to mail less – that's right, less. You're better to mail 100 prospects 10 times than 1,000 prospects once.

Call only once you know your clients have received your mail. Continue to use a professional, yet personal tone when you talk on the phone with potential customers.

When following up on the phone be sure to spend some time developing a rapport with your prospect. This will ultimately make closing sales a lot easier. The more knowledge you have of what they really want the less hard you'll need to sell. All good relationships are based on knowledge and the easiest way to gain that knowledge is by asking what makes that person tick.

Remember the old saying, "I was able to quit selling once I found out what people were buying." Don't use pressure tactics with your follow up, and remember to listen to what your client has to say.

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I hope you have enjoyed this short report on getting more from your direct mail.

I personally wish you the best of success in all your marketing ventures.

Sincerely,

Andrew Shedden  
President

## What's Next?

### Marketing 101

If your business sells to other businesses and you're interested in taking the first step to increasing your sales then contact us to set up an appointment for your free Marketing 101 telephone consultation.

During your Marketing 101 telephone consultation we'll spend some time getting to know more about you and your specific situation. Once we've spent some time learning about your challenges and goals we'll suggest marketing and communicating techniques you can quickly adapt to increase sales in your business.

Your consultation is completely confidential and you are under no obligation to commit to any of our recommendations. Nor will we pressure you in any way. You may choose to continue the relationship and if you choose not to that's okay too.

Book your free Marketing 101 telephone consultation today by calling us toll free at 1-800-353-4447 or fill in our contact form at:

[www.broadfieldcommunications.com/contact.htm](http://www.broadfieldcommunications.com/contact.htm)