

# Preparing Your Variable Printing Project



## **The Castle Press**

Digital Print Solutions

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## Marketing Basics

**With modern variable printing,** *the text and graphics of every sheet of a press run can change to reflect database information on the characteristics of its intended recipient. Such personalization has proved that it can generate many times the responses of non-variable printed pieces. To be effective, however, variable printing involves certain preparatory work that must be accomplished, starting from a project's earliest stages.*



**Variable information printing is a highly effective marketing tool.** It gives you the ability to customize your appeal to each individual receiving your printed piece. Combined with a strong appeal and good design, personalizing your marketing message to reflect an individual's information in your database can significantly increase response rates.

In preparing your mailing, look at your available data and ask, "What can I offer that this particular customer is likely to want?" Then target your appeal appropriately.

If your data includes information such as which model or color of a product a customer previously purchased, you have an idea of what may appeal to him or her in the future. If a customer always buys red cars, a brochure featuring a photo of a red car will more likely get their attention.

If your data does not include specific information, consider purchasing a list that includes demographic information, buying patterns, or purchase of items related to your product.

Begin building your own customer list with precise data for your future marketing efforts.

## Buick's One-On-One Marketing Success

Every time a technical innovation such as variable printing hits the market, many business people react to it with a burst of enthusiasm—often fueled by puffery that hails the new wrinkle as the best thing since sliced bread. What prudent marketers need is evidence that the technique pays off in reality.

According to *Personalized & Database Printing*, an authoritative book by David Broudy and Professor Frank Romano, variable printing has resulted in an average increase in:

<i>Response</i> . . . . .	+34%
<i>Order Size</i> . . . . .	+25%
<i>Repeat Orders</i> . . . . .	+48%
<i>Revenue/Profit</i> . . . . .	+32%
<i>Speed of Response</i> . . . .	+35%

A recent personalized direct-mail campaign for the Buick division of General

Motors provided data on the results a well-planned, well-executed variable-printed promotion generated for the automaker.

Buick sent three individualized direct mailings to 516,715 selected car owners over an 18-month period.

The digitally printed full-color mailers offered a new Buick at full price. They included a questionnaire, the answers to which provided personal data on car preferences that was used to customize later mailings. Results:

- The digitally printed packages produced 6.36% response—about five times higher than the average direct-mail campaign.
- The digital mailings sold more than 19,575 new Buick automobiles.

- The digital mailing packages generated \$494 million in sales.
- The digital campaign cost less than 1.2% of sales—44% less than the direct-mail industry average.

Typically, according to Buick's agency, McCann Relationship Marketing, an automaker spends \$673.73 per car sold. In this promotion, Buick sold cars at a cost of \$300.77 each—a marketing-expense saving of 55.4%.

The variably printed mailers, compared to earlier non-variable owner mailings, lifted response by 595%.



## Data Collection

**Look at your data with a marketing eye.** Will the information you collect be useful in targeting your marketing? Consider what other information will help you better understand your customer. Also, what information will help you build a relationship?



**Is the data kept in a form that will be useful in personalizing your piece?** For example is the name information separated, so a letter can be either formally or informally addressed: “Dear John,” or “Dear Mr. Smith,” rather than “Dear John P. Smith, Jr.?”

Sometimes this is accomplished by using separate fields for prefix, first name, middle name, last name, and suffix. Another approach is to include separate fields for formal and informal salutation and also formal and informal mailing name. This method allows decisions to be made at data entry for unusual names.

What about couples? Is there a way to address the couple together, or to address the wife or the husband separately?

**Always keep the zip code in its own field,** so you can take advantage of economical pre-sorted postal rates. And if a list includes foreign names, your database needs a country field so foreign addresses can be sorted for mailing.

**And finally, careful data entry is essential** when a list is going to be used for variable printing. Set up data entry rules and stick to them.

Never put comments into address lines or name fields. Use a woman’s actual first name — “Mrs. Jane Smith” not “Mrs. John Smith.” Otherwise an informally addressed letter might be sent to “Dear John...” rather than “Dear Jane...”

**Keep data as accurately and completely as possible.**

Personalization that is well done enhances an appeal, but sloppy personalization is irritating and detracts from it.

## Building a Functional Database

A functional database—in which useful information is stored in easily retrievable packets—is the essential foundation of every successful variably printed mailing.

To build a database that is going to do you any good, you must first decide what information you need to know in order to market your product.

At the dawn of variable printing, all some advertisers needed to store in their databases was the names of their sales prospects. This resulted in messages like:

*“John Smith, you may have won \$1 million!”*

When they were still novelties, such messages produced exciting response lifts. Later, when the novelty wore off, their response rates dwindled. Luckily, when properly designed, databases include information on individual buying histories and product preferences—which has proved far more compelling than the recipient’s name alone.

However, a prudently designed database includes only information that will help sell a product and build a good customer relationship.

In Buick’s case, for instance, data on the frequency, dates and price ranges of a person’s earlier car purchases, or on the individual’s prefer-

ence in vehicle models or colors, probably would be useful. Information on the person’s likes in clothing styles, while useful to a marketer of soft goods, probably would not affect car purchases.

Please note that for ease of information retrieval each field in the following sample database format contains only one piece of information. Your real database probably would not include all the sample fields, and probably would include others.

In any case, you should use only those fields that will help you sell your product!



## Sample Database Format

Every list is unique. These are commonly used fields for you to consider when setting up a new database or adding to an existing setup.

Field Name	Sample Data
Customer ID Number	12387
NamePrefix	Mr.
FirstName	John
MiddleInitial	P.
LastName	Samplename
Suffix	Jr.
SpouseNamePrefix	Mrs.
SpouseFirstName	Jane
SpouseMiddleInitial	A.
SpouseLastName	Samplename
MailName	Mr. and Mrs. John Samplename
Salutation1	Mr. Samplename
Salutation2	Mrs. Samplename
Salutation3	Mr. and Mrs. Samplename
Salutation4	John
Salutation5	Jane
Salutation6	John and Jane
Address1	915 Highland Avenue
Address2	#106
City	Duarte
State	CA
Zip	91010-1938
Country	USA

Phone	(555) 555-1212
Fax	(555) 555-1214
E-Mail	jpsample@isp.net
SpouseE-Mail	janesample@earthlink.net
Title	President
CompanyName	Sample Industries, Inc.
CompanyAddress	123 Grand Avenue
CompanyAddress2	Suite 1567
CompanyCity	Los Angeles
CompanyState	CA
CompanyZip	91234
CompanyPhone	(555) 555-1213
LatestPurchase	1998 Cadillac Eldorado
LatestDate	3/27/98
LatestPrice	\$37,500
LatestModel	2-door Coupe
LatestColor	Red
StillRegisteredOwner	Yes
EarlierPurchase1	1996 Buick Park Avenue
EarlierDate1	2/15/96
EarlierPrice1	\$32,600
EarlierModel1	4-door Sedan
EarlierColor1	Red
StillRegisteredOwner1	Yes
EarlierPurchase2	1993 Chevrolet Malibu
EarlierDate2	4/10/93
EarlierPrice2	\$23,000
EarlierModel2	4-door Sedan
EarlierColor2	Red
StillRegisteredOwner2	No



## Design

**It helps to have data available when a piece is being created.** The designer can make room for various lengths of data. For example, if a person's name is to be included in the headline, knowing the average length of the names as well as the longest and shortest names will help in choosing typefaces and font sizes. A piece can be set up to use a larger font for short names and a smaller font for long names.

### **What information is going to change in the piece?**

Name-and-address information is the most common variable data. But considering the pur-

pose of your piece, what other information will help you communicate with the individual?

**Would it be helpful to have different copy for men and women?** Or variations according to location, or previous buying habits? Often non-profit mailings consider a donor's giving record. Don't forget that images can be changed as well as text.

The variable information is contained in one layer of the digital file, with the non-variable information as a base image below.

**Sometimes a list can be split, so that the job is run as two versions with different base images.** This increases the amount of customized coverage without the added cost of large numbers of variables. For example, in a job in which the list is segmented by gender, the men and women can have entirely different base images, while the variable information might only include their name and address information.



## File Preparation

**Files for variable printing can be created in any software that provides an option to export an EPS file.**

Popular programs are QuarkXPress, Pagemaker or Illustrator and Freehand.

Sample variable information should be included in the file, and then highlighted on a laser print. (Please provide original files rather than exported EPS files.)

**Data files may be provided in a variety of formats.**

Rather than sending your entire database, it is best to export the data for needed for a particular job.

**Our preferred format for exported data is Tab-Delimited.** Usually the data export will have a header on the file that indicates field names and the order in which they appear. Please add such a header to your file if one is not automatically included. (Tab-delimited text files can be edited in any word processor).

Make sure that all fields necessary to produce the printed piece are in the file, and provide a printed list of fields included.

We also accept data in DBF, Excel, Filemaker Pro, and Microsoft Access formats.

If you are planning to use variable images, we will need to know which image is to be used with which record.

One approach is to include the exact filename of the image as a field in the appropriate record.

Another is to set up rules for which image is to be used — such as everyone on the list who has children receives a photo of a family climbing into a van, while seniors receive a photo of a retired couple happily riding in their luxury car.

**In addition to your data, be sure to include any files necessary to produce the job on your disk.** Include all image files and all fonts used. The preferred format for scanned images is EPS or TIFF at 300 dpi. Use maximum quality JPEG compression for EPS files and LZW compression for TIFF files.





### Finishing

- Score and fold     Perf
- Die cut             Laminate
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Mailing

Date to be mailed \_\_\_\_\_

- Does not mail
- DPS mails         Customer mails
- Use CASS address verification
  - Delete unverifiable
  - Mail unverifiable
- First Class         stamp    indicia
- Standard (Bulk Rate)         stamp    indicia
- Non Profit         stamp    indicia
- Address for Automation  
(best rates, but requires strict adherence  
to postal Service design guidelines)
- Standard or non-profit return service:
  - "Return Service Requested"
  - "Address Correction Requested"
  - None

### Outgoing envelope

- None (self mailer)
- Window envelope    Regular envelope
  - #10    A-6    A-7    A-8
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Variable data addressing (for window  
envelope only)
  - Ink jet addressing
  - Labels    Provided    DPS prints

### Response

- Business Reply Envelope (postage paid)
  - #9    #6<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>    A-7    A-4
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- Courtesy Reply Envelope (requires stamp)
  - #9    #6<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>    A-7    A-4
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- Mailable return card (business reply)
- Mailable return card (courtesy)
- None



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