

MARKETING *Benchmarks*

2008 trends in direct-mail formats

In January, New Jersey's Ballantine Corporation published the results of a survey in which it asked its marketing contacts in several industries to specify which direct-mail formats they planned to test in 2008.

The results of such surveys are important, because of the precise tracking of results that direct mail and other direct-response media make possible. Hence, their answers offer a positive indication of the formats that currently are pulling the most inquiries and orders.



A recent survey indicates that 70% of respondents preferred unsolicited correspondence via mail vs. e-mail

- **About 19% of the survey's respondents** cited the traditional #10 mailing package – whose elements may include an outer envelope, a one- or multi-page letter, a folder, a lift note, a response device, and a reply envelope. It beat all other formats hands down.

The #10 format is relatively expensive to produce and mail. Its continuing popularity in an increasingly cost-conscious era must reflect its high potential for returning healthier net profits than less-pricey package designs.

- **Around 12% of study participants** reported that they were testing 6" X 9" and self-mailer formats.

This result is somewhat puzzling. A 6" x 9" package can cost as much as or

more than a #10 mailing, all elements being equal. Often, it is used to provide relief from the "sameness" of an all-#10 mailing program. Self-mailers, on the other hand, are much cheaper to produce, but usually generate weaker responses.

- **10% were trying single standard postcards**, typically not a good medium for order generation, used usually to convey information about a mailing-address change, an Internet URL, a new telephone number, or the location of an exhibit booth.
- **About 8% mentioned a "voucher" package**, hinging on an invoice but able to include letters or other printed materials, and considerable less expensive than a #10 mailing.

Marketing consultant Hilde Sprung cautions that response rates to voucher packages, "due to over usage, have begun to decline."

- **Trailing at 5%+** were 9" X 12" packages, oversized postcards, "custom" mailers and E-mail experiments.
- **Last of all at 4% or less** came magalogs, fax tests, double- and triple-panel postcards, variable-data mailers, acetate-backed packages, and invitation mailers.

Many astute mailing observers think that use of variable-data mailings, which reportedly have generated response lifts of 30%-500%, is soon certain to rise sharply in use.

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