

MARKETING *Benchmarks*

6-point checklist for effective direct mail

“Direct mail accounts for 22% of all advertising dollars, a percentage that has been rising for most of the last 17 years.”

— McCann-Erickson



Graphics

Handsome is as handsome does in direct mail.

A direct mailing is more engineering than art. It is a set of cues that signal the reader to take an action. If a mailing’s graphics please the eye, but do not impel your addressee to do what you want, they are useless. If they spark him to do what the marketer wishes, and also look good, so much the better.

Never handcuff your art director. But you are paying the bills. So do not allow any designer to bamboozle you. Buy him — and yourself — a copy of “Type & Layout: How Typography and Design can Get Your Message Across or Get in the Way,” Colin Wheidon’s landmark book. And study it.

Headlines

David Ogilvy, a research-respecting adman, wrote in his book, “Ogilvy on Advertising,” that “On average, five times as many people read the headlines as read the body copy. It follows that unless your headline sells your product, you have wasted 90 per cent of your money.”

“The headlines which work best,” Ogilvy wrote, “are those which promise the reader a benefit like a whiter wash, more miles per gallon, freedom from pimples, fewer cavities.”

Fuzzy headlines are wastes of money. So are lines that try to amuse. Use bold but simple language that promises a solid benefit to the individual reader, who wants to know what accepting your offer will do for him. So use a muscular headline — and restate its message on your reply device.

Personalization

Direct mailers who insert the reader’s name and other pertinent information in their copy can anticipate response lifts of 30% higher than those achieved by the same offer made in a one-size-fits-all offset package. Results like that usually justify the costs of segmenting your mailing lists and printing digitally personalized packages.

Testimonials

Blowing your own horn is great for the ego. But people order more after reading disinterested, third-party recommendations. Use them as often as you can. And make sure you cite (with their permission) the full names and locations of customers who love you. Testimonials from “Mr. A.B., Massachusetts” don’t cut much ice.

Guarantees of Satisfaction

You are asking your reader to spend his money. He needs assurance that he will be happy with his purchase or get his money back. Resist the temptation to trifle with his confidence. Guarantee 100% money back, including sales taxes and shipping fees, if he is not happy with his purchase.

Call to Action

Tell your reader exactly what you want him to do, and how to do it. Close your letter with an action command — and repeat it in your P.S. and on your reply device. Set a time limit on your offer, stressing that your offer will not last forever — so your reader must take advantage of it right away.

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