**Take the "Junk" out of Direct Mail**

**By Brian Jud**

Direct mail has been given a bad reputation because of overuse and poorly designed mailing pieces. People tend to perceive direct mail as junk mail, and its Internet equivalent as spam.

However, when you have a finite, identifiable group of people who are potential customers for your books, direct mail may be the most effective and efficient marketing tool you can use to reach them. It gives you control of the timing, delivery and content of your promotion, a pre-determined fixed cost and the means to forecast and measure the return on your marketing investment.

Unfortunately, direct marketing is too often implemented simply by purchasing a mailing list and then sending an existing brochure. Unless you first prepare a plan, including a way to evaluate your relative success, you may end up wasting money and becoming disillusioned in the potential effectiveness of a strategic direct mail campaign.

Your plan can be a simple document that outlines the actions you intend to take in six key areas. These areas are the books/products you offer, the target market, the special offer you are proposing, the format you present and the ways in which you test and evaluate your costs.

**The product**. Not all books are destined for successful direct marketing. Is it a real value for the price you are asking? If you are trying to deplete your inventory of over-priced books simply by offering a reduced price via direct mail, you may be disappointed. Instead, think about your titles from the recipient's perspective. Is the point of difference important to them?

**The target list**. When mailing to existing customers, make sure your list is current and cleaned (old names eliminated) recently. While the addresses will probably remain the same, the names may change periodically.

**The offer**. The most important part of your direct-mail package is not your book, but the offer that surrounds it. There are several basic propositions you can use by themselves or in various combinations, depending on your objectives. Here are several.

**1. Free information**. This is often the most effective offer, particularly when your objective is to generate leads for future business. Tell people that when they send for a copy of your book they will also receive a special report or some other free, useful information.

**2. Samples**. If you are selling booklets or other low-cost items, a sample will show people the level of information and quality they may expect.

**3. Conditional sale**. If you are selling a subscription of your newsletter, or perhaps a continuity book program, you could offer the premier issue of your newsletter for free if the prospect agrees to a one-year subscription.

**4. Yes-No**. This is an involvement proposition where the prospect is asked to respond by indicating whether he or she accepts or rejects your offer.

**5. Time limit**. Setting a time limit on a given offer forces action, either positive or negative. Usually it is more effective to name a specific date rather than a time period.

**6. Discounts.** A discount is a popular lure and is particularly effective where the value of your book is well established. Three types of discounts are typically offered: for cash, for an introductory order or for volume purchases. Providing free shipping could be considered a discount if the customer is used to paying for freight.

**7. Negative option**. This offer prearranges for shipment if the customer does not cancel the shipment by mailing a rejection form prior to the deadline.

**8. Positive option**. Here, every shipment is based on a direct action by the customer.

**9. Load-up**. This is a favorite of publishers of continuity series. For example, you would offer a set of twelve books, one to be released each month. After the customer has received and paid for the first three books you would invite him or her to receive the remaining nine all in one shipment with the understanding that payments may continue to be made monthly.

**10. Free gift**. For best results, test several gifts to determine the one most appealing to the target audience. The most important criterion for gift selection is 1) appropriateness of the gift, 2) its effect on repeat business, and 3) net profit per thousand including the cost of the gift.

**11. Secret gift**. If the prospective customer completes all the information on the reply card or order form he or she will receive an extra free, unnamed gift.

**12. Advance payment**. If you want the customer to order with a credit card or to send a check with the order you could offer an incentive for doing so. This might be a special report or free gift.

**13. Add-on offers**. If you want your customer to call you, tell them to ask for your special offer when they speak to your sales person.

**14. Deluxe alternatives.** Give the customer a choice between your perfect-bound book and your special leather-bound edition. An autographed copy could be considered a deluxe alternative, too.

**15. Offer a guarantee**. The words “satisfaction guaranteed” are at the heart of all mail order selling. If you include a buy-back option it becomes even more effective.

**16. Bounce-backs**. This offer succeeds on the premise that the best time to sell people is right after you have sold them. Here, forms offering more of the same item, related books or items totally different from that originally purchased are included in shipments or with the invoices.

**The format**. The standard format for direct mail is a three-piece package consisting of a cover letter describing the offer, a brochure and a reply mechanism.

**The test**. Before you embark on a 10,000-piece nationwide mailing, test on a smaller scale your choice of titles, the list you will use, the offer you will make and different formats you plan to use. Also test the timing of your mailing and alternative geographic areas.

**Evaluation**. Before you conduct your direct-mail campaign, make sure it will be profitable for you. calculate the cost of the mailing to make the offer, plus the cost of sending the title in response to an order.

Direct mail is a targeted marketing weapon that that can help you sell more books, test new titles, generate sales leads or communicate information about your authors and your business. It can be an effective and efficient addition to your promotional strategy – if used properly.

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