

5 Steps to Effective Direct Mail

1. Set Your Goal and Know Your Audience

The first step to a successful direct mail campaign is pinpointing your objectives. Are you trying to reach existing customers? Or contact prospects? Do you want to increase awareness of a new product or services? Or generate sales?

2. Insist on the Best List

There's no better way to sink a direct mail campaign than by using a mediocre mailing list. Start with list brokers, but the key is to shop around and really do some legwork. Pin down the list's demographics such as age, gender, geographic location and buying habits for maximum effectiveness.

3. Develop an Offer They Can't Refuse

Spend time formulating a unique offer that sets you apart from your competitors. Business reply cards (BRCs) give prospects an easy way to contact your company. Whether you're offering more information, a free sample of your products or even asking for an order or charitable donation, BRCs help attract attention to your offer. Here are some other ways to make your offer pop:

- Put a reader-oriented benefit in the headline. "Reduce your heating bills by 50 percent!" is better than, "Find out more about the Acme Furnace Company."
- If your offer is free, use the word "free" in the headline or subhead.
- Show a picture of your catalog, booklet or other free information.

4. Prepare for Success

Be sure you're ready to handle the leads or orders that your direct mail generates.

- Make sure you can deliver what you've promised quickly. Whether prospects requested more information, a call from your company or a product sample, following through fast.
- If you're sending more information, put the words, "Here is the information you requested" on the envelope or package.
- Don't treat the fulfillment stage as an afterthought - it's a golden sales opportunity. Include enough information to move prospects to the next stage in the sales process.

5. Be Clear

It's easy to get lost in nuances and subtleties when you're developing direct mail copy and design. Does your copy clearly communicate the basics of your offer? What about the unique characteristics of your product or service?

Remember to check with a mailing expert early in the design process to make sure your piece conforms to postal standards in size, color, weight and white space for postal bar code imprinting.