



Direct Mail Still Delivers Results

By Becci Ambroe

Here's the Situation

You have a database filled with potential customers and qualified leads. You have an upcoming trade show. You want the folks in your database to become three-dimensional and visit your booth because you have a specific product or service that meets their needs. How do you get them to seek you out? How do you plant the seed of an idea and turn it into a blossoming business relationship?

Use a Direct Mail Campaign

Send them a letter or a postcard. Seriously? In this day and age of one-click information? Yep! According to the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council's website, here are some interesting facts about direct mail:

- ✓ When given the opportunity to choose, 51 percent of consumers prefer to receive product or service promotions via traditional mail (44 percent prefer email).
- ✓ 73 percent of respondents prefer direct mail to receive information about new items.
- ✓ Nearly half of respondents (43.2 percent) said direct mail was more convenient (than e-mails and phone calls).
- ✓ 31 percent of mail recipients tend not to throw away unopened postal messages, ranging from brochures to envelopes.
- ✓ 86 percent would rather receive private communications through postal mail.

Make It Personal

Junk mail is annoying and wasteful. Any mail that does not address a consumer's needs is junk mail. It will end up in the garbage can or the recycling bin faster than you can say, "Oscar the Grouch." In fact, the CMO Council notes, "41 percent (of consumers) say they would consider ending a brand relationship due to irrelevant promotions. An additional 22 percent said they would definitely defect from an offending brand."

Marketing is more than advertising. Marketing is building relationships with people. The CMO Council adds, "30 percent of consumers stated they are inspired to do business with a company after receiving personalized communication." Why? Personalizing a message builds trust by demonstrating effort, familiarity, and concern on the part of the sender. They make the customer feel special.

Make an Effort

Uncertain how to personalize your message? Persuading customers to make a purchase is not easy, nor should it be. You are asking them to trust you with their reputation, their time, and their money. In that spirit, make an effort to demonstrate that you deserve their confidence. Use the contact's name rather than a generic term. Avoid address labels whenever possible. (Labels add to the perception that the recipient is one of many rather than an individual with specific needs). For the same reason, use stamps instead of metered postage methods.

Use Your Database

Worried about cost? Use your database, but clean it up first! How do you prioritize your leads? What kind of information do you collect? How specific is it? How accurate are your sources? That is a really important question to answer. The CMO Council offers these statistics about database management:

- ✓ 23.6 percent of all mail sent in the U.S. is addressed inaccurately.
- ✓ Internal duplication rates of up to 20 percent are not uncommon.
- ✓ 42 percent of businesses make no effort to measure data quality.
- ✓ U.S. businesses waste more than \$600 billion each year due to defective data.

Think about that. Based on the first two statistics, companies have the potential of wasting almost **half** of their marketing budget on poor data. How often do you update contact information or check it for accuracy? Whenever possible, use websites to verify addresses. Conduct various “sorts” in order to discover multiple records in your database. Remember that quality, not quantity, is the goal.

What’s the Message?

Despite the latest technology, “snail mail” is the preferred method of communication. If you want leads to turn into customers, then invite them, with a personalized letter, to your trade show booth. If you want past customers to learn about your new product line, then send them a “save the date” postcard. If you want to start building business relationships, then use a stamp.