

Marketing Through the Mail Checklist

Staying in contact with customers and prospects helps generate new business and new customers. Using the postal system can be an effective way to make those contacts because mail almost always is properly delivered, it can be automated, it is relatively inexpensive and it can eliminate time-consuming return phone calls.

Mailings to customers and prospects will usually take one of two forms – a personal letter or a direct mail piece with or without some type of insert. Each has advantages and each can be used for specific objectives. Here are some ideas to help you use mail to generate business.

Personal letters

Even in the age of electronic communication, nothing gets someone's attention like a personal letter. The reader can read it at their convenience and usually a personal letter commands a certain degree of attention not found with other types of communications.

Personal letters are especially effective to convey a sense of personal attention and can be used to follow up on an initial contact or to thank someone. Ideally, the letter should address a topic that has already surfaced in earlier conversations and be used to demonstrate that you were thinking of the person and their needs. A good example is sending a letter along with a copy of an article that you saw in the trade press that addresses an issue facing the customer or prospect. A thank you letter for an order or a referral is also always appreciated.

Personal stationary, using stamps and making a few handwritten comments on a printed letter demonstrates that you thought enough of the reader to spend the time, effort and money to stay in touch.

Direct mail

Using direct mail can be similar to using individual letters, only on a less personal basis and sending the same thing to many people. Direct mail as a part of an overall marketing plan can produce results, but it can also be a waste of precious resources if not done properly. Here are some of the keys.

Goals of the mailing

Purpose	Issue	Comments
Immediate sale	Generating a sale with direct mail requires a very strong offer, a sense of urgency and an easy way for the sale to take place. An offer of a pre-approved credit card, with a very low interest rate that can be activated with one phone call is a good example.	

Initiate an inquiry	<p>Generating new leads with direct mail usually requires a message that is focused on the prospect's needs and positioning your product or service as a solution.</p> <p>Good examples include an invitation to a seminar on investments to reduce taxes or a simple postcard from a local furnace repairman offering to inspect and clean your furnace or air conditioner.</p>	
Staying in touch	<p>Organizations that offer relationship-type services often use newsletters to build a favorable presence of mind with customers or prospects so they think of the company when they are ready to make a purchase decision or consider a change in a relationship with another company.</p> <p>Good examples include financial institutions that send stock market commentary along with promotional messages on a recurring basis.</p>	

Materials to be sent

Item	Issue	Comments
General comments	Most direct mail pieces take one of four forms – a simple postcard, a letter, a letter with an insert or a newsletter.	
Post card	This is an easy way to communicate a minimal amount of simple information quickly and cheaply. Be sure to include contact information on the card.	
Letter	<p>Personal letters (addressed to the reader) tend to get relatively high readership. The more you can do to make it look like a real personal letter and eye catching, the better.</p> <p>This includes using a date, a signature (preferably in a different color ink) and some level of graphics, like bulleted lists, interesting headlines and attractive fonts.</p>	

Letter with an insert	Including a product brochure with a letter is common. The insert should describe the product enabling you to focus on using the letter to sell. Try to focus on customer benefits in the letter and include a call to action. Also consider adding a “P.S.” to the letter since the beginning and the ending of the letter are most commonly read.	
Newsletter	Newsletters can be effectively used to surround your marketing messages with useful information the readers can use. Newsletters generally have an informative nature and a regular frequency that keeps your name in front of potential customers. Newsletters are often thought of as glossy, four or eight color pieces. However, common publishing software can make it easy to create an effective, simple two page black and white newsletter easily and cheaply.	

Having a good list

Item	Issue	Comments
General comments	The quality of your list is paramount. Before starting a direct mail effort, consider establishing three different data bases of names – customers, prospects and leads. For any specific mailing, you may want to include only one or two of these groups depending on the nature of the mailing. You may even want to exclude certain customers or prospects if you are concerned that the mailing would be inappropriate for them.	
Existing customers	Existing customers are frequently the best source for new business, however you must respect the existing relationship and ensure that any mailing to this group reflects the existing relationship.	

	For example, the announcement of a new product or a “staying in touch” newsletter would be appropriate while a “cold prospecting” mailing may not be well received by this group.	
Existing prospects	Individuals that have already shown an interest in your product are ideal for including in a mailing.	
Cold leads	Every person you hear or think of that is a potential buyer of your products should be added to your mailing list. Every person in your organization should have a short information form for names and addresses of leads to be added to your mailing list.	
Buying a list	Purchased lists can be effective, but they have drawbacks, such as bad or out of date information. If considering purchasing a list, try to screen larger lists down to those individuals most likely to become valid prospects. Use geographic, demographic, titles and other limitations to get the best list you can. The costs of screening will probably be more than offset with reductions in mailing costs.	
Keeping a list current	Keeping a mailing list current with address changes and changes in personnel at companies is difficult. Consider adding language in your mailing to make it easy for readers to notify you of changes. Also, consider adding a “Change Service Requested” statement to your envelope. The Post Office will then notify you of changes and forwarding information. There will be a charge, but it will help you keep your list current.	

Mail Processing

Item	Issue	Comments
Who does it?	Implementing a direct mail effort does not necessarily mean using an outside service or mailing house. Mail/merge software, found in most word processing programs make letters and envelopes relatively easy to create and using stamps or your postage meter can work very well for relatively small mailings up to several hundred.	
Consider using a mail house	If your mailing is larger, using an outside service can save time and money. Bulk mail rates are usually available when quantities reach 300 and will save you about 15 cents per piece.	
Choosing a mail house	Most services have a set-up fee for each mailing and then charge on a per piece basis. Be sure to thoroughly understand all the costs including list processing, printing, insertion and mailing. If your mailing is very large, the mail house may be able help you save money with alternative design and printing ideas.	

Follow up, follow up, and follow up.

Once the mail is sent, the true work begins.