

Plug-ins

DIRECT MAIL

Direct mail is a highly effective, targeted and measurable form of marketing. Marketers spent \$45.2 billion on direct mail last year, according to the Winterberry Group, a marketing consulting company. In 2011, spending is expected to increase 5.8% to \$47.8 billion. Yet, this medium often gets short shrift in favor of sexier media channels, such as social media and mobile marketing.

Mail can also be an expensive channel for marketers, so careful planning and execution are required to make sure campaigns succeed and garner response.

Done right, postal mail can be the foundation of a marketing strategy that incorporates other media for maximum effect. E-mail, for example, is often paired with direct mail.

Our Plug-ins this month feature **advice from the best minds in the direct mail space** on topics including how to maximize ROI while minimizing costs; how to think more strategically about the channel; and how to leverage the science behind human behavior to make sure direct mail gets noticed and ultimately evokes the response marketers seek.

Direct mail unmatched in marketer toolkit

Direct mail doesn't work, direct mail is too expensive, and now direct mail is obsolete – I've heard this type of rhetoric for years. It's a true "if I had a dollar" type comment...and it seems especially prevalent in the last few years.

I love reading these types of comments from people in our industry. While part of me wants to save them from themselves, and their clients, a greater part of me gains satisfaction, knowing that my competition has handicapped themselves by refusing to work with a full set of tools.

Don't be fooled into this line of thinking. The flexibility and versatility of direct mail as part of the overall marketing strategy is unmatched.

Here are six things to keep in mind before you embark on the next direct mail program.

1 Have a clear idea of who your ideal customer is and what that customer is worth to you. Not just age, rank and serial number, but who they are as people and what they do on a regular basis in life besides work. This gives you talking points. Some call them hot buttons. Knowing your customer

value will influence mailing presentation and delivery method, what your offer is, and how often you mail. If you always take into account how much a customer is worth – it's hard to go wrong in direct mail.

2 Think outside the box. Direct mail does not have to be a postcard or a standard flat envelope. It can be a box, a tube, a FedEx or UPS package, USPS Priority Mail, or even a lumpy envelope. Direct mail can give you unlimited ways to get attention and response.

3 Don't rush the job. Think about it. How many things in life go right when you try to rush? It just doesn't work. So whether you are a boss or a client, don't expect a good job if you rush a project through at the last minute. If you're a company that does mailings for others, I would advise you pass "last minute" types of clients on to your competitors.

4 Investigate what your competitors are sending. This goes back to No. 3. Take the time to see who's playing the game and what cards they are laying down. Many times I



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John Schulte
President, National
Mail Order Association

like to zig while the others zag. If you don't know what's going on in the marketplace for your particular project, you weaken your chances of success.

5 Build a mental or physical warehouse of direct mail components and tactics that you find cool and impressive, so you have ideas to draw from when the need arises. Study old direct mail examples when you get a chance for ideas that can be reborn. What's old becomes new.

6 Look for ways to use direct mail on a small scale. Every day, there are ways to use direct mail to help your organization if you take a moment to think about it and institute it internally. It should be every company's policy that each employee is required to send out written notes or personal letters six times each year.

These could be thank you notes, thinking of you notes and even Happy New Year notes. They can address customers, vendors, suppliers, or the company or person who hosted a party you recently attended. These little efforts at being "human" stay in people's memories, and that always pays dividends. ■