

The Seven Vital Steps You Must Know To Ensure Direct Mail Success

by Allan J. Katz

1. Your Most Valuable Asset

A mailing list of valued customers is the single most important asset you have. Loyal customers will spend an average of five times more in your business than new customers. Plus it costs ten times more to acquire a new customer.

When choosing a mailing list, first identify your best customer. What is their age, income level, and geography?

Then identify your "perfect" customer. Select mailing lists which match your perfect customer profile. If you're selling business to business, select the type of business, number of employees and geography, then tailor your message to this audience.

2. The Three Most Effective Words

Copy is the persuasive argument that sells your product or service. Begin your copy with a strong headline that spells out the benefit of your product or service.

The three most effective words in direct mail are "you," "free," and "new." Studies show that using these words in headlines can boost your response dramatically.

Letter copy should follow a simple formula that will help you organize your thoughts and make a convincing sales argument.

- A. Attention: The headline must grab their attention and make them want to read further.
- B. Interest: Grab their interest with a sub-headline that states your Unique Selling Proposition (what sets you apart from everyone else.)
- C. Desire: Elicit desire by painting word pictures of your prospect using your product or service and enjoying its benefits. Give testimonials of customers who have benefited from what you offer. Tell stories of people who used your service despite their initial apprehension.
- D. Close: Ask for the order. Make it convenient for them to respond. Give your prospects choices of how to get in touch with you. Use a P.S. at the end of the letter to pique their curiosity.

3. What's In It For Me?

Your offer attracts people to your business or service. Direct mail will not work if you use it like a billboard. It is like saying, "SEE ME, I'M OVER HERE" at 60 m.p.h. In order for your direct mail to achieve measurable results you must have a compelling offer.

Your offer can include money, free gifts, guarantees, testimonials, sale events, coupons, gift certificates, sweepstakes, drawings and private sales. Test different offers and see what works best for you.

When you're marketing to a business, personalization is important. Make your outside envelope look like a personal business letter. Keep your copy to 1 or 2 pages and offer an incentive for responding quickly..

4. Experience Captivating Graphics

Designing a mail piece should accomplish 2 things. One is to get the attention of your reader. Two, is to visually clarify the written message you are trying to get across.

There are six elements that determine good direct mail design.

- A. One visual element should dominate the page, whether it's a photo, headline, cartoon or graphic.
- B. Use only one or two typefaces. Stick with one or two families of type. Use one for the headlines and bolded sub sections and one for the body copy. The body copy should always be a serif typeface, it's easier to read.
- C. Use lots of white space when you want to make a lasting impression.
- D. Make sure your text is easy to read. Don't make your margins too wide or your columns too long. Space

out the lines of your text so they are easy to read. Use bullets, bold, underlines and short paragraphs.
E. Display your logo and pertinent contact information.

5. Produce the Package

Have you ever read an ad or received a mailing without a phone number or address? Often people get so wrapped up in the copy they forget to call for action. Boldly feature your phone number, address, web site address, email address and fax. Make it easy for your prospects to contact you.

Your logo should visually express the essence of your company's mission along with a positioning statement that sets you apart from your competition. Design a "risk-free" response certificate that clearly repeats your most valuable benefits and moves your reader to say "yes."

6. Testing

The standard business-to-business mailing package includes an outside envelope, letter, brochure, lift letter and response device.

The benefit of direct mail is that you have an unlimited number of choices when it comes to your package. You can choose the paper, ink color and size of the package. Or you might choose a postcard, self mailer, flyer or 3D package which is almost guaranteed to get opened.

7. Follow Up

The three most important elements to test are the list, offer and package. Studies show the quality of your mailing list represents 40% - 70% of your mailing success.

First, carefully select your list, keep your offer the same and test one list against another; either two rented lists or your customer list against a rented list.

Then, test your offers. Keep your list the same and change your offer. A one word change in a headline can boost your response over 300%. Test discounts, free gifts, free samples, personalized coaching or free reports.

Third, test the creative. Colors create moods and can affect response. Test a humorous approach vs. a serious approach. Test photos vs. clip art, ink colors, paper colors, envelope design. Test a postcard vs. a letter. What about a teaser on the envelope vs. a blank envelope? All these variables can affect your response and should be tested.

It's useless to have a powerful measurable tool like direct mail and not evaluate whether it's working. Keep track of your response. Code your ads and business reply cards and determine what is the most profitable combination of elements for your market.

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