

11 Tips for Successful Direct Mail Campaigns

Direct-mail marketing is popular with entrepreneurs nationwide, who rely on it to sell products and generate leads. But with an average 2-percent response rate, the difference between a good package and a great one can mean the difference between spending a fortune and earning one. To increase your response rates, start with a clean, well-qualified list, then use these 11 tips.

1. Use five components: an envelope, a letter, an order form, optional inserts and a return envelope. For a small test, mail 2,500 to 5,000 pieces. Mail to the same list at least three times.
2. "The envelope is your handshake," says Don Dailey, president of Dailey Direct Inc., a Gaithersburg, Maryland, graphic design firm specializing in direct marketing. "A teaser on the envelope is vital."
3. Your letter should explain the benefits of your product or service, followed by the features.
4. Be sure your letter includes a "Johnson box"--the sentence or headline before the salutation that highlights your marketing hook--and a P.S. "The second thing people read in a letter is the P.S.," says Dick Goldsmith, president of the New York City direct-mail production agency The Horah Group. Because your reader will look at the P.S. before the copy of the letter, it should contain some aspect of the offer that makes the recipient want to read on.
5. Make your order form clear, brief and easy to fill out, and include a fax number.
6. Include a toll-free number on every page, because you never know which component your prospect will keep.
7. "Avoid a monochromatic package," warns Dailey. Keep your carrier envelope and letter stock consistent, but for the rest, use different textures, sizes or colors.
8. At the same time, says Dailey, "Don't overdesign. Some of the best packages are simple-looking."
9. "Lack of a single focus is one of the biggest mistakes entrepreneurs make," says Dailey. If you have a good offer, it should lead the package. If you have a one-of-a-kind product, make that the lead.
10. The more pieces you include, the better, as long as each explains an additional benefit. Include brochures to explain complex services. Use coupons for offers.
11. Testing is vital and should be ongoing. If you're serious about using direct mail to build your business, use it continually.