

# The Principles of Targeted Direct Mail Advertising

By Blair Entenmann, President of MarketingHelp!

Advertising *does* work. It not only creates a better, more productive selling environment, but properly done, can generate inquiries and sales! If you can identify your ideal customer, you should use targeted direct mail. When you spend hard-earned dollars on direct mail, you want it to be noticed, not forgotten. The objective for direct mail is Open Me, Read Me, Call Me Today! The following principles can make your direct mail more productive and deliver exceptional results!

- 1. Mail to the Right Prospect with Frequency.** Two-thirds of direct mail's success is in the mailing list - the better the list, the better the results. Invest the time and money into finding or building a mailing list of prospects who would be interested in your product or service. Consider a two- or three- part direct mail campaign. Timing may be a critical success factor - today they aren't interested, but next month they might be. Repetition will generate a better response. A general rule is that it takes 6-9 advertising or sales contacts before a suspect buys.
- 2. Make It Stand Out.** What attention-getting, fun and creative device can you use that has some linkage to your product or service? Be different in size, shape, and color than competitor's mailings, such as a large square envelope, a bright yellow envelope, or triangular mailing tube. Use postcards, greeting cards, or even frisbees to deliver your message. What attention-getting words work best for your prospects? Words like *Free, New, Now, Breakthrough, Finally, and Limited Time* are powerful, magic words that can evoke a positive response. A good creative concept, combined attention-getting graphics and copy will make your direct mail noticeable.
- 3. Make It Interesting.** Make an offer so good that your customers simply can't refuse. Find out what they want and offer it to them. Use benefit-oriented customer promises for headlines such as "Prevent Theft of Your Valuables" or "Reduce Your Warranty Costs With Quality Components!" Write selling copy about what the prospect wants to know in clear, concise sentences. Adding a powerful cover letter to a great brochure can increase your response. A letter allows you to reveal and customize a major promotional offer or get the prospect involved in your product or service. Personalized laser letters (Dear Blair) are more effective than form letters (Dear Sportsman). Use headlines within the letter to summarize the benefit of the following paragraph. Can you include an advertising specialty that could enhance the prospect's curiosity?
- 4. TEST, TEST, TEST.** Run two different campaigns or promotions at the same time (i.e A/B Test) to see which performs better. Then run the winner with the other half of your prospect list against the next big idea. Overtime you will improve your results based on what your prospects/new customers want.
- 5. Make It Easy to Respond NOW.** Ask for the response you would like and help them do it. Your direct mail piece is your salesperson and it should ask for the order! In sales letters, use a P.S. to make a strong call to action. Use a business reply card, 800- number, fax number, or web site that offers a one step process. Give an incentive for the desired response (i.e. free gift or special consideration if you act now). Your response rate will be higher if you give customers several ways to respond.
- 6. Track Your Results.** Create a tracking system so you can determine what works and what doesn't. Analyze your results on a Cost Per Inquiry, Cost Per Proposal/Estimate/Appointment and Cost per Sale basis. Sometimes a low response promotion offer has sky high sales conversion, making it a more profitable sale than a high response, low sales conversion promotion offer.

Direct mail advertising can be a valuable marketing tool for your business if done properly. It can be more effective and efficient than mass advertising. Remember, there's a fine line between junk mail and valuable promotional offerings.

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