

Cost-Effective Mailings

By Nanette Miner

In a previous article (Aug. 2002) we talked about using mailing *lists* effectively; this month we'll discuss how to do cost-effective mailings.

Direct mailing, in which you send an offer or an announcement to a specific individual at a specific address, is an *extremely* effective form of advertising, when it is done correctly. Unfortunately over the years mailing has taken on a bad reputation because when it is done poorly it delivers truly horrible returns and it costs a lot of money.

There are two primary elements to cost-effective mailings:

1. The piece
2. The postage

We'll discuss the piece first. Personally, my favorite form of direct mailing is the postcard. Whether a 5x7 or a 3x5 card, the beauty of a postcard is that the recipient *cannot*, not read a postcard. Even if it goes from the mailbox to the trash (which of course we hope it doesn't), it HAS made an impact on the recipient. They may not need your offer or service today, but you have made a little tick in their memory bank. The more ticks, the more likely you WILL see this customer someday.

Your postcards should be bright and colorful – use photos if possible. Be sure to include your logo and all relevant contact information – your location, telephone, hours of operation, etc. Keep the wording brief so that the piece isn't crowded and the recipient isn't searching for what the point of the mailing is. Try to embrace the philosophy that you're really there to make an impression, not necessarily a sale. Why an impression over a sale? Wouldn't it be more beneficial to have the customer call and say 'tell me more about the spring special you're offering,' than to have them discount what you're offering at their kitchen counter and throw the mailing out? When you've piqued their interest enough to have them pick up the phone, you REALLY have an opportunity to invite them into your salon or spa.

How should you create your postcards? There are a number of options. You could print them yourself from your own printer in your salon or home office; but that is a labor-intensive method and typically results in you just putting the whole project off. The only time I would recommend this option was if your mailing was to a small group – say less than 50 individuals. You could create a "mock-up" of the postcard and take it to your local print shop (*not* copy shop) to have them typeset it and print it for you. This is probably the most expensive route to pursue and also requires quite a bit of lead time (sometimes as much as three weeks). Or you could use a service that creates postcards such as www.ModernPostcad.com and www.PrintingforLess.com. If you have a website

to promote, check out www.Web-Cards.com. These services will allow you to choose from various templates or create your own look. Once you have your first two or three created, the future creation of postcards is a fifteen-minute job.

One word of caution: Take a quick trip or call your local post office for regulations regarding the positioning of postage and address labels before your first mailing. I know of an individual that did a 4,000 piece mailing only to have 3,970 returned because they did not meet postal regulations (the other 30 apparently slipped through).

Postage. The reason this article is titled Cost-Effective Mailings is because while direct-mail is a great marketing methodology, *postage* is the main detractor. The reason I like postcards so much is because they require much less postage than the normal first-class mailing (unless you use what are considered to be “jumbo” postcards, the 5x7 kind, which *do* use the same amount of postage as a first-class letter; personally, I never use jumbo cards). A 4x6 postcard is mailed for .23 cents – that’s a .15 cent savings over any letter or 3-fold self-mailer you might send out. After two postcard mailings you’ve saved enough in postage costs to do a third mailing for free!

You can save even more money by sending your mailings bulk-rate but again, personally, that’s not my preference. There are a number of reasons I don’t like to use bulk rate postage: first, if you don’t care enough to send me something first-class, why should I care enough to read it? Secondly, it costs money to get a bulk-rate permit (\$125 at the moment; and it has to be renewed yearly). And thirdly, it requires a mailing of at least 250 pieces, which sometimes would force me to do a bigger mailing than I really wanted to do. It may just be a personal quirk, but I prefer to send my mailings using first-class postage. With the ease of self-sticking stamps, it’s not hard to affix the postage to your mailings during a slow period in the workday or at home one evening while you’re watching a thirty-minute TV show.

A final, compelling reason, to use postcards as direct-mail pieces is because they are affordable enough to allow you to be consistent in your mailings. Whether you choose to mail once a month or once a quarter, the issue of cost should be less of an obstacle when you use a cost-effective methodology such as the postcard.

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