

Planning a Successful Direct Mail Campaign

Dr. Kent Wolfe
Assistant Extension Specialist
Agricultural Development Center

Direct mail is an effective way to target a specific group of consumers with advertising flyers, brochures, specials price lists and countless other types of promotional material. However, planning and implementing a direct mail campaign is not simple. The cost of reaching a potential consumer using direct mail is estimated \$1.68.¹

There are a number of factors that are critical to implementing a successful direct mail campaign. However, the single most critical factor in to a successful campaign is having an accurate mailing list. A comprehensive mailing list provides a means for contacting existing and potential customers with advertising flyers, brochures and price lists.

One simple and inexpensive way to generate a mailing list is to collect basic information (customer's name, address, state, city, Zip code and telephone number) as you fill orders. Mailing lists can also be obtained through list brokers, organization membership lists, news articles, magazines, trade lists and show exhibitor lists. However, before a company invests in purchasing a mailing list, it is important to study the list's composition as the company only wants to mail to restaurants or grocery stores that cater to the demographic group that is interested in using ostrich products. If your mailing is not directed toward your target market, you have wasted time and money. For example, The Ostrich Meat Company has decided to market its products to non-fast food area restaurants using direct mail. The Ostrich Meat Company would want to avoid using a mailing list that contained a considerable number of vegetarian restaurants as they are not potential customers.

The following discussion outlines factors that should be considered before undertaking a direct mail campaign. Besides carefully compiling or selecting a mailing list, there are a number of other factors which can significantly impact the success of your direct mail campaign. The most common factors that should be considered are²:

¹Source: Penton Media Inc., "What is the most cost-efficient way to communicate with business decision-makers." *October 17, 1997*

²Adapted from WGSC Publications' *Direct Mail Works Like Magic* - Phone: 909-924-8831
FAX: 909-924-8431 www.wgsc.com

- The product offer
- Presentation of Offer Seasonal factors
- Envelope Considerations Mailing
- Considerations
- Seasonal factors

1. **The product offer** must somehow appeal to the potential consumer. The offer must provide the consumer with an important benefit. Again, using the ostrich meat example, The Ostrich Meat Company's direct mail offering provides area restaurants with an important opportunity. Restaurants now have access to a locally produced exotic, tasty, fresh and healthy red meat product. According to industry research, these food characteristics are now preferred and the direct mail offer should address how ostrich meat can satisfy these changes in consumer preferences.
2. **Presentation of the offer** is critical to a successful mailing campaign. The recipient is not able to evaluate the product in the traditional manner, (i.e., potential customers are not able to taste, touch, see or smell the product). Therefore, the paper presentation of your company and product is critical to the customer's perception of your company and its products. The material should be presented in a professional manner and clearly written so your potential customer can easily and fully understand your offer. The material should emphasize product benefits as opposed to just discussing your company.
3. **Envelope considerations** - The envelope should look professional and avoid the appearance of "junk mail." Your potential customers are continuously being bombarded with junk mail. To decrease the chances of having your mail tossed out, unopened. The envelope **should not** resemble junk mail but it **should** create some level of curiosity. If the recipient is curious as to the contents of the envelope, you increase the chances of them opening it. Excluding an address or hand writing the address on the envelope are two ways to arouse recipient curiosity. Again, if the recipient does not open your envelope, you were not successful in reaching your customer.
4. **Mailing Considerations** - Again, to try and avoid the image of junk mail, you should consider using first class mail for your direct mail campaign. The use of first class mail is less likely to be perceived as "junk mail" and is more reliable than bulk mail. The Direct Marketing Association estimates that anywhere from 5% to 15% of bulk mail is not successfully delivered. However, bulk mail can save you approximately 45% or \$0.10 per mail piece for pieces weighing 16 or less ounces. The benefits and costs associated with both first class and bulk mail need to be considered when deciding on a class of mail.
5. **Seasonal factors** do not impact direct mailing campaign success as much as one might think. Most direct mail companies will operate year-round. However, it is a good idea to avoid implementing a direct mail campaign during holidays, especially the end of the year holiday season. The spring and fall months are busier than the summer and end of year months.

The Agricultural Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion or veteran status and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and county governments cooperating in furtherance of acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

Agricultural Extension Service

Charles L. Norman, Dean