



Presents

12 Steps to Direct Mail Success



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Introduction – Success Favors the Prepared

They say that "success favors the prepared." It's wise advice, and it's the reason that Click2Mail has decided to share with you our 12 Steps to Direct Mail Success. In the 12 Steps that follow, we'll show you how to create a successful (results-generating, business-boosting, award-winning, however-you-measure-success) direct mail campaign.

And remember, Click2Mail offers a range of direct mail solutions to help you on your journey. When you're ready to launch your campaign, call 1-866-665-2787 or visit Click2Mail.com.



Step 1: Make a Plan

"Planning," said A. A. Milne, "is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up." In that spirit, Step 1 of the 12 Steps to Direct Mail Success is: Make a plan.

List your goals

First, list the goals that you want to accomplish through the campaign. Think about qualitative goals - expanding your brand into a new market, for example; as well as quantitative goals - say, increasing sales by 10%.

Identify your target audience

Then, identify your target audience. Who do you want to reach with the campaign? Are they in a certain age range? Men or women? Do they fall within certain income categories? Live in a certain area? If, for example, you own a chain of restaurants and your goal is to expand your reach to early-bird diners, then your target audience might be senior citizens living within a few miles of your restaurants.

Identify your key messages

Next, think about what your key messages will be. They should speak directly to your target audience - to their needs and wants, hope and desires. Try to think like one of your mail recipients. Or, better yet, get some people together who represent your target audience. Make a list of questions for them that will help you understand what they care about. Then, if you can, test their response to your key messages.

"Storyboard" your campaign

Filmmakers use a process called "storyboarding" to plan out their movies - they sketch out every scene that they plan to shoot and then post them in sequence on the wall. Doing the same for your direct mail campaign will ensure that you have consistency across your campaign, with every piece working together seamlessly to deliver your key messages and achieve your goals.

As you go through the 12 steps in the creation of your direct mail campaign, create your own storyboard wall. Begin by sketching your "big picture" plan; it will help you ensure that all of your tactics - from design to copy to the type of mailer - are in line with your broad strategy. Sketch each phase of your campaign - what your mailer will look like, who it will be sent to, when it will be mailed, how responses will be handled.



Make a budget

Start with your quantitative goal (increasing sales 10%, for example). Then ask, "What do I have to do (or, more importantly, how much do I have to spend) to achieve my goal?"

- Determine how many responses you will need to achieve your goal. For example: How many new diners do you need at your restaurants to boost sales 10%?
- Think about the response rate you can realistically expect from each mailer (our article, <u>The DM Association's Annual Response Rate Report - How Do You Compare?</u> goes into response rates in more detail).
- If you need 250 new diners to achieve your 10% sales boost goal, and your response rate is 2%, then you need to send out 12,500 mailers.

Then think about what it will cost to send out enough mailers to reach your goal. Include:

- Project management costs
- Any costs involved in developing and testing your messages
- Design and layout costs
- Copywriting costs
- Printing and mailing costs (<u>Click2Mail's cost estimator makes this part easy</u>)
- Purchasing or renting a mailing list (Click2Mail can help)

As you develop your budget, you may have to go back and forth between boosting the effectiveness of your direct mail pieces (to achieve a higher response rate) and lowering your costs, so that you can achieve your goals within a budget that works for you.



Step 2: Craft the Offer

Michael: Within an hour, he had a signed release for a certified check of \$1000.

Kay Adams: How did he do that?

Michael: My father made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

When creating your direct mail marketing campaign, you clearly can't make a Godfather-style offer that can't be refused, but you should pay careful attention to your offer – it will have a significant effect on your response rate and, by extension, the return you see on your investment. In fact, it's said that 40% of a mailer's success is attributable to the offer (another 40% comes from the list, and 20% from copy and design).

Don't embark on this Step 2 until you've completed <u>Step 1</u>. Your audience – their needs and wants, hopes and dreams – should be the foundation of your offer (after all, what is one man's junk is another's treasure; what is an irrefutable offer to some might be meaningless to others). Identifying that target audience is an important part of Step 1. Another important piece is listing your goals – how you craft your offer should also depend on what you're aiming to achieve.

Crafting your offer

With an articulation of how your product or service serves your targets' motivations – fulfills their needs and wants or helps them solve their problems or ease their worries – you have a solid core around which you can craft an effective offer. Like the Godfather's, it should be one that only an idiot would turn down – make it incredibly easy to say yes, and incredibly hard to say no. The types of offers you might use run the gamut:

- Price incentives, which can include percentage off, dollar discounts, tiered % off price incentives
- Dollar value discounts
- Tiered discounts ("Spend \$50 & amp; get \$3 off, spend \$100 and get \$10 off")
- "No payments for 90 days" payment options
- Samples
- Free trial
- Free shipping
- "Refer a friend and get your next month free"
- Early bird offers
- "Buy now and you'll be entered to win" contests and sweepstakes



- "Buy 2 get one free" multiple product offers
- The money-back guarantee

Positioning the offer

Once you've crafted the offer – the 30-day money-back guarantee or 10% off, for example – you'll need to position it, to write some copy that explains why your target should take the offer. While the offer itself is the most important, positioning the offer is where you explain its irrefutability.

The most effective positioning centers around the benefits that your product or service – and your offer – bring to your target. How will the target's life be made better by responding to the offer? Rely heavily on the understanding you've gained about your audience's needs and wants, hopes and dreams.

Calling to action

The best offer in the world will fall flat if you don't expressly ask your target to take a particular action. This isn't brand advertising, where the goal is simply to build people's awareness and positive image of your company. In direct marketing, the goal is to generate a particular outcome – a web visit, a phone call, a sale. When you call your target to action, infuse a sense of urgency into the call. For example, "Act now! Offer expires on November 15" or maybe "Only 15 spots available. Act now to secure yours."

Test, test, test

You've decided to offer a discount on your oil change service. But should you offer a 10% off coupon or \$5 off? You'll discover the answer to that important question by testing. Measure the response from your first mailer (by including a unique identifying code on the coupon, for example), tweak your offer and then test again.

The best marketers never stop testing, measuring, and tweaking, and Click2Mail makes it especially easy to test and tweak. Since there are no minimum volumes and your Click2Mail mailers are sent the next day, you can test several variations this week and have your response results in hand within a few days.



Step 3: Build (and Maintain) a Good List

Step 3 on the 12-step path to a successful direct mail campaign is to build (and maintain) a good list. Of all the pieces of a direct mail campaign, your list is the single most important. Having a well-built, well-managed list can dramatically reduce costs and boost the effectiveness of your direct mail.

Building an in-house list

Marketers refer to a list that you build "organically" (in other words, not by buying or renting it) as an in-house list. Names on an in-house list should come from prospects who have expressed interest, current and past customers, referrals, and (when appropriate) people in your "sphere of influence"— personal contacts who may be interested in your product or service. Take these steps to more effectively build your in-house list:

- Have a "sign up for our mailings" form on your website. These are most often used to build e-mail marketing lists, but they can just as easily be used to build direct mail lists.
 Many website hosting companies offer an off-the-shelf sign-up form which can be linked to an Excel file or database that you can use to build a list of prospective customers.
- **Ask your customers.** Even if you don't get your customers' names and addresses in the normal course of doing business with them, ask for the information (including full names and mailing addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and birthdays or anniversaries, when appropriate the more information, the better).

Buying or renting a list

Buying or renting a list from a third party can be a great way to supplement your in-house list; perhaps because you're reaching out to a new demographic, or perhaps you're just getting started and haven't built a sizable in-house list yet. Take these steps to make your list buying or renting process an easy one:

- **Decide on your goal.** What is the goal of your direct mail campaign? Based on that goal, who do you want to target? Having a clear target in mind is essential in ensuring that you get the most effective mailing list.
- **Compiled or direct-response?** A compiled list is generated from secondary sources like the phone book, the Internet, and public records (magazine subscription and credit card lists are also popular ways to generate compiled lists). A direct-response list is made up of people who have responded to an offer of some kind (by mail, telephone, online, or some other way). Direct-response lists are widely considered to be the best you can



market to consumers and businesses who have already responded to organizations similar to yours and once a response is received, the name of that prospect goes on your in-house list.

- **Buy or rent?** Most small businesses rent their prospecting lists because it is both less expensive and less involved than owning (and, consequently, managing) your own list. Most lists "go bad" at the rate of 2 percent per month (at the end of the year about a quarter of most lists are out of date), so if you choose to own your prospecting lists, you'll have to invest in their upkeep.
- Owner, manager or broker? A list broker is an agent who coordinates the rental of
 mailing lists between the list owners and renters (much as a real estate broker
 coordinates a deal between a buyer and a seller). A good list broker like <u>Click2Mail</u> will
 have access to a wide range of high-quality lists and the necessary knowledge to help
 you choose the best list based on your campaign goals and your target recipient.

You've got your list. Now what do you do with it?

- **Segment and target.** Over time, you should use the information you gather as you do business with your customers and develop relationships with prospects to build a deeper, richer portrait of them in your database. When it comes to personalizing your direct mail, the more you know about your customers and prospects, the better.
 - With variable data printing (<u>Click2Mail offers this option</u>, click here to find out more), it is easy to change the elements of a mailer to target individual customers and prospects (with information about their expressed interests, the last product they purchased, or an upcoming birthday, for example). The benefits of that kind of personalization are clear: evidence shows response rates increase as much as 1500%.
- **Track and test.** Whether you're using a list from a broker or your own in-house list, tracking responses is an important way to reduce the cost and improve the effectiveness of future mailings. Tracking response rates on your in-house list will help you maintain up-to-date records and design more effective mailers. Tracking response rates on mailed lists will help you and your broker hone in on the types of recipients that are best to target, and the messages that are most effective.

Click2Mail is here to help you on your path to a successful direct mail campaign. Remember, the quality of your result is directly linked to the quality of your list. We can help you purchase or rent an external list, or advise you on building your own. Visit Click2Mail's online Mailing List Center today. (And, for more information, check out our webinar on creating and managing your mailing list.)



Step 4: Choose Your Mailer

Once you've made your plan (step 1), crafted your offer (step 2), and built a good list (step 3), you're ready for step 4 on your path to a successful direct mail campaign; now it's time to choose your mailer. There are a number of decisions you'll have to make: what type of mailer you'll use, what size, what paper, and what postage class.

What type of mailer? With Click2Mail, you can choose from six types of mailers (in a range of sizes and paper types): postcards, letters and flyers, booklets, Priority Mail Plus, Certified Mail, and reply mail. Let's take a look at the advantages of each:

Postcards

- o Easy; postcards are the least complex format to write and design
- Inexpensive; for example, printing and mailing 100 double-sided, full-color, 5 x 8 in. postcards is just 70 cents per piece (42 cents in black and white) including address cleansing and standardization
- Grab attention; the images and headlines on postcards are almost certain to be seen

• Letters and flyers

- Versatile; send exactly the number of pages you need from 1 to 96 in a variety of formats
- Private; letters are mailed in your choice of conventional business-sized or booklet, dual-window envelopes
- Professional; a well-designed letter with a compelling message can move people to action

• **Booklets**

- Efficient; booklets allow you to deliver a lot of information in a single package
- Expansive; space is not an issue, with booklets you have room to describe and demonstrate complex ideas and/or a large numbers of items
- Substantial, so your customers and prospects will keep them around keeping you top-of-mind

• Priority Mail Plus letters

 Urgent; your letter can be printed and delivered in the U.S. in one to three business days



- Eye-catching; Click2Mail's distinctive customized USPS envelope really stands out in the mailbox
- Traceable; free real-time, electronic delivery confirmation is included (or choose the signature-required option)
- o Economical; ship anywhere in the U.S. for low, discounted flat rates

<u>Certified Mail self-mailers and letters</u>

- Urgent; the need for someone to officially sign for your mail piece adds a sense of urgency – these mail pieces don't get thrown in the trash
- Secure; Certified Mail is a widely-recognized way to deliver legal documents and notices
- Traceable; someone at the delivery address must sign for your mail piece (or, with Restricted Delivery, a specific person or their agent must sign for it)

• Reply mail postcards and letters

- Convenient; the recipient has everything they need to respond on the spot
- Secure; the letter reply is sealed and returned in same ecoEnvelope it was delivered in
- Smart; using Reply Mail as your first line of interaction with customers and prospects saves you time and money

The type of mailer you choose should depend most heavily on the goals you want to achieve. If, for example, your goal is to get 15 new customers, you might start by sending a reply mail postcard asking your prospect for some personal information (which you use to personalize future mailings) in exchange for a chance to win one of your products or services. Then you might follow up with prospects who responded by sending a booklet describing your products or services. You might also send a large postcard announcing the contest winner and encouraging your prospects to visit your store or office for a special discount.

What size? In direct mail, size matters. Generally speaking, the bigger the better. But, because we all live in a world of budgets where every dollar counts, you should balance the extra bang you might get from a larger mailer with its higher cost. For example, a certified letter in a 9×12 in. Certified Mail flat envelope will definitely get noticed — and opened, and read — but it's probably too expensive to send on your first mailing to a list of 1,000 new prospects.

What colors? UV-coated or uncoated? When thinking about color versus black and white, the decision again rests on the balance between noticeability and cost. Color mail, generally speaking, is more noticeable (especially in a graphics-intensive piece), but more expensive, too. Consider the type of mailer when deciding color versus black-and-white; a postcard is probably best done in color, but a letter may be just fine in black-and-white.



For postcards you'll also have the choice of adding a glossy UV coating. It's a bit more expensive, but it makes your colors shine brighter – and last longer.

What postage class? When it comes to postage, you'll have to balance delivery speed, security, and noticeability. Priority Mail is the quickest and will get your mail piece noticed – but it is also the most expensive. The least expensive postage class is Standard (including non-profit), which is \$0.27 through Click2Mail (compared to \$0.38 for First-Class). Delivery times can vary widely with Standard Mail, though with Click2Mail's new Delivery Estimator you can estimate delivery of Standard Mail within a 5-day window (for the same low \$0.27 per-piece price). Of course, no matter what postage class you choose, you'll save with Click2Mail – you'll see a discount off retail postage rates on all Click2Mail products.

Whatever choices you make about the type of mailer, size, color, coating, and postage class, remember one important key to a successful direct mail campaign: test, measure, and repeat. Test each mailing to determine how well your recipients respond. If the response isn't as high as you'd like, tweak your strategy, test again, and measure those results. And remember, Click2Mail is here to help.



Step 5: Write Good Copy

We've all heard the adage that "content is king." It's true. Whatever type of mailer you choose, writing good copy is your first step to creating an emotional connection with your customer or prospect – an emotional connection that is essential if your prospects are going to buy what you're selling.

The "copy," or text, of your mailer is how you explain to your customers or prospects 1) what you are offering; 2) the benefits of what you're offering; and 3) how to get what you're offering. As advertising great Leo Burnett said, "Say to people, 'Here's what we've got. Here's what it will do for you. Here's how to get it."

3 rules of good copy

1. Speak to your mail recipients. Marketing legend David Ogilvy famously quipped, "I don't know the rules of grammar. . . If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language, the language they use every day, the language in which they think." Good copywriters typically don't fuss over sentence structure or punctuation. They do fuss over whether their copy resonates with the people reading it.

After you've written the first draft of your mailer copy, read it out loud. Think about how it will sound when your recipient opens the mailer and reads it. Even better, find someone who fits the profile of your target customer or prospect and ask them for their opinion. Do they feel like the copy speaks to them? Does it sound like something they would say?

2. Imagine your recipients asking, "What's in it for me?" It's an incredibly common, and incredibly dangerous mistake that many marketers make: talking about all of the wonderful features of their product or service and ignoring how those features are relevant to the customer or prospect. Remember, your prospects don't care what your product or service can do; they care what it can do for them.

To ensure that you're always speaking the language of "benefits" rather than "features" think about how your product or service helps your prospects solve their problems or achieve their dreams, then write to that. If you are an accountant, for example, instead of advertising free efile services, talk about *how you make filing taxes easy* with free electronic filing.

3. Keep it brief, but not too brief. Clearly, the length of your copy will depend on the type of mailer you chose (Step 4: Choose Your Mailer). But even if you chose a mailer format that allows for more copy (say, a letter or a flyer), be succinct. Most of us see, read, or hear about 3,000 marketing messages every day, so we've grown accustomed to tuning them out. Your copy should grab readers' attention then get to the point quickly.



That said, you want to write enough to adequately explain the benefits your product or service offers – at least to entice the reader to visit your store, pick up the phone, or click on to your website for more information. If your copy is on the long side, break it up into chunks with subheadlines that make it easy for readers to scan and get the gist of your message (then, they can read between the sub-heads for more detail). Use formatting – underlining, italics, and bolding – to draw readers' attention to certain parts of your copy.

Writing good copy is all about grabbing your readers' attention, creating an emotional connection with them, and demonstrating that your product or service will make their lives better. Clearly, that involves knowing your customers and prospects well — which requires a good list and good targeting. If you're not sure where to start, Click2Mail can help. Call 1-866-665-2787, visit click2mail.com, or e-mail support@click2mail.com.



Step 6: Lay Out and Design Your Mailer

The copy and graphics on your mailer are what allow you – through that piece of paper – to create an emotional connection with your prospect. Create that emotional connection, and you're exponentially more likely to make the sale. In Step 5 (Write good copy) you did that with text, now how to do it with design? These 7 tips will get you on your way.

7 tips for effective layout and design

1. Ask, "Would I put this on my refrigerator?" We can probably all recall a few mail pieces we've received that have stood out enough to put on the fridge – maybe they were particularly witty, or the art was especially appealing.

Certainly your mail piece doesn't *have* to be "fridge-worthy" to be successful. And while the fridge test is a quick and easy way to determine how attention-getting and memorable your mailer is, it doesn't *guarantee* a high response. But as Natalie Engler wrote in the magazine *Deliver*, "if you manage to make that great art relevant to your message, the place for your mailer just might be on someone's office wall."

2. Use eye-catching, relevant graphics to get your message across <u>in an instant</u>. A direct mail piece is kind of like a billboard in that it must grab your prospect's attention right away. It's unlike a billboard in that, if you can catch your prospect's attention, you can take some time to explain the benefits of your product or service.

<u>Postcards</u> are typically thought to be the easiest attention-getters, because your entire message (graphics and all) is visible. With Click2Mail's <u>Easy Letter Sender</u> you can take advantage of the benefits of a letter (including more room to explain your message in text) *and* have a visible image to grab recipients' attention. (Our <u>self-mailer flyers</u> do the same.)

- **3.** Whatever mail format you choose, pay attention to everything that is visible. If you're mailing a postcard, pay attention to the design and layout of the "back" side (where the address is) too. In fact, the back is the first side that most recipients will see (since mail typically arrives address-side up). The images and text on the back side, then, should entice recipients to turn the card over and check out the rest of your message.
- **4.** With every design element you add, think "What's the point?" No matter the format of your mail piece, every inch of space should be designed purposefully (even if it's white space). "Gilding the lily is one of the pitfalls of direct mail," said creative director Steve Goebel in <u>Deliver</u>. "If you focus too much on the art and not enough on the call to action, you're just



making art for art's sake." Instead, ensure that all of your design elements work to accomplish the goal you've set out for your mailer.

- **5. Be consistent.** Your direct mail is an extension of your brand. So the fonts, colors, and images you use to design your mail piece should be consistent with the fonts, colors, and images you use elsewhere in your store or office, on your product packaging, on your website, on your business card and stationery.
- **6. Use white space.** Designing your mail piece purposefully doesn't mean covering every inch with text, images, or color. In fact, white space should be an important element of every mail piece, no matter the size or format. White space makes the graphic elements, colors, and text you do include more powerful.

As <u>Inspired Mag</u> put it, "White spaces play an absolute role in determining the hierarchical significance of various sections of content on a particular page. In many ways, white spaces direct how and upon what terms we 'read' a particular design artifact."

7. Choose color wisely. Colors create emotional responses, even when we're not aware of it. While the colors you use in your mail piece should be consistent with your brand's, think about the emotional response they will generate before you decide to include them. For example, red symbolizes energy, passion, excitement, and power; it can also imply aggression and danger. Yellow conveys wisdom, joy, brightness, happiness, and light. Blue represents wisdom, confidence, loyalty and trustworthiness; it can also imply sadness and depression.

No pressure, but the design of your direct mail piece can have an enormous impact on the results you get from it. One non-profit organization increased its response rate by 73% by simply switching from a black envelope to a white one, according to Steve Cuno in <u>Deliver</u>.

That said, you don't have to be perfect on your first try (by the end of this white paper, you'll know how to Test, Measure, Repeat). And <u>Click2Mail</u> is here to help.



Step 7: Write a Stand-out Headline and P.S.

The headline and the P.S. are the two most read portions of a direct mail piece. According to master marketer David Ogilvy, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. Often, readers will look to the headline first, skip to the postscript (P.S.), and then decide if they will invest in the rest of the copy. So, by all means, take the time to make your headline and postscript great.

10 tips for headlines and postscripts that work

- **1. Grab attention.** Sometimes headlines ask a question. Sometimes they tease the reader, enticing him to read more out of sheer curiosity (though that's tougher to do well). Sometimes they simply and plainly assert the benefits of the offer. However you choose to craft your headline, it must grab readers' attention and *compel* them to read the rest of your copy.
- **2.** Cultivate an emotional connection. The most effective mailers create an emotional response in the recipient, through both textual and visual elements. Both your headline and your P.S. should reiterate and reinforce the emotional connection you want to make. (But take care that your mailer doesn't come across as disingenuous be emotional, but be real.)
- **3.** Use the active voice. Using the active voice creates a sense of, well, action which is, after all, what you want from your recipients. "The active voice is stronger and more direct," wrote Randall Hines and Robert Lauterborn in <u>Direct</u> magazine. "Compare 'The Size You Need Is Stocked by Our Store' with 'Your Size Is Here.'"
- **4.** In headlines, tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em. Whether you craft the headline as a teaser, a question, or as a direct statement of the benefit of your offer, take the opportunity to give your mail recipient a peak into what you're going to explain in the rest of the copy. In other words, answer the question, "Why should I read the rest of this mailer?"
- **5.** In postscripts, tell 'em what you told 'em. Remember that most mail recipients will read the P.S. after the headline but before they read the rest of the copy. That said, use the postscript to summarize what you've said in the copy. Reiterating the offer (and the benefits of acting on it) is usually a good bet.
- 6. Explain the benefit. Why should the reader care? What's in it for him?
- **7. Be concise.** The purpose of headlines and postscripts is to get your readers' attention and entice them to read the rest of what you have to say. You won't get the chance to do that if you're too wordy in your headline and P.S.



- **8. Play on your mailer's visual elements.** The headline is a great place to connect your copy to the mailer's visual elements.
- **9. Remember your purpose.** Just as designing for design's sake is a mistake as you lay out and design your mail piece, humor, wit, or anything else for its own sake is a mistake in your headline and P.S. As with every other element of your mailer, the headline and P.S. should work to help you accomplish the goal you've set out.
- **10.** When you test, test your headline and postscript. Because the headline and postscript are the most read elements of your mailer, testing changes to them (not at the same time, of course) is a good first place to start. If you're running a split test of two slightly different mailers, test different headlines to see which generates better response.

Learn from what works

There's no need to reinvent the direct mail success wheel. Taking cues from what has worked for other companies is a quick and easy way to create great headlines and postscripts that will work for you, too.

All-time-great headlines

- You Don't Have to Be Rich to Retire on a Guaranteed Income for Life
- Do You Make These Mistakes in English?
- Give Me Three Minutes a Day and I'll Give You a Better Complexion
- Here is a Method That is Helping Homeowners Save Hundreds on Insurance
- The Secret of Protecting Your Assets in Litigation
- Have a Smile You Can Be Proud Of

All-time-great postscripts

- From Ray Jutkins: **P.S.** Risk-Free Guarantee. If you choose not to subscribe just write "cancel" on the bill. You pay nothing. You owe nothing. You keep your free books no matter what.
- From Lee Marc Stein in <u>Direct</u>: **P.S.** You might describe the IHT experience as "Quality Time." It brings you news, trends and perspective from around the globe in a very focused way... and a very different way than you get from the U.S. daily paper you read now. Try the IHT for a month FREE and judge for yourself.

You don't have to write headlines and postscripts like David Ogilvy, Ray Jutkins, or Lee Marc Stein to be incredibly effective. By following these 10 tips – and learning from what works – you can boost the response rate you see on your mailers, maybe by a lot.



Step 8: Make it Personal

You've probably begun to notice a recurring theme: Cultivate an emotional connection. Speak to your prospects. Marketing giant Seth Godin has said that "People don't believe what you tell them. They rarely believe what you show them. They often believe what their friends tell them. They always believe what they tell themselves."

How do you cultivate an emotional connection, speak *to* your prospects, and get them to tell themselves *your* message? Personalization.

Ford's success story

In their December 2009 issue, <u>Deliver</u> magazine profiled a number of companies that have seen big success with personalized direct mail marketing. One was Ford Motor Co. Initially, the auto maker was using only basic personalization – its customers' names and the vehicles that they owned – to create mailers promoting its extended service contracts. But response rates wouldn't budge above 2.5%.

In order to make its mailers more personal, Ford's first step was to aggregate customer data from all of its various sources. Armed with data on vehicle type, length of ownership, address, age, income and gender, Ford "got to know" its recipients well enough to design mail pieces that really spoke to them.

"By combining the different sets of data and looking really hard at how we could connect the data with the messaging, we were able to build messages that speak to the reasons why having an extended service contract is important to different customers," marketer Jeff Sierra told *Deliver*.

Ford tested its new strategy by mailing 20,000 pieces to F-150 truck owners whose warranties were near expiration. The company tested two different mail formats: one was a black-and-white letter, and the other was a full-color self-mailer. Each format had two versions: one with the same kind of basic personalization the company had been using (such as the customer's name) and the other with more personalized content and a more targeted message based on the data the company aggregated.

Despite the fact that the test ran over one of the most difficult periods in history for U.S. carmakers, the more personalized mailers still generated a 5.7% increase in response rates and a 35.7% increase in sales penetration.

How might you implement personalization in your mailer? Consider another example, first of a mailer before personalization:



Dear Friend,

We'd like to say "thanks" for being a Yum's customer. As an appreciation of your loyalty, we'll give you 10% off your next purchase. See you soon!

If you have a relatively modest amount of data on your customers, you could personalize the mailer like so:

Dear Sam,

Can you believe that you've been shopping at Yum's since **August of 1999**? We want to thank you. As an appreciation of your loyalty, we'll give you 10% off your next **cookie** purchase. See you soon!

The personalized mailer includes the recipient's name, the date that he first became a customer and the last product that he ordered – three easy ways to make the recipient feel like you are really speaking to *him*.

Personalize with Click2Mail

Through a technology known as variable data printing, <u>Click2Mail</u> can personalize your mailer for your recipients. It works a lot like "mail merge" – you tell us where you want the recipient's "Name" or "Birthday" or "Appointment Date" (or any other personalized information) to appear. We'll pull that information from your data file and print it on the mailer for each individual recipient. It's that easy!

Of course, the personalization is only as good as your data. Ideally, you'll have kept detailed data on your customers that you can pull together into a personalized mail campaign. Click2Mail can help, too. Our <u>mailing lists</u> offer a wealth of information that you can use, first, to target particular recipients and second, to personalize your mailers.

Craft your marketing message so that it resonates so well with your target prospects they'll think they thought of the idea themselves. A targeted list that allows you to get to know your prospects is your first step. Personalizing your message for each individual recipient is your second. That, as we like to say, is smart marketing.



Step 9: Call Your Readers to Action

You crafted your offer in Step 2, now it's time to get your recipients to act on it. In the spirit of making action easy, here are five simple tips for calling readers to action in your mailer.

1. Make it easy to say yes and hard to say no. Your offer should be as close to the Godfather's can't-be-refused offer as possible, and your call to action should be, too. It has been said that a good call to action is one that only an idiot would refuse. Yet the fact is that you are asking your recipient to do something that will take time and effort.

You sweeten the deal with a great offer, but you still need to minimize the time and effort that action will take. Or you need to maximize the benefit the recipient will get from taking the action. Or, better yet, you need to do both. And by all means *tell* your prospects that you have minimized the work involved in responding to your offer and maximized the benefits of doing so.

2. Be clear. If your mail recipient is even slightly confused about what you're asking her to do, she's probably not going to do it. Too much effort. So be exceedingly clear every time you write your call to action. An easy way to ensure that your call-to-action is clear is to include the four Ws: What are you asking your mail recipient to do? Where are you asking her to do it? When? Why?

For example: What: Come in and shop. Where: The Yum's store near you (and here's a map). When: Before Friday, March 26 (when the offer expires). Why: To get 10% off your cookie purchase. So here's the call to action: Bring this coupon to the Yum's store near you (here's a map) for 10% off your cookie purchase. But hurry! This yummy offer expires on Friday, March 26.

3. Ask, ask again. There's a delicate balance in repeating your offer and your call to action often enough to be memorable but not so often that it becomes annoying. If you're sending a letter or self-mailer, you should certainly repeat your call to action at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. If you're sending a postcard, include your offer and call to action on both sides.

You can always tweak your call to action just a bit to avoid sounding like a broken record. On the back side of a postcard, for example, your call to action could be "Keep more of your hard-earned money. Call 1-800-555-5555 for your free tax analysis today." Then on the front side you say, "Are you paying too much tax? Call 1-800-555-5555 right now to find out."

4. Light a little fire. The fact is that we've all got too much to do in too little time. Even if you have a great offer and a strong call to action, unless you give your prospect a credible reason to



act right now, he might just put it off until later (which, of course, becomes never). An easy way to infuse a sense of urgency into your offer is to add an expiration date, or limit the quantity available to the first *X* number of responders.

5. Leave breadcrumbs. The ultimate goal of most direct mail is making a sale or closing a deal. But that shouldn't necessarily be your call to action. Sometimes, you need to help your prospects take baby steps. Instead of saying "Visit our website and buy our software!" Maybe your offer is a free white paper and your call to action is "Visit our website now for your free white paper. Hurry! We're reserving this special gift for our first 100 visitors."

Now, we'll practice what we preach: Visit <u>Click2Mail.com</u> right now to call your prospects to action!



Step 10: Integrate Direct Mail with Other Marketing Tools

The article in the <u>Wall Street Journal</u> said it all: "Looking to cut costs amid the recession, Alicia Settle initially thought it would be a good idea to eliminate her company's annual direct mailing. . .But after swapping snail mail for email last year, Ms. Settle saw a 25% drop in early orders compared with the same period the previous year. 'We realized we had made a huge mistake,' she said."

That doesn't mean e-mail, web marketing, and social media have no place in the marketer's toolbox – they most certainly do. No man is an island; no direct mail campaign is, either. The most successful campaigns are integrated with other marketing strategies – strategies as simple as calling prospects to follow up on a mailer or as sophisticated as personalized URLs

The key is ensuring that all of your marketing activities are working together toward a common goal. As you think about how your direct mail efforts fit in with your overall marketing, keep these 4 tips in mind.

1. Create synergies between your online and offline marketing efforts. The "death" of direct mail is a fate that has long been (erroneously) foretold. But at the same time that direct mail can still be a powerful marketing tool, every successful business needs a web presence. You can maximize the power of both your direct mail and your web marketing by allowing the two to feed off of each other.

A simple example of creating online/offline synergies is using direct mail to drive recipients to your website, where they can get more information and have a more interactive experience. In the opposite direction, you can use your website to capture visitors' names and mailing addresses (in exchange for a special report, for example), giving you yet another way to interact with your customers and prospects.

Another great, though far more complex, example of web/print cooperation is the personalized URL, or pURL. Marketers use direct mail to entice prospects to a specialized website landing page that is personalized (in much the same way that the mailer is) to further encourage a response (and to measure who responds and who doesn't).

In a recent marketing campaign for its new printer, Canon sent a self-mailer inviting recipients to attend its upcoming webinar. The mailers included a personalized URL so recipients could register online for the webinar as well as a reply card so recipients could register by mail if they preferred. The company also promoted the webinar online through social networks, including



Facebook and LinkedIn. Canon reports great attendance at its webinars, which it credits to the integrated marketing effort.

- **2.** Use e-mail and direct mail together. Calling the e-mail/direct mail combination a "one-two punch," Neil Feinstein recounted in <u>Deliver</u> magazine how his firm used the power of those two media to help a credit union increase its membership. The credit union began its campaign by sending personalized e-mails to its current members, with links to a website landing page where they could list the names and contact information of family members and colleagues that they thought should join the credit union. Then, a week after sending the e-mail, the firm sent 20,000 direct mail pieces "to reinforce the message." The result? The credit union's membership boost was 122% higher than they had expected.
- **3.** Be consistent across all of your marketing media. People like consistency. Your marketing efforts will be far more powerful if you use a coherent theme in your direct mail, your e-mail, on your website, and in your social media profiles. At the very least you should use the same logo, color scheme, and tagline in your direct mail as you do online. Even better, create a unified marketing "concept" that is reflected in your layout, your graphics, and your copy both online and off.

Maintaining a consistent look and feel is partly about building your brand (think about how some company's colors and images have become incredibly recognizable cultural icons). But it's also about giving your mail recipients the sense that the mailer is connected to a bigger picture.

4. Ask how your customers want to be contacted. The absolute best move you can make is to communicate with your customers and prospects in the ways they want to be communicated with. Don't assume, ask. You'll find that communicating with your customers and prospects *on their terms* will boost the effectiveness of your communications and engender a huge amount of goodwill (and loyalty).

Listing 4 reasons why direct mail can thrive in the digital age, Ethan Boldt wrote in <u>Target Marketing</u>, "1. What Is Old Can Be New Again. 2. Mail May Be Old, but It's Wise. 3. Each Channel Has Its Strengths, Marketers Just Need to Play to Them. 4. In Some Markets, Online Remains Small Potatoes."

At <u>Click2Mail</u> we make our living through direct mail, it's true. But we know that other kinds of marketing can be incredibly effective. And we want to help you get the most from the money you spend on direct mail. Do that through integrated marketing – by combining direct mail with web marketing, e-mail, and social media. Every media has its place in the marketer's toolbox. The real power is in using all of those tools together.



Step 11: Test, Measure, Repeat

"I know that half of my advertising is wasted," said entrepreneur John Wanamaker. "I just don t know which half." The beauty of direct mail compared to other types of marketing and advertising is that measuring your results is incredibly easy. That easy measurability allows you to perfect your direct mail campaigns – by testing, measuring, tweaking, and then testing again.

The ability to test, measure, and perfect your direct mail marketing is hugely important today – in a tight economy where every last penny counts, you can't afford to be "wasting" half of your marketing dollars (or, at least, not knowing the return they're generating).

Measuring and testing is a can't-lose – even in the worst case, if you realize that your direct mail isn't working as well as it could, you'll be able to create mailers that *do* generate the results you expect. In the best case, you'll realize that your direct mail is fabulously successful – that'll be a fun conversation to have with the boss!

How to set up a test

"In direct mail," said marketing great David Ogilvy, "testing is the name of the game." How you can test your direct mail depends in large part on how many mail pieces you send. If you're sending small volumes – say, a few hundred pieces – you probably won't be able to test two versions of your mailer at the same time and get reliable results.

In that case, do your best (using the first 10 *Steps to Direct Mail Success*) to set up a great direct mail campaign. Send it out and measure the results. Then wait a month or so, tweak your strategy (see *Elements to test and tweak* below) and send out another round of mail. Measure the results, compare them to your first mailing, then pick the mailer that generates the best response (or, better yet, tweak and test again).

If you're running a sequential test like that to the same list, bear in mind that your response rate on the second mailer will almost surely be higher simply because you're mailing to that recipient for the second time (repetition works). Remember, too, that a number of other factors not related to your mailer can affect its response (what's going on in the world at the time, for example). Still, running a sequential test is well worth your while – it will give you an idea of what you can change in your mail piece to increase results.

If you have, or can get, a larger group of addresses, you can run what's called a split or A/B test, which is far more "scientific" and will give you a better idea about what part of your strategy is working and what isn't. In a split test you can perfect your direct mail campaign through the process of elimination. To start, choose one element in your mailer to test (see *Elements to test and tweak* below).



Create two versions of your mailer that are the same in every way except for that one element. Randomly split your list in two and mail one version of the mailer to one half and the other version to the other half. Whichever version pulls the best response, that element wins – you should use it on all of your subsequent mailings. If you want, you can keep running split tests to perfect other elements of your mailer.

How to measure your results

Increasing results. . . what does that mean? The first step in determining how well your direct mail is working is to measure response – how many people do what you've asked them to do in the mailer?

You should think about how you're going to measure your response as you create your mail piece. The easiest way to do that, whether you're asking people to call, click, or visit, is to tie a special code in with your offer. If your offer is a coupon for 10% off, include a coupon code unique to that mail campaign. If your offer is a free phone consultation, again, include a special code the caller will need to give to the consultant. If you want to get really fancy, you can include personalized URLs (which are unique to each mail recipient) to see exactly who is visiting your website in response to the mailer.

If you're running a split test, make sure that you can measure responses from each version of your mailer separately (so even if you're not testing the coupon, for example, you should have two coupon codes).

As long as you have a system in place to measure the number of people responding to your mail campaign, calculating your response rate is simple – take the total number of responses you got divided by the total number of mailers you sent and multiply by 100.

But you shouldn't stop there. Your response rate will tell you how well your mail piece worked to generate recipients' action. It won't tell you how much that response will add to your bottom line. To do that, you'll need to measure the return on your investment, or ROI, which articulates the relationship between what the direct mail campaign cost you and how much you earned as a result.

Calculate your ROI by taking the dollar amount of sales attributed to the campaign, dividing by the total cost of the direct mail campaign (including the list, the design and copy, the printing, the mailing), and multiplying by 100. For example, a home renovations company spent \$6,000 on a direct mail postcard campaign. They got \$100,000 in new contracts from people who had received the postcards. So their return was 1667%.



Elements to test and tweak

The point of measuring the results of your direct mail is not to make yourself feel great if the results are good and bad if they're not. The point is to enable you to tweak, improve – perfect – your mail campaign. Whatever kind of test you're running (sequential to the same list or at the same time to a split list), test only one element of your mailer at a time (otherwise, you won't know what's responsible for different response rates).

"Experienced practitioners always test some variables, but seldom those which experience has taught them make little difference in results," wrote David Ogilvy, who was truly a direct response genius. The most likely candidates for testing and tweaking (in order) are:

- **Price and terms of payment.** Is your service \$65 per year or \$64.99 per year? Or \$5.99 a month?
- **The offer.** Do customers get a free gift with purchase? Or 10% off? Do visitors to your website get to download a free white paper? Or attend a free webinar? Are callers entered into a drawing for a big prize?
- **Format.** Large postcard? Self-mailer? Long letter? You can test them all with Click2Mail.
- *Call to action.* Should recipients call you on the phone? Or register on your website? Come into your store?
- **Headline and P.S.** How do you draw readers into your text? How do you highlight the offer, its benefits, and your call to action?
- **The list.** Testing different lists, and how you segment and target recipients based on those lists, can make a big difference. One great feature of <u>Click2Mail's mailing lists</u> is our minimum order requirement of just 100 records (a much smaller requirement than other list providers), which makes testing easy and affordable.

Which half of your marketing dollars are put to good use? Or are you maximizing the return on every penny you spend? David Ogilvy put it best: "Only testing will tell. The more you test, the more profitable your direct mail will become." Remember, Click2Mail can help.



Step 12: Send, Send Again

By this point in the *Steps to Direct Mail Success* you have all of the tools you need to create mail pieces that generate great results. Once you've done that, the final step to ultimate direct mail success is simple: keep on mailing.

Think about how many times you get renewal notices on your magazine subscriptions. Why do publishers send what seems like 50 million mail pieces asking for your renewal? Because repetition works. As John D. Rockefeller said, "I do not think there is any quality so essential to success of any kind as the quality of perseverance. It overcomes almost anything, even nature."

Put the "Send, Send Again" principle to work for you in three ways.

1) In the course of a single campaign, continue sending mail to non-responders. Statistics show that a small percentage of sales are made the first time you contact your prospect. A greater percentage are made on the second, third, and fourth contacts. But the largest percentage of prospects become customers only after you've mailed to them five times or more.

On your second and subsequent mailings to non-responders, escalate your call to action and the urgency with which you're asking recipients to respond. In your final mailer, tell the recipient that this is the last time you will mail this offer to them (that may be just the little kick they need).

- **2)** Develop a direct mail system for communicating with customers through the sales cycle. Your first communication asks unknown prospects to step forward and show interest. Your second mailer thanks them for the interest and recommends they become a customer. Your third mailer thanks them for becoming a customer and suggests additional products and services they may like to try. And so on.
- **3)** Unless a customer asks, never stop mailing to her. Your best prospects are your current customers. Even if a customer hasn't bought from you in a while, maintain your relationship by sending periodic mail maybe an announcement about a great new product or service he may be interested in or maybe a simple card on the anniversary of the date he became a customer. . the point is to stay in touch.

Click2Mail makes it easy to create automated systems for staying in touch with your prospects and customers – you can <u>schedule mailings</u> in the Click2Mail system up to 180 days in advance.



As direct response copywriter Ivan Levinson said, "Keep on mailing until you stop making money. Unless you keep getting back to your prospects and customers, you may be leaving money on the table. A lot of money."



Conclusion - Go Forth and Mail!

At the end of the day, the goal of all marketing is to educate people about what you're offering so that they take the offer. As marketer Robert Allen said, "No matter what your product is, you are ultimately in the education business. Your customers need to be constantly educated about the many advantages of doing business with you, trained to use your products more effectively, and taught how to make never-ending improvement in their lives."

Direct mail can help you do that. Following these 12 steps will make it a success.

And remember, with easy, affordable mail solutions, Click2Mail can help.