

How to stop your DIRECT Mail turning into JUNK Mail

Your company is great. The best business, with the best products or services, anywhere in the UK. Your sales people are more dedicated, your engineers are more skilled and your commitment to customer service is second to none. Fact.

Your customers should know this, because they will already be working with you and developing relationships with your team. But as the evangelists say, "What of those who have never heard?".

Time for the direct approach. The term 'Direct Marketing' is an ambiguous one and can refer to a variety of methods including things like email or telemarketing, but what most people think of first is direct mail, or in fact 'junk mail'. Although we are business people, we exist in a consumer world as well, and the 10th letter on the mat that month from Readers Digest or Barclaycard is enough to make anyone nervous about being responsible for sending such items.

But direct mail doesn't have to be a bad thing. Think about the junk mail you receive at home. What annoys you? It's the non-relevant and obviously inappropriate stuff that is sent out 'blanket' fashion to thousands of people. Pet Insurance when all you have is just the one goldfish, or stair-lifts when you are the most senior member of the household and it's your 40th next week! But what about something that's actually of interest, which arrives just when you need it? A different story altogether.

Business to business direct mail can fall into this category if you've got a good database and have properly researched your target audience first. Instead of sending thousands, you can just send hundreds, or maybe even a handful, but to the right people, as close to the right time as you can possibly manage, for a fraction of the cost.

But the importance of contacting these people accurately cannot be overlooked, as accuracy can make all the difference to the success of any direct mail campaign. In a previous role, working for a company called SDX Business Systems, I received a mailer containing a free sample from a company trying to sell me personalised pens for use as give-aways. Unfortunately no-one had checked the spelling of the company name on their database and although the sample I received was personalised in very pretty gold letters, it said "SDX Buisness Systems plc". Not much use to anyone – and it certainly guaranteed that they didn't make a sale from me, then or in the future.

It's also worth remembering that people's job titles change all the time. It's often very hard to keep up with the changes, and you don't want to be mailing 'John Smith - IT Manager' when he just got promoted to IT Director last week! So, whilst you need to include a job title on your database for your own reference, you don't need to include it as part of the address on the mailer. It will still get to the right person and you can ensure that there's no risk of it being incorrect.

And never fall into the trap of committing the worst crime of all. A blanket mailing to 'The IT Director', with no name, in the forlorn hope that some may end up in the right place and will actually be opened. It's a clear indicator to your prospect audience that you didn't bother to take the time to find out even the most basic details about their business before contacting them.

So, you have a target audience and you have exactly the right details with which to contact them. But what comes next? The 'envelope vs postcard' debate, or the 'plain envelope vs branded envelope' debate, followed by the 'shall I put a covering letter with the mailer or not?' debate! There are pros and cons to all of these and decisions should be made after taking advice from experienced marketers. The right answer may well be different for each campaign you run. But I will let you into one little secret . . .

Assuming you like the envelope idea, don't you find that cheques usually come in a plain, handwritten one with a real stamp on? So tell me if anyone is going to throw one of those in the bin without opening it . . .