

# Get the Most Out of Direct Mail

By Brian Gallagher

**F**or many companies, direct mail is just another marketing tool. With proper planning and execution, business-to-business direct mail can be the best tool in your marketing arsenal.

Whether your marketing budget is small or large, direct mail can be a very effective method for reaching your target audience. As with any project, several elements must come together to ensure your direct mail initiative is a success. By following these steps, you will be on your way.

## Define Your Goals and Objectives

Before you start any direct mail campaign, develop a plan. Define what you want to achieve and how you intend to achieve it.

## Get the Mail Opened

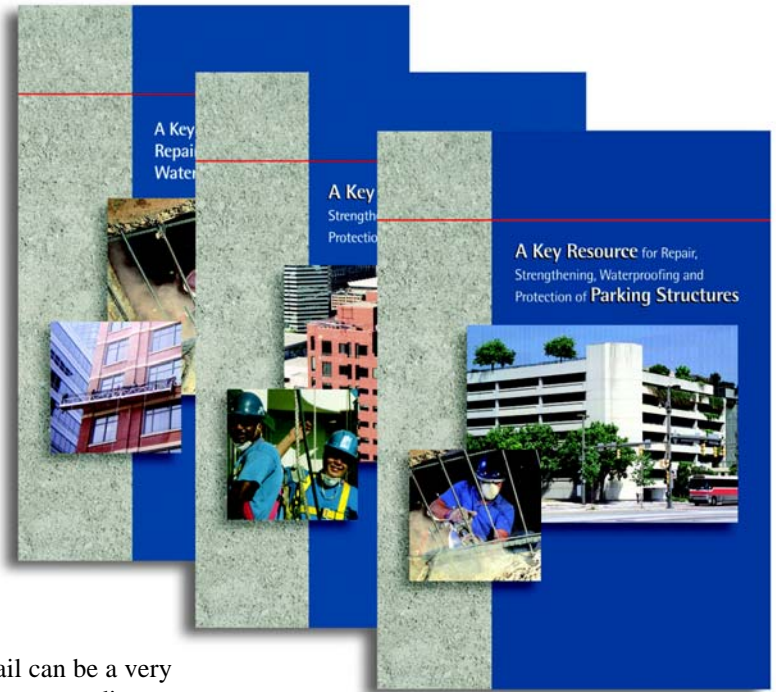
Enticing a prospect to open your envelope or self-mailer is often the most difficult job. The exterior of your piece must beg to be opened. The most effective ways to do this are to make a valuable offer and use interesting colors and graphics or a catchy teaser or line.

## Make an Offer of Value to Your Prospect

Because your primary goal is to get a response, your offer must be very compelling. You should push the target's hot buttons. The offer can be a discount on product or services, a free premium item, or simply additional information. Whatever your offer, be sure to make it something of value to the prospect. By making the offer time-dated, you can often move the prospect to action.

## Tailor the Message

With direct mail, you can speak personally to an individual. Messages can be tailored to specific audiences based on a number of factors. For example, you may not want to deliver the same



message to an engineer, a property manager, a school superintendent, and a hospital facility manager. By understanding what is important to your prospects, you can communicate with them more effectively.

## Get Your Prospect Involved

Your piece must cut through the clutter. Creative execution is critical to getting your piece opened, but it doesn't stop there. What good does it do to have your piece opened and quickly thrown in the trash? To keep your prospect's attention, you need to involve your prospect. The more you can intrigue your prospect, the more likely your prospect is to respond.

## Give the Prospect Several Options for Responding

Now that you have their attention and interest, don't blow it. Make it easy to respond. Make sure your direct mail piece includes at least two of the following: a business reply card or envelope, a toll-free phone number, a fax number, an e-mail address, or a website.

## Select the Right List

While many companies spend significant marketing dollars on creativity and design, they overlook the most critical element of a direct mail campaign: the list. Mailing a great piece with a great offer to the wrong prospects will only bring disappointment. Direct mail is most effective when precisely targeting prospects with the highest propensity to purchase your product or service. When selecting your list, target prospects with a



profile similar to your current customers. Databases and data profiling can help you identify and reach your audience. Lists can be from internal databases, list brokers, publications, or trade associations.

## Timing

When you mail can be as important as what you mail. Various industries may be subject to cycles and seasons. By researching your target prospects, you may be able to more effectively reach your targets when they have a need for your products or services.

## Mail Frequently

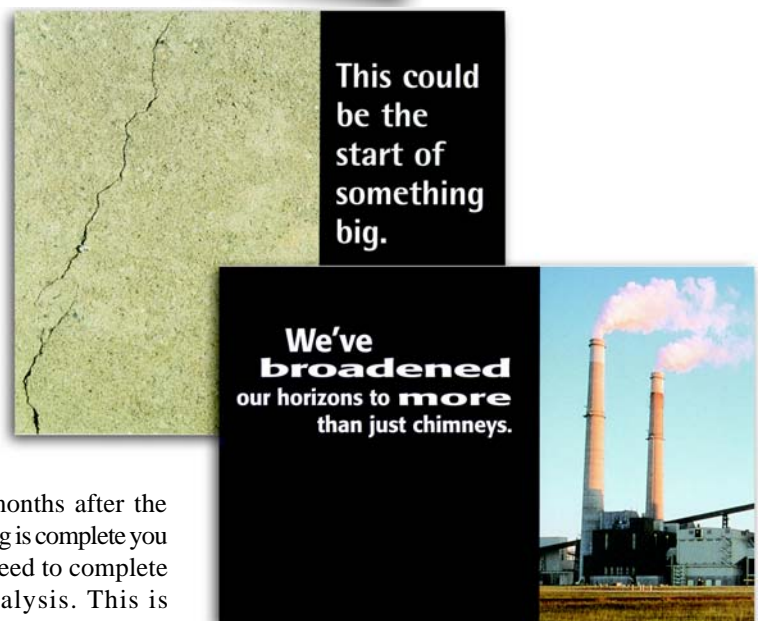
Direct mail programs with multiple waves are the most effective. Repetition and timing are essential to getting your message across to your prospects. Research demonstrates that prospects may not respond until after their second or third exposure to an offer.

## Synergize Your Efforts

Direct mail should be part of a synergistic approach to communicating with your audience. Coordination of direct mail, advertising, trade show participation, e-mail marketing, public relations, and other marketing initiatives will increase awareness and response.

## Don't Forget to Measure

Before you start any mail project, make sure it makes economic sense. Your ultimate goal is to generate inquiries that will turn into profitable revenue. Start by estimating the response you will need to cover your expenses. Like other functions within your company, marketing and direct mail must generate a return on investment (ROI). Determine your expected ROI by dividing your expected incremental revenue by your costs. A



few months after the mailing is complete you will need to complete an analysis. This is where you determine if the mailing was

successful. The analysis should include how many inquiries were generated, how many leads were qualified, how many proposals were generated, and how many sales were made. This information is valuable to determining the successfulness of your program.

Whether you are a manufacturer, distributor, contractor, or engineer, understanding the elements of a direct mail program is imperative. By taking a pragmatic approach, you can get the most out of your investment and make direct mail your company's most effective marketing tool.



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