# idea F|I|L|E

## This Issue

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# The 3 Essential Elements of Direct Mail Marketing

Despite the popularity of e-marketing—e-mail campaigns, SMS messaging and social media—direct mail is still a proven way to generate new business from existing customers and identify potential new customers. Used correctly, direct mail can generate leads, communicate with customers, build name recognition or brand awareness, and build traffic.

A strong direct mail program is built on three essential elements. In this issue of the *Idea File* we'll explain the importance of each one.

## Element #1: The mail list

According to the Direct Marketing Association, the mailing list accounts for 60% of the response to a direct mail program. That's greater than the influence of the offer and the design combined. The best response rate comes from mailing to those who are already familiar with your business or organization. This can be your customers (active and inactive), prospects who have contacted you for some reason, and referrals from customers or friends.

A list you put together yourself consisting of customers, prospects and referrals is known as a house list. A house list can be compiled from customer purchase transactions, donor records, membership rosters and similar sources. In general, a house list produces a higher response rate than a purchased list because so many of the individuals on the list already know who you are.

If you want to expand your house list by adding a purchased list, a good technique is to submit the house list for data append. This adds demographic information (such as household income, gender of the head of household, home value, presence of children for residences, annual sales volume, number of employees, and SIC code for businesses). Data append creates a profile of those on your house list; the profile can then be used to select prospects whose profile is a match.

After the list is compiled, it is important to engage in some data hygiene—establishing a structure for the mailing list that allows each element to be in its own separate field, sized appropriately for the data. A very simple structure for a mail list is first name, last name, street address, city, state and ZIP code. It also means that all names are spelled correctly, addresses are accurate, up to date, and conform to the United States Postal Service (USPS) standards for abbreviation and punctuation, and there are no duplicates.

## Element #2: The mail piece

The mail piece uses design and text (also called copy) to deliver the message, make the offer, and tell the reader what to do next. On average, a reader will spend only seven seconds looking at the mail piece before deciding what to do with it—read it now, set it aside to read later, or discard it. An eye-catching design uses those seven seconds to direct the reader to the important elements of the copy. Because the design and art attract while the copy does the actual selling, it is a good idea to write the copy first. The design can be fit to the copy, to lead the reader to the key points and a response.

Strong copy informs, persuades, convinces and motivates the reader, often by using an offer. The offer could be a discount, a free gift, a gift with purchase, or something else of value to the reader. A strong offer is concise and easy to understand, has high-perceived value, and emphasizes benefits over features. Strong copy usually includes a call to action—wording that tells the reader what to do next. The call to action may also give a time frame for acting, known as creating a sense of *urgency*.

Not all direct mail marketing campaigns are launched for the purpose of generating sales leads. Other reasons for sending something through the mail include increasing name recognition or brand awareness, providing information, and making announcements.

In general, we recommend that the mail piece be designed in full color. Digital equipment has made full-color printing affordable in small quantities, which allows the design to include stock photography. Alternately, a stark black-and-white design can create a dramatic contrast to full-color pieces, provided it is well designed and printed on good, quality stock.

Here are some additional elements that all direct mail marketing pieces should include:

- *The benefits to the recipient*. Persuasive copy for a direct mail marketing piece tells the recipient what he ultimately wants to know—what's in it for me. Translate product and service features to benefits; overcome problems or fear with a solution; appeal to emotion—just remember to clearly state why the recipient should continue to read the mail piece or take the action you recommend.

- *Response device*. A coupon, request for information card, QR code, personalized URL, and dedicated phone number are all examples of a response device. The response device allows the customer to act quickly and easily.

- *Your company name, logo and contact information.* Your company name and logo are important for establishing name recognition or brand awareness. However, they are not normally placed in a dominant position on the mail piece. Save that location for a reader benefit statement. Be sure that contact information is easy to find and contiguous to the call to action.

- *Return address.* Adding a return address implies that your business or organization is established and is committed to transparency in its communications. A return address, when used with the proper endorsement for mail that is undeliverable as addressed, will enable you to keep your mailing list current.

## Element #3: The schedule

The best marketing results come from using direct mail consistently and regularly. In fact, you can think of direct mail marketing as a never-ending activity—either a series of individual campaigns to promote a product or service, or a way to keep your name in front of customers and prospects, and establish familiarity and name recognition for your business. Regular mailings also allow you to tell your company's story and highlight individual products and services. Finally, regular mailings mean you are putting your contact information in the hands of prospects and customers again and again. You aren't relying on them to remember, keep, or find the contact information.

Keep your expectations about response rates realistic. For example, don't expect a single mailing to produce spectacular results. Successful direct mail marketing is based on cumulative effect. If your budget allows you to mail 5000 pieces, it is better to mail three times to a list of 1600 rather than one time to a list of 5000. The mailings should be closely spaced (3-4 weeks apart), and can use the same mail piece.

The ideal number of mailings in a single campaign is either three or seven, mailed close enough together to build recognition in the mind of the recipient. Studies show that the cumulative response spikes after three mailings, then reaches a point of diminishing return until the seventh mailing, then spikes again.

## Use direct mail as a marketing tool

Direct mail is a proven technique for generating leads, identifying prospects, and selling products and services. We are experts at mail list management, mail piece design, and running an effective direct mail campaign. To learn more about what we can offer you, call [RepFullName] at [RepPhone]. You won't be disappointed.

Response rate—the "make or break" test of a direct mail campaign—is broadly influenced by three factors: the mail list, the offer and the mail piece. Of these three, the most important is the mail list, which accounts for approximately 60% of the response, while the offer and mail piece account for about 20% each.

However, many other factors can also affect response. The uniqueness of your product or service, its price, whether it is a seasonal product, the image you project, how creatively you engage the audience, and how consistently you mail, all play a role in determining response rate.

Another important factor is the size of the mailing itself. A response rate of 1% applied to a mailing of 50,000 yields 500 responses. The same response rate applied to a 1000-piece mailing yields 10 responses.
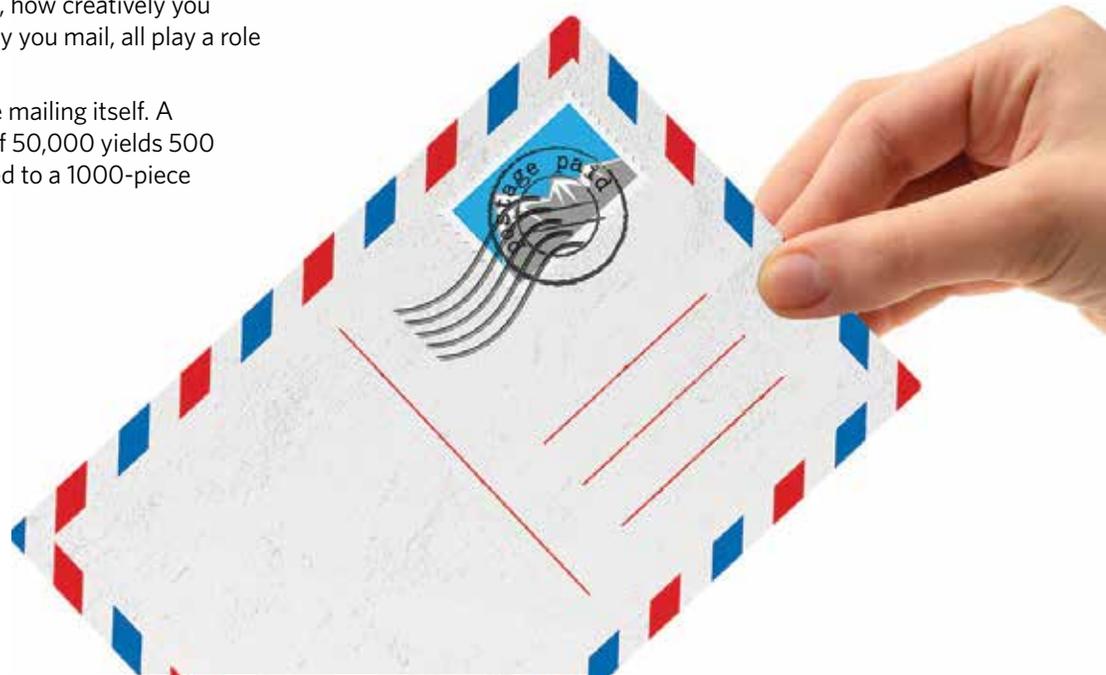
## Q

*I'm tired of 4x6 inch and 5 ½ x 8 ½ inch post cards. Can you suggest other sizes?*

## a

Yes, we can. We like 6x9 inches (half an inch higher and wider than the popular 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 inch post card) because it "sticks out" from within a stack of mail. An even more compelling size is a giant post card measuring a full 6 1/8 x 11 1/2 inches. And because the USPS considers any size between 4 1/4 x 6 and 6 1/8 x 11 1/2 inches to be letter-sized mail, all three sizes of post cards—popular, oversized and giant—mail at the same postage rate. Remember to use stock with a higher base weight to satisfy the USPS standards for thickness, stiffness and tear strength.
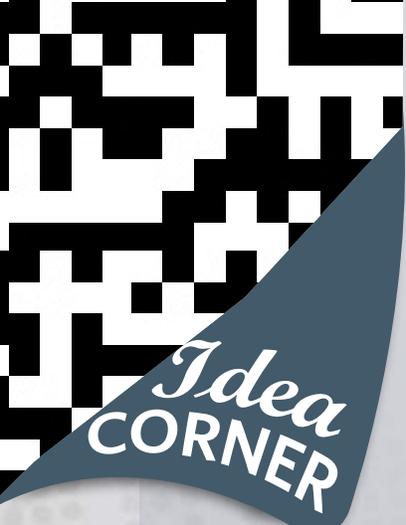
**Idea CORNER**

QR codes are the way to connect printed words to e-media. By scanning the QR code with a smart phone, a consumer is using their phone as a response device. Unlike print-based response devices, this is one with immediate impact. Within seconds, the consumer views the marketing message and perhaps continuing interaction with the site. This interaction has benefits for the business: each respondent's interaction can be quantified and tracked.

If there is any doubt about whether QR codes will be important to—marketing in the future, consider these statistics. According to comScore, Inc., in the three-month period ending November 2012, 123.3 million people in the United States owned smart phones—a 53% mobile market penetration. Even more surprising, a study published in December 2012 by the Centers for Disease Control revealed that one-third of American homes (35.8%) had only wireless phones during the first half of 2012, and 15.9% of all households had both landline and wireless phones. However, all or almost all calls were received on the wireless phones. That means that over half of all U.S. homes either didn't have or didn't use landlines in the first half of 2012.

To make the most of QR codes, use these tips:

- Have a reason for the customer to scan the QR code—don't include it unless there's a reason.
- Entice the customer to use the QR code. Provide an incentive beyond curiosity to motivate the customer such as coupons, prizes or information.
- Optimize display and content for mobile phones.

# VOCAB OF THE *Graphic* ARTS

**AIDA:** an acronym for *Attention*, *Interest*, *Desire*, *Action*, the four sequential steps of direct mail marketing copy.

**Compile:** to assemble information collected from a variety of sources. Mail lists offered for rental are compiled from publicly-available sources and need to be varied before use.

**Database:** a comprehensive collection of related data organized for convenient access, generally in a computer. A database is analogous to an electronic filing system.

**Deduping:** The removal of data from a mailing list where that information appears more than once.

**Demographics:** the characteristics of a population, either individual or business. Commonly-used demographics include gender, race, age, income, disabilities, education, home ownership. Also called *demographic data*.

**EDDM:** an acronym for Every Door Direct Mail, a program of the USPS, consisting of a mailing sent to every dwelling unit (house, apartment, condominium or mobile home) and business in a specific geographic area.

**Field:** in a database, a space allocated for one item of information. Fields are the smallest unit of information that can be accessed. In spreadsheets, fields are called *cells*.

**House list:** an internally-developed mail list consisting of the customers, members or donors of a business or organization. A house list can also contain contact information for prospects who match the demographic profile of customers.

**Prospect:** in selling, an individual, company, or organization that has been qualified as a potential customer.

**Record:** in a database, a record holds all the information about one item or subject. Records are composed of fields; a set of records constitutes a file.

**Response device:** an enclosure in a direct mail piece that allows the recipient to respond to the offer.

**Response rate:** the percentage of inquiries or other responses resulting from a mailing.

**Suspect:** in selling, an individual, company, or organization that fits the marketing profile but has not yet been qualified as a potential customer.

**Suppression file:** a specific list of people who are not to be sent promotional mail, such as marketer's current customers, bad debt customers, people who have requested not to receive direct mail promotions, and the DMA's Mail Preference Service List.

# STYLE GUIDE

## HYPHEN VS. DASH

There are actually three hyphen-like characters: The hyphen itself, the en dash and the em dash, with specific rules when you should use each one:

### Hyphen

- Used as an automatically-generated dash when a multi-syllable word breaks at the end of a line
- Use the hyphen to link compound modifiers and other hyphenated words (Catherine Zeta-Jones)
- Use it for telephone numbers (e.g. 800-555-1212)
- Do not put a space before or after a hyphen

### En Dash

- Use as a substitute for "through" (1990–2000)
- Do not use with "from" ( I attended college 1996–2000, not from 1996–2000)
- No space before or after an en dash

### Em Dash

- Use it to signify an abrupt change of meaning or thought in a sentence (The em dash—a long dash used to separate a thought in a sentence—is twice as long as an en dash.)
- Do not put a space before or after an em dash

## AVOID UNDERLINES

The underline is a visual relic of the typewriter age. The typeset equivalent is italic.

## ITS VS. IT'S

*It's a dog eating its dog food.*

*It's* is a contraction, a combination of the pronoun it and either the verb is or has. Examples of contractions: He'd and they're. Use *its*, without the apostrophe, to refer to a possessive, like hers or his. Though most possessives (Jimmy's, for example) use an apostrophe, *its* does not.

## ELLIPSIS...

Use an ellipsis to replace omitted text. These dot-dot-dots are subject to their own grammar rules that are often overlooked. If words are omitted at the end of a sentence, use an ellipsis followed by a period. If sentences are omitted between other sentences within a quotation, use an ellipsis after the period.

## QUOTES VS. INCH MARKS

Typewriters didn't differentiate between quotes and the inch symbol, but fonts do. Unfortunately, keyboards do not have a smart quote key. You have to know how to access the right character. To make it easier, a number of word processing and layout programs support smart quotes. With smart quotes, straight quotes convert automatically to open-close quote pairs—if you manually type text.

## [BRACKETS] VS. (PARENTHESES)

Brackets are used to enclose explanatory material inserted into a quotation by someone other than the original writer or person being quoted [I did not know that! –Editor].

Use parentheses (the marks surrounding this) as a way to provide an additional or alternative explanation of the subject at hand: The record low for July 9 was 60° (15°C).

Acronyms are good examples of when to use parentheses: Canadian Anti-Spam Law (CASL).

## SPELL OUT NUMBERS UNDER 11

The rule for numbers: Spell out numbers when they are less than ten, and use numerals for numbers 11 and above. Always spell out numbers when they begin a sentence (Four score and seven years ago), except for calendar years (1776). Use numerals for percents (5%), time (8 minutes; 3:00 pm) and ages (the baby will be 6 months old tomorrow).

## COLONS AND SEMI-COLONS

Use semi-colons to connect two closely–related sentences and avoid run-ons. Do not capitalize the word following a semi-colon. Rely on a colon when announcing a list or as a way to transition to a similar point of focus. Unlike the semi-colon, capitalize the initial letter of a word immediately following a colon: Use colons and semi-colons just like this; don't worry, this is the right way!

## AVOID DOUBLE SPACING

Never use double spacing to separate sentences. It is an outdated holdover from the days of the typewriter. Double spaces create gaps in paragraph spacing and make them jump around the page. Layout and word processing software require only one space. Use just one space after periods, colons, exclamation points, question and quotation marks, etc. With the space bar, less is definitely more.

# Preparing Files for Print: The PDF Standard

Originally developed for office communication use, the PDF file format is now the world standard for electronic document exchange. A PDF file's unique characteristic—the ability to exist independent of the hardware, software and operating system used to create it—allows file creators to share documents as well as to keep them secure from modification.

PDF version 1.0, an internal project of Adobe Systems conceived by founder Dr. John Warnock and based on the page description language PostScript, was first announced at Comdex Fall 1992 where it won the "Best of Comdex" award. After years of continuous improvement, and in recognition of the power of PDF for document exchange, Adobe relinquished control of PDF to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 2008.

For printers, PDFs solve many problems associated with using customer-prepared files. Before PDF, printers had difficulty opening and preparing files that were created using multiple software programs and containing fonts not owned by the printer. This led to delays in getting on press, extra cost for file repair, and frustration for both customers and the printer.

By using PDF as the standard for submitting files, customers can use any platform and their favorite software program to create files. Printers can accept the files and prepare them for output to press plates or for digital printing knowing that the finished page images will be what the customer expects.

## A good PDF file begins with a good native file

As versatile as a PDF file is, the final printed product will only be as good as the native application file. A PDF created from a poorly-designed file containing low-resolution photographs or graphics and typographical or grammatical errors will still have these flaws. A PDF created from a file that has no allowance for bleeds (i.e., an image that extends beyond the trim line) or finishing functions (binding, drilling, saddle stitching, etc.) will still need to be repaired and resubmitted.

Here are a few tips to help you create good, native application files:

- Set the page size equal to the document's final page size after trimming.
- Set the live print area of the page to create a minimum of 1/4 inch (0.25) of white space on top, bottom and side margins.
- Extend any image that will bleed to beyond the trim line. The standard allowance for a bleed is 1/8 inch (0.125). If the final size of the printed piece is 8.5 x 11, then set the document size at 8.75 x 11.25, set trim marks at 8.5 x 11, and extend the image that will bleed .0125 inches past the trim lines.
- Set trim, score and fold marks outside live print area.
- Make allowances for finishing operations such as folding, drilling and binding.
- Use images of 300 dpi resolution at the size they will appear in the document. Lower resolutions produce pixelated images; higher resolutions increase file size without improving the print quality.
- Use Tagged Image File Format (TIFF) for photographs rather than JPEG or GIF.
- If printing a color photograph in black, save as grayscale before placing the image in the document.
- Crop images in an image editor such as Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator.
- Set screens and tints at a minimum of 5% and maximum of 95%.
- Use the correct color space for output (CMYK or Pantone for offset printing).
- Delete blank pages before creating the PDF.
- Use the right native application. For complex page layout, use printing-standard programs like InDesign or Quark XPress. Use Publisher and Word for simple layouts such as one-page flyers. Avoid using non-page layout programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, PowerPoint or Excel.

## Preparing a PDF file for print

Before a PDF file can be used for printing, it must go through a process called *preflight.* There are two parts to preflight. *Content preflight*, completed by the customer, confirms that all necessary components of the file are present, including placed graphic images, fonts, bleeds, and correct color assignment. Content preflight also includes spell check and proofing.

*Technical preflight*, completed by the printer, examines how the file is constructed, and assesses whether it is ready for *raster image processing*—converting fonts, line art and photographs into dots. During technical preflight, we check image resolution, color assignment, color separations, allowance for bleeds, trapping values, trim and paper sizes. We also impose multi-page documents into *printer spreads* so that pages will backup correctly, or put more than one image on a page when the finished size is less than the size of the press sheet.

Technical preflight may reveal problems with the file that will compromise quality or prevent raster image processing. It is our policy to complete technical preflight and report the results to you within 24 hours of receiving the file. We'll let you know if the file passed preflight and has been scheduled for printing, or if we uncovered a problem. If there's an easy fix, we'll give you the cost of repair so you can approve, or you can ask to have the file returned so you can fix it yourself.

Please be aware that there are some problems that we consider *fatal flaws* that we'll always ask you to repair before resubmitting the file. One example is an RGB color space when the file will be used for offset printing. This is because we want you to view the color after converting to CMYK or spot color to be sure it is acceptable. Other fatal flaws are lack of the 1/8 inch allowance for images that bleed and low resolution images. It is very helpful when submitting a PDF file that you let us know about anything that intentionally deviates from standards—like a low-resolution, pixelated image included for artistic effect, so we will not count this as a fatal flaw.

## Allowing for finishing operations

Some documents, like brochures or booklets, require additional work after printing that must be taken into account during file preparation. Here are the allowances for folding, drilling and booklet binding.

- *Folding*. To produce a completely flat and even fold, the size of panels that fold in must be slightly smaller. To compute the adjustment mathematically, determine the width of a single panel if all were the same size, reduce the width of the panel that folds in by at least 1/8 inch (or more, depending on the thickness of the paper being used for the job), divide by two and add that amount to each of the outside panels. In addition, the position of the inside panel changes from the front to the reverse.

- *Drilling*. When the finished product requires drilling (holes), allowance needs to be made in the margins. We recommend a 1/2 inch clear space on an 8.5 x 11 sheet. Shift the margin to the right for one-sided pages; for two-sided pages, shift right for odd-numbered and left for even-numbered pages.

- *Booklet making*. Booklets consisting of more than two or three flat press sheets folded into a booklet are subject to *shingling*— the effect of having each folded *signature* (i.e., multiple finished pages on a press sheet) wrapping around all previous signatures. After binding, the opposite edge is trimmed to produce an even edge. Without an allowance for this trim, it is possible that text, page numbers or other images may be trimmed away. Though paper thickness and the total number of signatures affect the allowance, you can use this rule of thumb when the booklet is 16 pages or less: subtract 1/32 inch from the face margin with each successive, interior signature. This means move everything 1/32 inch toward the gutter margin.

## Unleash the power of PDF

We hope this discussion will help you prepare perfect, print-ready PDF files. If you find you have questions, call [RepFullName] at [RepPhone].

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## This Issue

# idea FILE

**Visions, Inc. easy-to-use online order management tool features:**

- A centralized repository for static and customizable files which streamlines the print procurement process

- Easy, web-based uploading of files

- Automated job submission resulting in precise and flawless print instructions

- Customizable online catalogs that contain marketing collateral, business forms, non-printed promotional items, and a wide variety of printed or branded communication materials on a single site

- Variable data templates with the ability to create personalized marketing communications based on individual customer information

- Hassle-free reorders

- Order tracking, cost and order history

- A secure environment

Contact [RepName] at [RepPhone] or [Repemail] to schedule a personal demonstration.