

24 Principles Of Direct Marketing

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24 Principles Of Direct Marketing

1. There are four important elements in a "Direct Mail Package" and close attention must be paid to each: (Before anything, of course, comes the essential "idea" since the conceptual strategy is still key.)

- a) the graphics (carrier) which must be opened by reader - i.e., "what does it look like?"
- b) the offer: the way the proposition is phrased - i.e. "what's the deal?"
- c) the copy: the compelling description that gets the reader to buy or act - i.e. "how is it said?"
- d) the list: the targeted audience most likely willing to buy or act - i.e. "who is it sent to?"

2. Perhaps the most important element is the list since an excellent offer, with a striking carrier and compelling copy - if mailed to wrong list - can be a disaster. Others believe copy is most important, but don't let ranking bother you since each element is important. Take all reasonable steps to get, use and keep the most accurate and up-to-date lists possible to increase your margin of success. Set up a system to add names and keep'em current.

3. Heed "Daly's Law" - "Everything takes longer and costs more!" So, it's wise to start project in ample time to make all elements come together in easy manner. Use "reverse timetable" to plot what needs to be done and when. For instance, you probably need to order lists first. Then, don't forget the envelopes, printed stock, other enclosures, etc. Allow time for delivery and return action plus follow-up mailings.

4. Direct Mail is a demanding taskmaster, so if it fails it's probably you who missed somewhere, not the medium.. If possible, "test" some or all portions of your program so you can alter methods if needed.

5. Writing compelling Direct Mail copy only seems simple so don't be deceived. Heed basic principles of writing to single person in simple, straightforward manner - yet with style. For success, remember the 3 "S's" of successful copy are: (1) Simplicity, (2) Sincerity, (3) Serenity. Long copy is not necessarily bad, in fact it can outpull short copy. Focus on main message you intend to convey. Never forget you want action to occur...NOW. Be sure copy answers the always-asked questions: "What's in it for me?" Always keep reader's perceived needs in mind. Do the necessary research to determine them.

6. Closely analyze your potential markets and your offer so you

can hone lists and copy to target your approach. Though you mail by the thousands, remember Direct Mail is more akin to a rifle than a shotgun. Write your copy to be read by one person at a time.

7. Remember Direct Mail is a substitute sales representative. Where an in-person sales representative can immediately answer prospects' questions and overcome objections when raised, Direct mail copy must anticipate all aspects and insure logical points are covered.

8. Incorporate an action device - coupon, order form, reply card or envelope, phone number - to make it easy for recipient to take desired action.. Repeatedly tell recipient what action you want and make it simple to do. Put nothing in the way of getting an order or response. Use all action devices cited.

9. A letter almost always works better in a Direct Mail package than a package - even a catalog - without a letter. Don't worry if the letter repeats what's in the catalog, brochure or order form. It's there for a different purpose. The sales letter is a one-to-one communications to explain and sell, to get the recipient to act. The postscript is often the most-read part of the letter.

10. If all elements of package are good, it is imperative repeat mailings be made. It's difficult to wear out a good list and,, unless mailings are overdone, you can't wear out your welcome. Let statistical probabilities and the laws of economics work in your favor rather than allow difference about making frequent mailings deter you. A common error is not to mail often enough or to a wider list.

11. Keep detailed records of everything you do.. Follow a "systems approach" so you know what happened, when and why. That way you can repeat successes and avoid failures. Sometimes the difference of a tenth of a percent or less is all it takes to tune a marginal performer into a winner.

12. Study all elements of your package so you can know what's working. Is it the price? The geography? The timing? The phrasing of the offer? The list? The copy? The product? Which of those myriad elements, in combination or without one element, makes the critical difference in the return? Analyze your records closely and continually until you know why you're winning and can repeat success.

13. Keep current with changing postal rules, rates, regulations and procedures. Regularly monitor your procedures to insure you're in full compliance. To illustrate expensive errors, a frantic client called after the Postal Inspector visited. We can help with postal problems.. Had he checked with us before the visit, the \$5000 per word differential postal cost and worry most

likely could have been avoided. We offer professional authoritative postal expertise but seldom can avert unchecked mistakes. Check in advance. (We can supply you with a checklist of valuable postal publications upon receipt of addressed, double stamped #10 envelope.)

14. Save, subdivide and study the good Direct Mail you get to learn what to do - and maybe what not to do. Remember some of the things that appeal may, in fact, be "tests" that, when results are known, are failures. Never underestimate need for simplicity and complete honesty.

15. People who take actions by mail are different from those who don't. Thus it is wise to isolate them so you can easily remail with new or different offers. Remember the axiom: "People who buy by mail"...buy by mail...buy by mail..." Best lists are of mail buyers of similar products or services who recently purchased in same price range.

16. Do what's necessary to make your mail stand out, even "look peculiar" since it has to fight all types of competition. If it doesn't get opened, looked at, and read...there's no chance it will bring the action you want. Clever "teaser copy" on outside of carrier can work wonders.

17. Wise mail merchants work at differentiating between "suspects," "prospects" and (best of all) "customers." Once they can distinguish names on lists among those three categories they are able to achieve cost efficiencies that novices can only dream about. So keep good records of what happens and when it happens with mailings to a particular list with a particular offer. Capitalize on success.

18. Testimonials can be effective promotional tools, especially if they're heartfelt and cogently express what the average user might feel about a product or service.. They're even better when offered by celebrities or persons well-known to the audience. Treat testimonials like the jewels they are and gather more.

20. There's no such thing as a "normal" percentage of return that's universally applicable across a wide range of products and services but, over time and by keeping careful records you can determine what some norms are for your offer (s). Goal then is to "beat your best"...if only by 1/2 or 1/4 of a percent!

21. In producing Direct Mail programs these seven words may be cliché - but only because it's true: "Nothing is as simple as it seems." Continual care needs to be exercised at every step of the planning and conceptual stage, though any step in the conception-production process can become critical if close attention isn't paid to what's happening. "To err is human." Yes. I'm aware of the error but that's exact spelling of sign I

spotted in printer's window and I reproduce it to emphasize how vital it is that extreme care be given to this facet of production. Proofreading in a professional manner is essential.

22. Direct Mail Copywriter John Yeck long ago cautioned me to be aware of these two "sinful" acronyms: KISS and CIPU. The first, "Keep It Simple, Sweetie" describes how to tell your message, while the second cautions us to avoid lapsing into business or industrial jargon which "we" understand but most everyone else doesn't. CIPU stands for "Clear If Previously Understood."

23. While the Power of Mail will long be with us (even though the nature of the Postal Service might change) wise direct mailers see themselves practicing in the fields of "direct Marketing" or "Direct Response." They become knowledgeable of the synergistic value from use of print media (magazines, space ads, newspaper inserts, etc) as well as electronic media (radio and/ or TV) to supplement their mail promotional efforts. The combination can be powerful.

24. Continually study and be alert to what's happening in this dynamic medium. It may seem that not much is new, when in fact, there are subtle but important shifts in many of the areas delineated in each of the four elements cited in Principle #1. (Our seminars, workshops and speeches point these out to sponsor's audiences.)