

Six Tips for a Successful Direct Mail Campaign



PMQ Magazine (May 2015) – The introduction of social media has helped many pizzeria operators reduce their marketing budgets. However, while you’re spending hours hunched over a computer trying to figure out the best way to get 100 customers to “like” you, the guy down the street just mailed 10,000 direct mail pieces emblazoned with an irresistible offer to your customers. Which strategy sounds more effective to you?

Some say that direct mail has gone the way of the dinosaur. With so many ways to reach customers online, they insist there’s no reason to spend money on snail mail anymore. Alyson Lex, founder and CEO of Rock Your Marketing in Baltimore, says that direct mail has been touted as dead for so long that business owners are starting to believe it. “Mailboxes are becoming emptier, but people still check them every day,” Lex says. “You don’t have to speak as loudly to be heard in a place where there isn’t as much competition.”

Unlike the Internet, direct mail can be more personalized for your audience and allows your customer to physically hold your message in his hands, notes Linda Duke, CEO of Duke Marketing in San Rafael, California. “With the right offer, a direct mailer can deliver your message without any other brands clouding their memory, allowing your brand to stand out,” Duke says.

In other words, the old-school method of direct mail is starting to feel fresh and

new again. “Our lives have all gone online—from social media and online bill pay to telecommuting and streaming movies. We’re all so bombarded with emails, Facebook posts and tweets that they’ve lost their impact,” says Adam J. Toris, founder and owner of Cognicom Media in Bridgewater, New Jersey. “With direct mail, the person has to see it. Even if they just drop the mailer into the trash, they’ve held it in their hand, looked at it, and, at the very least, read part of it.”

Creating a Direct Mail Campaign

You may be thinking, “I’ve tried direct mail in the past and it didn’t work for me.” Maybe no one brought in a mailer, signed up for your email list or redeemed your coupons. So why waste your time trying it again, right? Wrong. With direct mail, the devil is in the details. Even the smallest tweak can mean the difference between a new customer and a mailer that’s destined for the recycle bin.

So let’s take a look at six essential ways to make your next—or first—direct mail campaign a success.

1. Nail the Basics. There are certain elements that are required on every direct mail piece that you send out. If you’ve sent a mailer recently, grab it and see if it contains basic info such as contact information, hours, error-free copy, a compelling offer, a call to action, and an expiration date. “Don’t forget the contact info,” says Jenne McCarty, brand manager at Marco’s Pizza, a Toledo, Ohio-based chain. “And proofread, proofread, proofread. Customers want to buy from someone they can trust, and this is your chance to impress. Pay attention to the hierarchy of messaging as well. What do you want them to think about first when they see your direct mail piece?”

However, while making sure to include all of the essential information, you can easily go overboard with too much info. “Remember that less is more,” Toris says. “Don’t try to cram too much information on the piece. You do not need to list all of the pies you make or tell the 50-year family history of the pizzeria. Keep it simple, concise, and to the point.”

2. Make It Exciting. Lex warns that being boring will get your marketing piece put in the trash faster than anything else. “Have fun and send something unique and different,” she says. It’s a busy world out there; getting attention means you must think outside the box. Try sending your piece in a red envelope designed to look like Priority Mail or look into suppliers—such as 3D Mail and Oriental Trading—that

offer attention-getting “lumpy mail” products.

We’re living in a fast-paced, technology-driven world, so when you’re thinking of sending out a plain paper flier, think again. “Do something to stand out in the mailbox,” McCarty says. “**Die-cuts**, complex folds and oversized pieces tend to pop, and that translates into more eyes viewing.”

When you have only a moment to grab someone’s attention, what will you do? “Historically, pizza places have used bland and basic graphic design for direct mail pieces,” Toris observes. “If you’re going to make the investment in printing and mailing it, you should also invest in having it professionally designed. Use real pictures of your pizzas and your shop in the design and stay away from stock photos and clip art.”

3. Make Them an Offer They Can’t Refuse. According to Bert Martinez, a marketing and sales consultant in Phoenix, 80% of your direct mailer’s success is dependent upon its headline. “Your logo is not a headline,” he says. “An attention-grabbing headline makes readers stop and read more. Once they stop to read, you need to make [an appealing] offer, such as Kids Eat Free or Free Pizza, not 10% off. Give them something they actually want.”

“Just offering coupons isn’t good enough,” Toris says. “What makes you special? Do you use a wood-burning or brick oven? Has your pizza won any awards? Do you offer artisan pies? Special or unusual toppings? What separates you from the rest? Figure it out and promote it.”

Duke agrees, saying that many pizzeria operators make their offers too weak and then wonder why there’s no redemption. “Food cost should be part of the budget for the direct mailer. **Give something away** to those who receive the offer, as a ‘Come Try Us’ special,” Duke says. “Entice them with something only your restaurant offers and then draw them in with your compelling offer.”

4. Make It Personal. How well do you really know your current and potential customers? “One of the biggest mistakes restaurants make when creating a direct mail piece is not doing enough research in order to know their audience,” Martinez says. “Take your time cultivating the offer; see what others are doing and do the opposite. If you aren’t good at marketing, find someone who is.”

“No one wants to feel like a name on a list,” McCarty says. “Make your offer feel

local in order to connect with your customer.” And don’t forget the power in addressing someone by his name. “Using a first name dramatically increases engagement,” Lex adds. “‘Dear Homeowner’ doesn’t cut it anymore. The more you can personalize your message, the more successful you’ll be.”

5. Make It Trackable. If you aren’t keeping a record of how many people redeem your offers and adding those customers to your customer list, you’re missing a key element of direct mail success. “Have a system in place for gathering contact information from customers,” Martinez advises. “If you spend the money to get them through your door, get them on your list and follow up with them.” He suggests creating an incentive for servers to secure emails at the table after a guest redeems an offer using wording such as, “We’d love to send you more great offers like this via email; I just need your name and email address.” Then just add the info to the ticket for entry at the end of their shift.

Every direct mail piece needs a mechanism to **track the mailer** and track returns and redemptions, according to Duke. “Communicate with staff and crew regarding redeeming instructions and first-time guest communication.”

6. Don’t Stop at One. Martinez reminds us to consider marketing’s “rule of seven” when planning a campaign. “You must see an ad seven times before you recognize that you’ve seen it,” he says. “A lot of people drop the ball when it comes to **direct mail repetition**. Sending a mailing two or three times is comparable to going to the gym two or three times; repetition is paramount. Send direct mail once per month at a minimum; **Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM)** from the USPS has now made it easier for businesses to target potential customers.”

Your direct mail pieces should be a part of your overall marketing strategy, each doing its part to support the larger plan. “A single direct mailing might provide an appreciable lift in the short term, but a multichannel marketing plan that includes a cadence of direct mail plus digital tactics and local events is more likely to keep you top-of-mind, which is the goal,” McCarty says. “How often you send really depends upon your goals. If you’re new in the neighborhood, you’re certainly going to do a lot more mailing at first, and then taper into a cadence that makes sense for the demographics. Promotions, LTOs and special events might be a quick single hit. Think about how you want the piece to be used, and what other tactics you’re leveraging to support your initiative, and that will help guide the frequency of your mailings.”

“Direct mail takes time and testing to get it right, but once you do you’ll see consistent profits,” Lex concludes. “There are enough holidays and events that you can have a reason to mail at least once per month, if not more. I love to create marketing messages around ‘wacky’ holidays, such as National Pizza With Everything Day on November 12. I’ve yet to receive an offer from a local pizza place on November 12.”

Direct mail should be seen as an irreplaceable tool in your marketing toolbox. Combined with your other marketing efforts on- and offline, your competition won’t stand a chance.

Direct Mail Checklist

Check your direct mailer against this list of must-haves. Does your piece contain every element?

- **An Offer:** Why should your customer care that you’re sending them mail?
- **A Deadline:** If you don’t ask them to respond by a certain date, you’re asking them not to respond.
- **A Compelling Headline:** This is what gets your reader’s attention and draws them into your marketing message.
- **Personalization:** “Dear Homeowner” won’t cut it. Using a first name dramatically increases engagement. The more you can personalize your message, the more successful you’ll be.
- **Your Contact Information:** As much contact information as your customer will require to do business with you is precisely how much to include. Phone number, e-mail, website and address should all be standard.

By Liz Barrett, PMQ editor at large and author of *Pizza: A Slice of America History*

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