The Beauty of Direct Mail in Marketing Consulting Services
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For Boutique Consultancies And Solo Consultants
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Blog entry

Do you remember Mark Twain’s reaction after reading his own obituary in a newspaper? He promptly sent a telegram to the editor. It read...

“The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.”

The same is happening nowadays with direct mail marketing. At least this is what some pundits are trumpeting.

Once upon a time Capital One Europe was a major direct mail user. But then former VP of marketing, Justin Basini, decided to change course and move to online marketing. His reason was...

“Sending out loads of direct mail with credit card application forms isn’t working anymore.”

I suppose, he also got fed up with the title of Junk Mailer in Chief that the public hanged around his neck for sending out all those application forms, a.k.a. junk mail.

He didn’t realise that it’s the sender to turns direct mail into junk mail by sending out junk. Sending out credit card applications as the first contact was a pretty gross error on his part.

Justin also believed that the proverbial asteroid had hit planet Earth on direct mail, and just as the dinosaurs had died out in the aftermath of the collision with that giant asteroid, direct mail was about to die out too.

He never considered that the method was correct but the flaw lied in what he was sending out in those direct mail packages.

Just ask yourself: What do you do when you receive a credit card application from a financial institution that you’ve never dealt or corresponded with?

You most probably chuck it into the rubbish bin.

There is a pretty good chance you already have so many credit cards that you could build a bigger and better house of cards than Kevin Spacey built in the Netflix series, House of Cards. At the same time, just look at what some of the most successful internet marketers are doing. Yes, they are putting more and more emphasis on using direct mail.

And for good reason...

Just Look At The Facts...

Let’s see how smart companies treat direct mail...

- In 2011 the total volume of first class mail was down by 7% but direct mail for marketing purposes was up by 3%. ~ Target Marketing Dec 2011

- More than 12 billion catalogues are mailed annually. (Direct Marketing Association Statistical Fact Book) I would add that these are measured mailings. That is, their success...

rates are monitored and if they don’t perform, they get canned.

- Investment in direct mail for advertising rose by **5.8%** between 2010 and 2011, totalling **$48 billion**. ~ DeliverMagazine.com (My comment: Let’s see. Idiots cut back on their marketing during the recession, but smart marketers slammed on the accelerator by sending even more direct mail.)

- The world’s largest e-commerce event, The Internet Retailer Conference and Exhibition is promoted through a 32-page direct mail piece.

- Direct mail campaigns consistently generate the highest ROI for both B2C and B2B. Source. ~ Target Market Magazine.

**And now let’s see what consumers think about direct mail...**

- **98%** of consumers retrieve their mail from the mailboxes on the same day of delivery. **77%** of mail gets sorted the same day. ~ USPS data reported in DM News February 2011

- **50%** of consumers say they pay more attention to postal mail than email. ~ Epsilon Channel Preference Study

- **26%** of consumers rank direct mail as more trustworthy than email. Only **6%** ranked blogs and social media as trustworthy as direct mail. ~ Epsilon Channel Preference Study. Also consider that companies hire professional copywriters to write direct mail packages, but many of the same companies hire $2 per hour (or less) “writers” from third world countries to write blog and social media pieces. Are we surprised by the **20%** gap in trustworthiness?

- **60%** of consumers say they enjoy checking their mail boxes and receiving postal mail. ~ Epsilon Channel Preference Study

- **60%** of consumers say they receive too many emails every day to open them all, and a fast-growing percentage of people express frustration and resentment at email marketing. ~ E-Commerce Alliance Research

Some people may say these are consumers, not corporate buyers, but the difference in perceiving email and direct mail is negligible.

Let’s just think of the amount of email and direct mail people receive. Hundreds of emails a day vs. a dozen of direct mails a month.

People subconsciously dedicate more attention to the smaller pile of direct mail.

Yes, email is free while direct mail costs some money, but let’s ignore the costs and focus on the potential return.

Many years ago, with its cost-effectiveness, direct mail had become the vehicle for junk mail. After each mail delivery, people were hard at work to throw away all the rubbish that was delivered to them.

And then came email.

In a few years, email took the dishonourable role of junk mail from direct mail, and people
started becoming more and more sceptical about it.
People’s fingers have become faster than speeding bullets on steroids to delete email messages on their computers.
On average, people spend about 15-20 seconds to skim an email message. And the only reason why this number is so high is because they actually read some messages, while giving only 0.7 seconds to others.
So, don’t assume you have 15-20 seconds to make your point. You have about 3-5 seconds.
More and more people realise that it’s getting harder and harder to reach new prospects via email, and despite the costs, they move to direct mail.
Especially as the very first step.
So, let’s look at...

How Direct Mail Can Support Your Marketing Efforts Better Than Email

Disclaimer: When I’m writing about direct mail vs. email, I apply them to communication with people with whom you’ve never communicated with, a.k.a. door-opening message.
Ongoing communication can be maintained via email, but the first interaction had better be via direct mail.
Direct mail is more reliable. Based on a study by Epsilon, 50% of buyers prefer to receive direct mail to email, 67% regard direct mail more personal, 70% prefers to receive unsolicited information from unfamiliar sellers and 25% of buyers perceive direct mail offers to be more trustworthy than email offers.
Direct mail can be more unique and memorable. It can easily be made lumpy mail, so recipients can actually “feel” the message.
Besides the cerebral reaction, lumpy mail also creates an emotional reaction too. And as we know, taking action on the message lies in the emotional reaction.
So, while emails are hard to differentiate, direct mail letters can be highly unique and distinct.
Unlike emails, direct mail pieces can be personalised to any degree you want to or have money for. Good copywriters are obscenely expensive, although they’re worth the investment.
Playing with sizes, shapes and dimensions, you can give unlimited levels of personality to your direct mail campaigns. If you don’t have the money for great copy, you still can spice up your letter using other factors.
However, you should know that after the quality of your prospect list and your offer, the third biggest contributor to your success is the words on your piece of paper.
All other contributors, like graphics or any other elements are as good as negligible relative to these three factors.
I would go as far as saying that if you don’t have a good list, a good offer really well written, then you shouldn’t waste your money on any kind of mailing may it be email or direct mail.
It’s as elementary as not going fishing without bait, no matter how top-notch your other fishing gear is.

Direct mail success contributing factors

Some words appeal to buyers while some others appal them all the way to raging fury and back... a few times.

Unlike email, direct mail has sticking-around power. Emails are deleted and gone once and for all, but impressive direct mail packages.

And let’s stop here for a moment because “impressive” means different things to different people.

Some people, usually lower level non-decision-makers get impressed by the graphics and other elements of direct mail packages.

Senior executives and other decision-makers focus on what’s written on the accompanying piece of paper. They get impressed by the quality of the offer and how that offer is presented.

This is why you’re better off with a simple letter in a white No.10 envelope with great copy that with a visually impressive package that has a letter with cheap Elance or oDesk calibre copy.

As per Forer Research, 95% of all emails don’t even get opened. That’s partly due to the high volume of emails in people’s inboxes.

But when you receive about five snail mail pieces a week, you’re more likely to open them.

If for nothing else, you want to find out who this moron is who is unable to drag his petite little arse out of the correspondence dark ages of direct mail into the 21st century of email.

Then you start reading the letter. And if the copy is good and the message is relevant, you’re likely to be captivated by the offer and you may well take the next action to check the offer out.

Direct mail allows you to provide more details.

And don’t tell me people don’t read long sales letters. They do. Think of the Harry Potter books or Stephen King’s books.

Realistically, they are long sales letters for their next books.

Unlike with emails, with direct mail you can write freely without worrying about spam words or
Emails are desperately competing for the recipients’ attention. It’s hard to be the one to be selected for reading among 100 or more emails. But it’s easy to be opened and read as one of five snail mail pieces, especially because the other four are likely to be utility bills.

Over the last few years, emails have become so invasive that recipients, even if they read them, have their guards up. They read emails with high levels of suspicion, scepticism and cynicism, because they know they are not in control and marketers can invade their space at any time in the future.

And even if they read emails, they often react to messages, “That’s far too good to be true.”

So, they just move on.

But when buyers receive snail mail letters, they know they are in charge of the reading process and they control the fate of that letter. They can read it, throw it away or even save it for bum fodder.

Therefore people read direct mail pieces with an open mind and with their guards down.

In general, direct mail is more affective for generating new business than email. Based on studies by the Direct Marketing Association, direct mail is 10-30-times more effective at new business generation than email.

And if it’s 10-30-times more effective than email, it’s even more effective than using salespeople to initiate new relationships.

While email can communicate facts and figures, direct mail is more suitable to communicate feelings, which in turn, spur readers into action.

**Combining Email And Direct Mail**

Yes, the two can be nicely combined, but you have to know which one should lead and which one should follow.

If you care about response rates and the number of new relationships you get out of your campaign, you’d better lead with direct mail and follow with email.

This is especially valid in Canada due to the extremely retarded new spam laws.

For instance, we meet at a networking event and exchange business cards. Then, after the event, I send you an email...

**Hey Joe,**

**It was great meeting you.**

**I’ve attached an article that relates to the problem you mentioned to me about your sales force.**

**You may find some good points in it.**

**Enjoy!**
Cheers  
Tom “Bald Dog”  

It’s the scan of a published article, and at the end of the article there is my byline with my website and a short description of what I do. 

It means this is an unsolicited commercial email, so Joe has the right start legal action against me for spamming him. 

Nice. 

The great advantage of direct mail is that you can direct Joe to your website where he can subscribe to receiving emails from you. 

Also, before a major promotional campaign, you can send out a direct mail letter in which you notify the recipients that they’re about to receive an important email. 

And to make sure they watch out for your email, give some details about what they’re going to receive. 

This approach can significantly boost email opening rates. 

The following diagram represents pretty well how readers digest service offers communicated to them in direct mail packages. 

The further recipients read your letter, the higher their trust in you, the desire for your services and their self-confidence go. The process gains momentum with each subsequent section in the letter.
In my experience, neither email nor live salespeople can gain buying momentum as fast as well-written direct mail.

**On Summary**

Yes, I know the cost of direct mail is much higher than free email, and this is where we can make one of two choices.

Either we can get obsessed about how cheap we can go with our marketing or we look at the potential gain and assess how much risk we’re willing to take to reap the projected rewards.

Considering that profits lie in taking risks, we might as well consider the investment and return option, instead of the mindless penny-pinching.

Over the years, I’ve attended dozens of seminars, workshops and conferences for copywriters and I’ve asked lots of top-drawer copywriters what they’d focus on to get new clients if they just started fresh in copywriting.

They’ve all said they would use direct mail because they believe that’s the most effective method to connect with decision-makers.

And since they are ahead of me in success and reputation as copywriters, I wouldn’t argue with them.

I just follow their recommendation and so far it’s worked out nicely.

I hope you heed their recommendation, although it comes through my interpretation.

Nevertheless, it may still be worth something.

In my experience, when you make first contact, a mediocre direct mail letter has a better chance to be read and acted upon than a pretty well-written email message.

**With victory on high...**

Tom “Bald Dog” Varjan


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