
21 Steps to Direct Mail Success

By Hugh Chewning

*This is the **second** of a **two-part** series.*

Getting the basics right goes a long way toward achieving direct mail success. In my last post, we discussed 11 strategies that you'll want to include when planning your next campaign.

You can see these [here](#).

To complete *21 Steps to Direct Mail Success*, here are ten more often overlooked strategies that you'll want to include in your next campaign.



12. **Test, test and test** are the three most important rules of direct mail; yet mailers regularly claim they can't afford to test. In truth, you can't afford *not* to test. Even the best mailing packages fatigue. There are a finite number of prospects who will respond to any mailing, and each time you mail your control, fewer and fewer people remain in this pool of names. To remain competitive, you must continue to test new lists, offers, formats and copy. Even the few direct mail letters that remain the control year after year are "tweaked" with subtle changes to maintain response. A successful direct marketer is always pushing for better results, and this can be achieved only with a disciplined testing program.
13. **Test the big things.** When you're looking for breakthrough results, test the lists, offer, format and copy. Testing minor copy revisions on page 3 or changing the paper stock of the reply form or the color of the return envelope will make a difference only to large-volume mailers. To everyone else, it's a waste of money.
14. **Maintain control of the package design.** Don't surrender control of the package's design to the graphic designer. Direct response isn't about looking

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good or winning awards. It's about getting results. Understand how people read direct mail and design your layouts accordingly. It may not look "award winning" and the designer may not agree with your choice of type, but readability is more important than pretty. (See [How to Use Graphic Devices to Boost Direct Mail Response Rates.](#))

15. **Focus on the letter.** Brochures explain while letters sell. There are exceptions, but more often than not, including a brochure will depress results. And, if you don't make the outer envelope interesting, no one will see your great letter copy. Focus on the letter, the response form and the outer envelope.
16. **Ask for the sale.** In direct response, your purpose is to convince the recipients to take a specific action. Whether it's to buy a product, make a contribution or generate a lead, you need to tell the recipients exactly what you want them to do. Then remind them. And tell them once again. To make the sale, you have to ask for the order.
17. **Test before you adapt.** We can learn from the mistakes of others and we can learn from their success, but every organization is unique, so don't assume that what works for your competitor will work for you. Test it first.
18. **Put the needs of your donors or customers first.** You're not the only one writing to your customers, and more often than not, even your multiple buyers/donors won't remember your name. In every communication, remind even your most frequent donors/buyers what your organization is, why it's important to them and how they benefit.
19. **Give the copywriter all the information he or she needs.** Several clients have told me that they don't want to prejudice my thinking by sharing package samples or past results. But are you paying the copywriter to be creative or to beat your control? We live in an "age of skepticism," and the more information the copywriter has, the better the job he or she will do. Besides, an experienced copywriter can often discover new concepts buried in old package samples and research material.
20. **Respect your test results.** In direct response, we don't need to decide what lists, offer or copy works best. With proper testing, the customer will tell us what works. Before adopting any major change to your mailing package, double-check the list work for the test, review package samples and confirm your postal receipts. But once everything checks out, don't second-guess the test results.
21. **Deal with the back end before you mail.** When accepting orders via phone, everything comes down to one telephone call. And if the person answering the phone isn't trained, professional and polite, you'll not only lose the order, you'll lose the customer. And if you're directing respondents to a landing page, make certain that its contents and look match that of the mailing piece. Confirm your inventory and work through the entire ordering process to ensure that it gives the customer a good experience. And be certain that procedures are in place to credit telephone and online respondents to the

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mailing's results.

Including these essential steps in your direct mail campaign doesn't guarantee success, but these steps will greatly increase your probability of achieving a successful mailing.

You can download the complete list of *21 Common Direct Mail Mistakes to Avoid* as one document in my [Direct Mail Resource Center](#).