

INCREASE YOUR USPS IQ

Ideas to make your postal budget go further

Savvy direct marketers know a successful direct mail strategy isn't focused solely on reducing postage costs—you must also improve deliverability and increase response. Here's some tips on how to do just that.

1. USE THE APPROPRIATE MAIL CLASS. Mail class is one of the primary drivers of postage cost. Most marketers use either Standard Mail or First-Class Mail to distribute their marketing messages.

First-Class, the U.S. Postal Service's flagship product, promises priority in the processing network, faster delivery, and a suite of ancillary services (such as forwarding or return to sender) built into the base price. But this higher level of service is reflected in the cost.

Standard Mail is a lower priority in the processing network, and the delivery cycle is longer. Ancillary services are available on an "a la carte" basis. Due to these differences, the base cost for Standard Mail is about 70% the cost of First-Class. In addition, Standard Mail offers more opportunities for worksharing discounts, such as Destination Entry.

Consider whether you'd use the additional services offered through First-Class or whether they can plan a production schedule to accommodate Standard Mail delivery to take advantage of the savings opportunities. (Keep in mind that some communications, such as bills or statements of account, are required to be mailed First-Class.)

2. WATCH SIZE AND WEIGHT. The other primary drivers of postage cost are the size and weight of the mail piece. Mail larger than 6-1/8" x

11-1/2" or thicker than 1/4" must be mailed at Flats rate, which can be up to 50% higher than the corresponding rate for a Letter-size piece. Also, Standard Mail over 3.3 ounces or First-Class Mail of one ounce or more incurs additional postage.

Flat-sized or heavier mail pieces may drive higher response, thereby offsetting the higher postage costs. Test to see if this is true for you.

3. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ALL AVAILABLE DISCOUNTS. The Postal Service offers a variety of "worksharing" discounts for mailers who do more to prepare and transport their mail.

✓ Presort discounts are given for grouping mail together into bundles or trays for more efficient processing.

✓ Automation discounts are earned for mail pieces with suitable barcodes that meet the physical parameters to be handled by USPS sorting equipment.

✓ Participants in the Intelligent Mail Full Service option gain discounts for using unique Intelligent Mail barcodes on mail pieces, handling units and containers; providing electronic documentation and statements, and making appointments for all destination-entered mail using the USPS's on-line scheduling tool, FAST.—KURT RUPPEL, marketing services manager, IWCO Direct



IDEAS:

Back to School

TIP: COMBINE MAIL AND SOCIAL TO REACH YOUR AUDIENCE

The Chandler Unified School District in Arizona is using a mix of social media and traditional direct mail to attract new parents to the public education system.

"We're trying to appeal to the younger parent with four- and five-year olds who are shopping for schools," says district spokesman Terry Locke. "That generation is definitely using Facebook and Twitter and they're not buying newspapers anymore."

To supplement those efforts, about 68,000



self-mailers were sent to homes throughout the district's more than 70 square-mile boundaries in May. The \$10,000 campaign was the largest of its kind the district has ever done.

"Typically, in the past we've done a little more marketing in [the parts of] our communities that are in a declining enrollment mode," he says.

"We've had to work really hard to maintain our student populations so that we don't have to cut programs," he says. "We had focused on the southern

[region] but this time did the entire district."

The response rate to such efforts is difficult to gauge, notes Locke. "We get a varied range of follow-up, from parents showing up at a neighborhood school to register their children to calls to the superintendent for more information to families deciding to continue at their [current public] school instead of choosing a competitor."

Many efforts are timed to when kindergarten registration opens. "We want to bring those families in and keep them for 13 years," Locke says.

But why does a public school have to market itself in the first place?

"The state established a very liberal open enrollment policy, meaning that if there's room for a child in a school it really doesn't matter where you live," says Locke. "Parents have the choice of where they send their kids—whether it's the neighborhood school, a different school in the same district, charter schools or private schools. So we have to market our product."—LARRY RIGGS

CONSIDER GOING BIG

A new direct mail prospecting package from Amnesty International offers a simple finding for marketers: Paper still works, and more paper works better. A January test of a oversize package bested the standard-letter control's response rates by 58%, and pulled in 59% more in donation amounts.

"We had a control package we'd been mailing for about 20 years," says Bonnie Catena, deputy director of direct response for Amnesty International. "Its returns were starting to wane, and we were struggling to replace attrition.

"We had tested many other packages," Catena continues. "We realized we needed to go big or go home. The doormat [package format] captures donors' attention."

The test package, which went to 50,000 prospects in January, is almost self-referential of its oversized nature. The envelope front features black text on a bright yellow background, reading "MASSIVE injustice deserves a MASSIVE response." Teaser copy alerts recipients to six enclosed petitions—and that copy is personalized to reflect the recipient's U.S. House and Senate members.

A note on the package's back urges recipients to look inside for free address labels, and offers an additional premium—with donation of an Amnesty International tote bag.

The package includes a four-page cover letter, which is personalized with the recipient's U.S. Senators and House representative on the first and last pages. The letter uses a generic salutation ("Dear Friend") to avoid the possibility of an incorrect gender greeting.

It also contains a set of 33 address labels and six buck slip-sized petitions urging President Obama, secretary of state Hillary Clinton, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, and the recipient's senators and

representative to work toward ending global violence against women. The package includes a standard postage-required reply envelope.

"A lot of people stopped mailing [large-size packages] because the postage increased dramatically," says Jenny Allen, principal and senior vice president at Chapman Cubine Adams + Hussey, which wrote the package. In fact, the larger piece's 19-cent postage cost is a nickel-per-piece more expensive than Amnesty International's letter-sized effort.

The new mailer didn't eliminate all elements from prior efforts. It still contains personalized address labels, albeit without the gold foil accents used previously. And it retains the tote bag offer to donors who contribute above a certain threshold.

"They had a lot of copy, and were able to use the dead space [in the inner envelope] for that poster," says Chris Seymour, a sales executive with Vertis, which designed and printed the piece. "Typically that would be white space. They found all the nooks and crannies."

Vertis also tested the various components' positions in the package, making sure pieces were trimmed to a point and positioned so they all come out of the package.

For instance, the reply envelope was deliberately tucked into the petition strip.

"The business reply envelope is much smaller [than the other components] and if it is left behind, it could depress response," Seymour says.

—RICHARD H. LEVEY



CATALOGS:

The Case for Order Forms

AS MORE AND MORE CONSUMERS PLACE ORDERS ONLINE, MANY MARKETERS HAVE ELIMINATED ORDER FORMS FROM THEIR PRINT CATALOGS. But is this really the right move for your brand? If catalogs are part of your mail plan, consider these factors before you ditch order forms.

The order form complements the catalog. Mail order buyers are conditioned to look in the center of the catalog to find the terms and conditions and other important how-to-order information. Today, catalogers typically receive fewer orders (5% or less) in the mail. Most orders are received over toll-free numbers or online. Older catalog buyers (age 60 and up) tend to use the order form more and often pay by personal check. But an order form is often used throughout the buying process regardless of how the order is actually placed. Many times, the shopper completes the order form first to speed the process even if they plan order by phone or online.

The bind-in order form creates a "hot spot" in the center of the catalog. This is why catalogs position their best-selling products in the center of the book. What's more, bind-in order forms cause the catalog to feel more substantial to the hand depending on the total page count. A bind-in order form is also more "user friendly" when it comes to encouraging gift orders because of the number of "ship to" spaces normally available on the order form. For catalogers who process a large percentage of gift orders, think twice before giving up the order form.

The effectiveness of using an order form—either bind-in or printed-on-page—should be tested before it is simply eliminated. It's easy to set up a simple A/B split test, or a three-way A/B/C split test—bind-in order form vs. printed on page order form vs. no order form. The control is whatever you are currently doing. Let the actual results guide your decision. —STEPHEN R. LETT, president, Lett Direct Inc.