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The essential marketing  
careers resource

# Marketing

NOVEMBER 2004

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**MORNINGTON PENINSULA ↑**

HEY ELISE,  
LEAVING TOWN? GOOD  
MOVE - CHECK OUT THE R.O.I.  
IN REGIONAL MARKETING.  
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SHARP  
RESPONSE RATE  
CURVES AHEAD

ENJOYING THE  
DIGITAL PRINT  
VIEW? FOR MORE,  
EXIT AT PENFOLD  
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**Malcolm Auld** takes a look at the brave new world of direct mail and talks to the digital printing experts making it happen.

# The direct mail renaissance... in your letterbox now

**T**he world of marketing communications never fails to intrigue. In the wake of the great dotcom craze, the internet has become ubiquitous as a research tool and just one of the many media to consider in marketing activities. Although, the smart marketers have realised the internet is not an advertising media, rather it is a direct marketing channel. That's because people don't need advertising when on websites – they have search engines to find what they want. Which is why banner ads perform so poorly.

And just as the 'wow factor' of the internet subsides and email starts to choke on its own success, another quiet marketing communications revolution has taken place, out of the eye of most people. And what a revolution it is.

Usually when cultures collide, chaos reigns. Yet the only chaos to emerge from the most recent collision is the rush to adopt the new industry benchmarks. These benchmarks will change the marketing industry forever – specifically the direct mail media and its integration with the internet.

This rebirth of direct mail, or as I prefer to call it, the direct mail renaissance, has occurred as a result of the convergence of a number of

technologies and industry services – specifically digital colour printing and specialist DM design software, as well as improved database quality and Australia Post services. Each item on its own has some significance, but when combined together, the impact is completely redefining personalised printed communications.

We now have colour digital printing that competes on price and quality with traditional offset printing, sensational new design and workflow management software that not only personalises communications like never before, but in extremely creative ways across multimedia, higher quality customer data and new incentives for innovative mail design from Australia Post.

This intersection of technology and industry activity has never occurred before and will make the current design of direct communications redundant in many ways.

Digital printing has been around for years, but the marketing industry has been very slow to embrace it. The usual reason being the quality of data – and this is still and always will be a problem. After all, the quality of personalised communications is only as good as the quality of the data. The other reason is cost and the size of the paper

that can be printed – but this is no longer an issue with the latest digital colour printers.

The radical developments in design software will make printed media a powerful competitor to email and change the way companies use direct mail. It will also change the way people respond to direct mail. Now you can manufacture your own typefaces using any graphic image for pixels and print them on any background of your choice.

You can also link customers from printed media to uniquely personalised websites that reflect the imagery and message in the printed literature. And you can create your campaigns on your desktop and deliver them directly to the digital printer within your mailhouse for production at the touch of a button – on all types and sizes of stock, from paper to plastic.

Privacy laws have forced an improvement in data quality and made marketers consider the value of what they keep on file. Consequently the quality of data has improved and marketers are able to talk with more relevance to individuals using personalised communications.

During the last month, Australia Post has launched a new service called Impact Mail. It allows marketers to send all man-

ner of unusually shaped envelopes in the mail – flats, die-cuts, booklets, folds, concertinas and more – using all sorts of material, paper, foil, card, etc.

The last time the marketing industry witnessed a revolution like this was the introduction of email as a marketing tool.

The fact is that email has reduced essential mail volumes (invoices, statements, loyalty statements, etc.) but has hardly impacted traditional advertising mail volumes. People still like to read printed letters, postcards, catalogues, brochures and booklets. You can pick them up and put them down whenever you like. You can flick between pages and compare content side-by-side.

The big problem with websites and email is the format in which they are delivered – HTML via a computer screen. The screen restricts what you can see and to view all content you have to scroll up and down, which is inconvenient, sometimes frustrating and doesn't allow you to compare content easily.

Mail order marketers and catalogue marketers will tell you their customers who order over the phone and the internet usually have their catalogue with them on their laps. They rarely order from online catalogues.

