

# NAILING MAILING

**D**irect mail is one of the most powerful media for building brands – both through building sales and influencing customer opinions about your brand. That's because direct mail is a personal medium. It allows highly relevant messages to be delivered to individual customers – versus the broadcast messages delivered in other media to masses of consumers.

Please note the difference: personal media such as direct mail allow you to talk directly with customers, whereas, in most cases, mass media only allow you to address your messages to a group of consumers. Mass media communications are far less personal and often less effective as a result. Understanding the difference can make an enormous impact on your bottom line.

Traditionally, the classic direct mailpack has included: outer envelope, personalised letter, brochure and reply envelope/card. But this traditional pack is fast disappearing. First, the reply device is now more often a website or telephone number, rather than a reply card or envelope.

Second, thanks to variable data printing and the quality of digital colour, the personalised letter and non-personalised brochure are also disappearing. They are morphing into a personalised letter-brochure that combines the personalised language of a letter with tailored images and other content produced specifically for each individual customer. The content is driven by the data held by the marketer about each customer.

There are a number of key elements involved in creating any direct mail campaign whether they are for consumers, business or government sectors. The three most important elements, in order of importance, are your list, offer and creative. But you also need to consider a number of other elements.

**1 LIST/DATABASE.** Your list is the most important element and this is where you invest your budget before doing anything else. Obviously if you talk to the wrong people, your campaign won't work; so getting your list sorted is your first priority. You may create the list from your database, a rented list or a co-op partner's list.

Always check a rented list for data cleanliness and accuracy, to ensure it is the list you believe it to be. I once rented a list of frequent flyers from Melbourne to Sydney for a mailing promoting a Sydney hotel. The mailing was printed and lodged with the only response being dead mail. On closer inspection of the list we discovered we'd been supplied a list of frequent flyers from Sydney to Melbourne – entirely the wrong list for our purposes and a complete failure for our client.

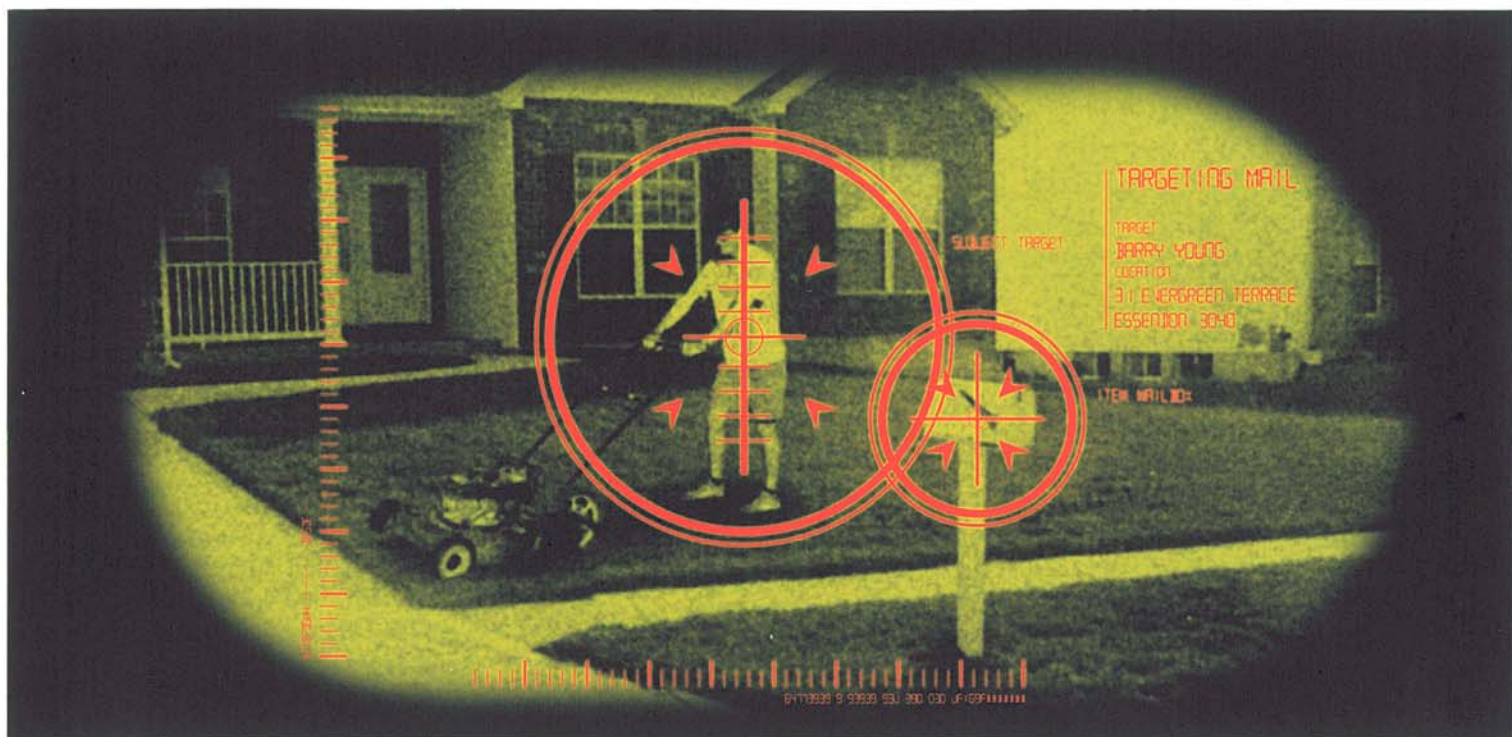
**2 OFFER/PROPOSITION.** The most important thing in everyone's life is the same, regardless of age or gender. It's something all people have in common – a keen interest in one thing: themselves. The first thing your customers subconsciously ask themselves when they receive marketing messages is 'What's in it for me?' also known as WIIFM. After all, you're asking them to read your message and take an action when they weren't planning to do so. Why should they do what you want them to do?

Consequently you need a strong proposition that differentiates you from your competitors. What can you say that positions your brand uniquely in the mind of your customers and prospects? How can you use your proposition to encourage response or reinforce why you are communicating in the first place and therefore support your message?

More importantly, what can you offer your customers to entice them to respond as you want them to?

Offers are essential to getting people to take action and they should be 'sold' to your customers, almost as a mini-ad within your mailing. An offer doesn't necessarily mean a discount or saving, it can mean a premium for purchasing, special payment terms, free advice or publications, or anything else of relevance that will motivate the recipient of your mailing to respond.

People are bombarded with hundreds of marketing messages every day, so a good offer can really help your message stand out from the crowd.



**3 CREATIVE.** You only invest in your creative once you have organised your list and have a compelling offer. A creative mailing won't do a thing for you if it goes to the wrong audience, or doesn't give the customer a reason to respond. When developing your creative, consider how relevant it is to your customer and the relationship you have with them. Relevance is more important than creativity, but relevance delivered in a creative way will nearly always get the best result.

In the case of the hotel mailing I mentioned earlier, it was a very creative mailpack designed in an unusual shape and produced in a split-run test with two different offers. But it went to the wrong people, so nobody responded – the creative was useless in this situation.

**4 FORMAT.** When developing concepts, you need to consider formats that ensure you break through the clutter, but also fit within your budget. The beauty of mail is that you aren't restricted to formats such as size of a page, shape of a banner ad or 30 seconds on TV or radio. You have enormous scope with shapes, size and paper stocks – or plastic, metallic and a whole raft of technology on which you can print your message.

You can have a three-dimensional box delivered through a doorway with a live animal in it, if it suits your proposition. I was once involved with a mailing to science equipment purchasers. It was delivered in a container with dry ice mist bubbling over the sides for effect.

Different formats utilise paper mechanics in different ways and consequently project different images to your customers. The body language of your format can say as much about you as the content of your mailing.

There are standard envelope formats that, when combined with minimum print quantities, earn postage discounts from Australia Post. And the new personalisation technologies mean these formats can be creatively personalised and engaging using picture window-faces and other involvement devices.

**5 TIMING.** As they say in the classics 'timing is everything'. If you are mailing nationally (or even internationally) check the dates of public holidays, school holidays and major events such as sporting matches, to ensure such external elements don't have a negative effect on your results.

The day of the week you mail will affect your response, as will important news events and the weather. I've seen a major rainstorm ruin mailpacks in specific suburbs where they sat in waterlogged mailboxes; yet in the suburbs where there was no rain, the mailings worked as planned.

**6 TESTING.** There are two types of marketers – those who test and those who waste money. Testing is an investment in a more profitable future. Whenever you plan a campaign include a test cell to see how you can improve your results over time. Why wouldn't you? Remember, direct marketing is the art of losing money in very small amounts. You test and learn, test and learn, then roll out. Then start again.

**7 MEASUREMENT.** The statement 'if you can't measure it you can't manage it' summarises why you should always measure your results. But most marketers only do half the job when measuring the results of their direct mail campaigns. They only measure the response rate, not the impact of the mailing on their brand values. As I said earlier, direct mail is one of the most powerful media for influencing customers about your brand, so your mail must be included in any brand tracking research.

One of the great benefits of doing this, apart from the knowledge you gain about customer attitudes to your brand, is that you'll probably discover how to reduce your investment in your mass media advertising – because your mail is doing a better job building your brand than your advertising. **M**