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# A Guide to Direct Mail



In this guide, updated in February 2020, you will discover:

- Why direct mail works
- How to create your mailing piece
- What to write and how to write it
- How to follow up after your mailing

Direct mail is alive and kicking in the digital age because consumers and businesses notice it, connect with it and refer back to it.

Here are some facts on Direct Mail:

Did you know?

- Direct mail is estimated to generate £27 billion worth of B2C business every year in the UK
- 54% of consumers prefer direct mail over any other form of marketing
- 82% of direct mail sent to businesses gets opened
- 60% of direct mail sent to consumers is opened
- 79% of people open their mail on the day it is received
- 42% of recipients read or scan read mailing pieces
- 48% of recipients retain direct mail for future reference
- 70% of lapsed customers re-engage after receiving direct mail with new offers
- Direct mail consumer response rate is at 3.7% (compared to 0.2% for mobile, 0.1% for email, 0.1% for social media and 0.02% internet display ads)

Page 1 of 6

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## Why Direct Mail Works

To understand why direct mail works, let's compare it with email.

Here are 7 reasons why businesses should use direct mail:

1. **In B2B environments we get less mail than we used to**, but our email inboxes are overflowing
2. **Direct mail gets opened** - How many letters, cards or parcels did you or your business receive today? Did you open them and look at the content? Of course, you did! What about your email? How much of this did you open? If you are like most people you are "behind with your email" but can't wait to get your hands on the post.
3. **Response rates are high** - For consumers, the response rates for emails are typically 0.1% compared to 3.7% for physical mail. **That's 37X better!**
4. **People like to receive physical mail** – It is personal, tactile and interactive.
5. **Direct mail is durable** - It is not ephemeral like an email. You can bin it, but you can't delete it. And if you intend to keep it and act on it, unlike an email you don't have to print it out.
6. **Direct mail is a wonderful advertising medium** - You can let your creativity run riot with physical mail. It does not need to go into an envelope or be of a standard size. Unlike email you can be sure that it will arrive as you sent it not as a computer operating system or browser renders it.
7. **Direct mail gets delivered, guaranteed!** - If it is correctly addressed physical mail will be delivered, whereas email can be blocked by spam filters or system administrators.

To understand more about the psychology of direct mail, you might like to watch this [short video](#) from the Royal Mail.

## But Isn't Direct Mail Too Expensive?

Yes, and no.

**Yes**, if you want to blanket mail large volumes of basic brochures or standard newsletters. Stick to email and PDF downloads from your website for this, and of course make sure that these documents do deliver to the intended recipients.

**No**, if you have a targeted, personalised offer to make or something special that demands your client's immediate attention.

Page 2 of 6

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Smart Solutions Delivered With Integrity



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## Potential Costs:

Self-design costs nothing but your time, your creativity and your mojo. Use sites such as Canva or enlist the help of low-cost graphic design through Elance or Fiverr if you don't have a retained design agency.

Use your own ink jet or laser printer for standard letters or go to a digital print company for 4 colour printing on flyers or leaflets. Costs per 1000 pieces can be as low as £100.

Second class mail is 61p for standard letter size. Unusual formats cost more.

## How to Create Your Mailing Piece

Your mailing piece (postcard, letter, letter with enclosure, flyer etc.) needs to do all 4 of the following:

1. **Get Noticed**
2. **Get Opened**
3. **Get Read**
4. **Elicit a Response**

It is up to you how you get noticed and opened. This depends on your target customer's preference and your approach could vary from weird, wacky and humorous to serious and sober.

But in all events, make sure that the piece is correctly addressed and personalised.

The next 4 elements require some serious thought. To be successful you must:

1. **Evoke interest**
2. **Be relevant**
3. **Answer straight away WIIFM ("What's in it for me?")**
4. **Create urgency**

Marketing experts say that your prospect will decide within 3 seconds whether to read the letter. If your headline and opening sentence don't immediately grab attention your direct mail piece is heading straight for the bin!



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## Think AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action)

Action means a next step for the prospect to take – hopefully to call you, visit your website or perhaps even to place an order straight away.

## What to Write and How to Write It

First and foremost be the real authentic voice of your business.

Aim to use simple, direct and appealing language and keep it short, snappy and to the point.

Follow these ten tips and you won't go far wrong:

1. **Use a one-to-one conversational style**
2. **Personalize with the correct name and address**
3. **Choose an easy to read typeface**
4. **Make the offer in the first paragraph**
5. **Use action words throughout your letter**
6. **Make one compelling offer only - and repeat your message if necessary.**
7. **Provide as many response options as possible e.g. phone, email, web, social media etc.**
8. **Create urgency (without being pushy!).** Include an expiry date and an incentive for a quick response
9. **Use an actionable “P.S.”** This works well for skimmers who read the opening paragraph and skip straight to the end
10. **REMEMBER:** The message is all about the customer and the benefits that you offer to him/her and not about you and your products and services

As a business owner or manager, you may not feel totally confident in your writing skills. But don't worry, you may not need to employ the services of a professional copywriter.

After all, you are in the unique position of knowing your customers and the way that they use your products and services better than anyone else. Avoid jargon and stale clichés.

Remember to keep your copy simple and to make it easy to read.

Once you've written your piece it is a good idea to show it to colleagues and friends to ensure that it is proofread and your message comes across as you intend.

Also, check for readability using the online [Flesch Kincaid Test](#).



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To get a feel for what works well in direct marketing and the kinds of messages that appeal to potential buyers, please do take a look at this [SlideShare](#).

### How to Follow Up After Your Mailing

Surprisingly, many businesses do nothing. Don't fall into that trap!

Even the best mailing piece with the most seductive offer is not on its own going to grab attention and demand instant action.

So, you need to follow up to:

- 1. Ensure the mailer arrived and has been read**
- 2. Restate the offer**
- 3. Close out the sale/book the appointment**

Ideally follow up by phone. If you can't do this, then follow up by email. The advantage of email here is that it is:

- 1. Quick**
- 2. Easy**
- 3. Low cost**
- 4. Can reinforce the mailer by sharing imagery and the same call to action**

Studies show that direct mail followed by email is 3 times as effective at converting compared to direct mail alone.

Don't expect instant results from your first mailing piece.

In the same way, that you need to follow up a mailing by phone and email, you also need to integrate your physical mailing with your online business assets.

For example, if your mailing is to promote an event or a new product launch, be sure to have information about these promotions prominently displayed on your website and on your business social media pages.

Finally, please bear in mind that a one-off mailing is less likely to be as effective as a mailing campaign.

Direct mail campaigns take a variety of forms.

You could run a discrete campaign which aims to build interest before making a promotional offer.



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A good example of this is a product launch campaign that might start with a “sneak preview” or “teaser”, followed by “full disclosure” (for example the new product in all its glory), culminating in a special offer – for example an invitation to a launch event or money off for a short period of time.

Alternatively, you could schedule regular communications through the year with seasonal offers to attract additional business as appropriate.

### In Summary

In the age of email marketing and instant messaging, direct mail still has a place in the marketing mix. This holds true for B2B as well as B2C campaigns.

Costs need not be prohibitive even for smaller organisations provided that campaigns are well-targeted and correctly followed.

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#### About the Author

Chris Dunn is passionate about the power of digital transformation and customer experience to create brand value, customer loyalty and competitive advantage.

His career stretches back 35 years during which time he has developed fast growing, profitable businesses serving B2B and B2C markets in the UK and internationally.

His company Chris Dunn Consulting Services Limited provides business coaching and management consultancy to companies to help them drive change management and business development.

Chris is a long-standing mentor on the Cambridge Venture Project run by the Cambridge Judge Business School.

He writes a regular blog to pass on business advice as well as posting handy hints and tips through regular posts on LinkedIn and Facebook.



Page 6 of 6

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