

Direct Mail

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Direct marketing: the basics

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As well as a mailing letter, you typically include a range of enclosures such as a product brochure, order-form and pre-paid reply envelope. Don't cut corners in preparing your materials - the success of your mailshot depends on it.

The other key ingredient for a successful direct-mail campaign is a high-quality mailing list. The most effective lists are those sourced in-house from a well-managed database - you will know the preferences of the recipients of your mailshot and can tailor your offer accordingly.

If you don't have lists, however, there's a range of commercial list providers you can use. Lists of both businesses and consumers are available. You can find details of list providers on the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) website.
Tips for a successful direct-mail campaign

- Draw up a budget which sees your business profiting at a realistic level of response.
- Consider incentives such as prizes or discounts to maximise response - and make sure you've included these in your budget.
- Source a mailing list that's appropriate to your objectives.
- Make sure you have the resources to run the campaign, follow it up and cope with the response.
- When your campaign is over, quantify the costs, returns and rates of response. If you started with clear objectives, you should be able to learn a lot about what you achieved and how.

Why use direct marketing?

Direct marketing allows you to generate a specific response from targeted groups of customers. It's a particularly useful tool for small businesses because it allows you to:

- focus limited resources where they are most likely to produce results
- measure the success of campaigns accurately by analysing responses
- test your marketing - you can target a representative sample of your target audience and see what delivers the best response rates before developing a full campaign

A direct marketing campaign can help you to achieve the following key objectives:

- increasing sales to existing customers
- building customer loyalty
- re-establishing lapsed customer relationships
- generating new business

You can use direct marketing in both business-to-business and consumer markets. Of course, your strategy will need to be modified depending on which you're targeting. While business contacts are used to receiving marketing emails, consumers may be less receptive to mailshots or telemarketing calls - so you need to plan your approach carefully.