



8 Direct Mail Marketing Predictions for 2016

Direct mail is a vital part of marketing for many companies and brands. Like any other marketing effort, strategies on how to best use direct mail are constantly changing. In 2015 we saw direct mail being used to tell more of a brand story, as well as a shift towards better integration with digital marketing efforts. While many of the past uses of direct mail marketing will live on, 2016 has the potential to bring some major changes to how we use and view direct mail marketing.

To sum it up in one word, direct mail in 2016 will work to provide relevancy. Marketers on all fronts are more determined than ever to reach consumers with messages that are relevant to them, their needs and their habits. In the coming year, direct mail will be an important part of providing just that.

Here are 8 direct mail marketing predictions to keep in mind as you continue to prepare for 2016:

1. Personalization and the “Customer Journey” will increase in importance

It's been said time and time again that the days of “batch and blast” marketing are going away. Consumers want personalized messages. Over the course of the next year we'll see direct mail being a bigger part of reaching the right consumers at the right time, with the right message, including direct mail pieces that are triggered to be sent based on behavior and interactions with past materials.

This means we'll also see an increase in the way direct mail incentives, promotions and content is personalized based on customer preference, past behavior, as well as their interactions with marketing materials. This will lead to better response rates and higher consumer satisfaction.

2. The dividing line between digital marketing and direct mail marketing will continue to blur

As direct mail continues to be an important part of the **customer journey**, in 2016 we'll see less of a dividing line between direct mail marketing and digital marketing efforts, and instead see them interacting together.

Consumers could expect to see direct mail pieces that push them to digital properties such as a website, landing page or social channel. On the flip side of that, a lack of action with an email marketing communication could trigger the sending of a direct mail piece. Marketer's will find themselves thinking more about how all of their **marketing efforts can work in conjunction with each other**, instead of thinking in silos.

3. Mail tracking will help better track leads

By using the **Intelligent Mail Barcode** with tracking encoded on their direct mail pieces, marketers will be able to track each piece through the mail stream and know exactly when it has been handed to the carrier for delivery.

For retailers this means they'll have the insights to see exactly when a piece has been delivered and therefore will have the opportunity to staff their locations accordingly, particularly if they expect a big draw to their stores due to a special incentive or announcement.

Knowing when a mail piece has been delivered can also trigger an email to reinforce the message to those customers. This can increase the likelihood that they will act on the call to action. Having the ability to better track mail delivery means better insights into when direct mail becomes the acquisition vehicle and email becomes the response vehicle.

4. Opportunities for segmentation will increase

Segmenting your direct mail list is nothing new, but the level of depth in segmentation will become a bigger focus in 2016. This means marketers will look to uncover new ways to reach their audience based on their preferences and past behavior. While this may mean developing more direct mail pieces, it can also mean providing content that the consumer is more likely to take action on.

For example, retailers could segment based on buyer activity and send different promotions or incentives based on high or low spend.

5. Data will be the driving force behind every direct mail effort

As marketers look to better segment their lists and provide targeted messaging that evokes a response, the need for accurate data will be essential. Generally when we've talked about data in the past, it's mostly referred to having clean data (i.e. correct names and addresses). This is obviously still important, but in 2016 we'll take this a step further to include actionable data.

For example, which zip codes get the greatest response? Which message had the lowest rate of interest? Which campaigns had the best overall impact on ROI and should therefore be continued? These are just some of the questions that data can help answer and taking the time to analyze the results of each mail piece will grow in importance over the next coming year, allowing new insights to be uncovered.

6. The use of A/B Testing will become more frequent

As data grows in importance, so will the use of A/B testing. Content, images, colors, offers and more can impact the response rate on any given marketing effort. By including a regular A/B testing plan into a direct mail strategy, marketers will have a better sense of what their audience responds to, as well as new data to analyze and inform their future efforts.

7. Direct mail will serve as a response vehicle to leads

Sometimes you don't need very much data to provide something relevant. – If you have a lead who requested to receive certain information on a product or service, make sure you are able to provide them with a response. When there is an obvious interest, direct mail can be highly effective and decrease the chances of losing those leads to a competitor.

8. Direct mail marketing will continue to evolve

Like all marketing efforts, direct mail in 2016 will continue to evolve into something that works to evoke a response from the consumer, and there are a number of efforts still in the initial stages of development that are looking to help marketers do just that.

Currently being tested in Northern Virginia and the New York metro area, **Informed Mail Delivery** allows mail pieces being delivered to also be sent electronically to the recipient. Consumers can see what's in their mailbox at any time and mailers can make pieces more interactive by embedding links into the digital image that provide further, relevant content.

Augmented Reality (AR) is also working to bring consumers a new, interactive experience. With the Postal Service AR app, recipients can point their smartphone at an image in a catalog or mailer and be taken to an entirely new experience. Marketers can provide new content, hidden promotions, interactive 360 product views, and even allow one-click purchases, further closing the divide between direct mail marketing and the digital world.

While there are a lot of new and exciting things coming to direct mail marketing in 2016, it's important to remember to always follow best practices.

- First, **know what you want to sell or what your specific goal is.**
- Second, **make sure you reach the right person**—you can do this through data mining, modeling current customers, and data testing.
- Third, **design for impact.** Fonts, graphics, and colors can all have an impact on how consumers take in your message. Finally, always track and analyze your results.

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