

Direct Mail, It Starts With the List



Direct Mail campaigns require considering mail piece design, printing and time frame issues right from the start. However, the best designed mail piece means little if it arrives in the mailbox of an uninterested recipient.

A recent customer inquired about the costs to mail to residents within a five mile radius of her store. After learning that her shop was for antiques and collectables, we suggested obtaining a list of antique collectors in her area. This would cost a little more than the general population list, but she was guaranteed to have the mail piece seen by interested parties. Like many mailers, she was not aware that targeted mailing lists are available.

Mailing lists are available to rent by many different criteria. Business Lists can target geographic information, industry, number of employees, sales volume and more. Consumer Lists can target geographic information, income, ethnicity, presence or age of children, interests and more.

Mailing lists are available on the internet, from government agencies, associations and from Mailing List Brokers. Internet and government mailing lists often are not up to date with move information, so caution should be exercised using those sources. Mailing List Brokers can provide lists that are kept up to date with the United States Postal Service move information files.

Many businesses have mailing lists already developed. A current customer list is likely to bring you the best response to a mailing. They are familiar with you and will most likely open your mail pieces. It is imperative that you have some process in place to keep your list current so you are not wasting printing and mailing costs on "Undeliverable as Addressed" mail or customers that have moved out of your service area.

There are three services available that can assist with this task. NCOA (National Change of Address) service processes your mailing list against the last three years of address change files with the United States Postal Service. For those records that a move is found, new address information is provided to you electronically or on paper, so you can update your list. There are authorized NCOA providers throughout the country that offer this service on behalf of the United States Postal Service.

Direct Mail, It Starts With the List

A car dealership provided an in-house list of 7,000 addresses for a recent mailing. After NCOA processing we found 2,000 households that moved out of state. We deleted those names from the list and reduced the printing and mailing costs by more than \$1300.

ACS (Address Change Service) is provided by the United States Postal Service to participating mailers who maintain computerized mailing lists and want the change information electronically instead of on a returned mail piece with a bright yellow label.

Ancillary Endorsements are markings placed on mail pieces that provide instructions to the post office on how to handle mail that is undeliverable as addressed. These markings, such as "Change Service Requested" are typically found under the return address on a mail piece.

Another very important element of list maintenance is CASS (Coding Accuracy Support System) processing. CASS compares your addresses with the postal database to verify they are complete. Addresses like Front & Market Streets may get your mail delivered, but they are not complete addresses. The postal service's automated processing requires addresses like "10 West Market Street". You can purchase software or contact a mailing service that can perform this process for you.