

Direct Mail– It Takes Time



In previous editions we discussed the benefits of direct mail, the importance of targeted and up-to-date lists, and the design of your mail piece. Planning your timetable is another important element of successful direct mail campaigns.

Many direct mail campaigns are informational or general marketing and have no specific deadline. Even without a deadline, you should still include a “call to action” that will prompt the recipient to act quickly. Coupons or statements like “Mention this post card and receive a 10% discount” will cause a recipient to keep the piece for use when they are ready to try your product or services.

If you do have a deadline for response, you should plan your timetable starting from the deadline date and work backwards. Determine how much time you want the recipient to have to respond. If providing a coupon, you should typically allow 2-4 weeks to respond. If your deadline is for a sale or special event, you should only allow 1- 2 weeks to plan on attending. This reduces the chances of them forgetting the event. If your deadline is due for a business event, 4-8 weeks notice will allow them to plan for coverage or necessary travel. For events planned 6-8 weeks out or longer, an email or post card reminder is good within two weeks immediately preceding the event.

You must now allow ample delivery time by the postal service. Delivery standards for First Class mail are 3-5 business days and Standard (Bulk) mail is 7-10 days. Typically, the closer your recipients are, the shorter the delivery time. We consistently see 1-2 day deliveries on First Class AND Standard mailings when mailed out of Harrisburg to addresses within Central PA. Although we see these types of delivery times, they are not guaranteed to always be that quick. To ensure the quickest delivery times, the mailings should be prepared according to Postal Automation Standards.

Next you should plan the mail processing time. If you prepare your own mailings, you already have an idea of how long it will take to get the mailing out the door. If utilizing a mailing service, you should check with them to determine their overall workload around the dates you are expecting to mail and be sure they can process the mailing in ample time. This advanced notice will ensure your job is planned for production. Obviously, the larger the mailing, the longer time needed. Even though your mailing service may turn jobs in 1-2 days, that shouldn't always be expected. Plan on allowing your mailing service 3-5 days to accommodate larger work loads, unexpected production issues, and unexpected design or printing delays

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Next you need to plan your design and printing time. It typically takes 2-3 days to design and proof a mail piece before printing. Depending on the complexity of the mail piece, color usage and quantity, printing can take as long as 4-6 days. Speaking to your printer ahead of time will help them plan appropriately to get your pieces to the mail house and mail on time.

In a perfect world, you should allow 15-20 days for the overall time required to design, print, prepare, mail and be received by your intended recipients. Realizing this is not always possible, making your service providers aware of your needs ahead of time will help them better accommodate your needs.

