



Postcards: The essentials are bold, brief, and compelling

Postcards—the UNPRETENTIOUS LITTLE URCHINS of the direct mail game—can be a heavy hitter in your marketing mix. But as unassuming as a postcard may appear, there are a lot of significant rules to this game that can make the difference between bust and bonanza.

On the plus side, postcards are generally affordable despite recent postage rate changes. There is no envelope to mask your message, and friendly, attention-getting cards get through the mailbox clutter. Done right, postcards can produce a healthy return on investment as well as boost and extend the effectiveness of your overall strategy.

And that brings us to our 10 tips checklist:

❶ **Postcards do not stand alone.** But they can be one strong tactic when properly fit into a broader plan. Don't count on a big splash from a one-time drop of a few postcards and then conclude "they didn't work." So ...

❷ **Think quantity.** In building a practice marketing plan for a client, we often recommend mailings at a minimum of 5,000 pieces for the first of several weeks.

❸ **Think list.** Your list is absolutely critical. Postcards mailed to the wrong people fail 100 percent of the time. Seek expert help in this area.

❹ **Think frequency.** Repetition (in just the right measure) works. We often build a marketing plan that begins with a postcard "drop" in the first week, followed by additional drops of a similar size every other week over four to six weeks.

❺ **Take a breath, if needed.** These numbers can seem astronomical to the uninitiated. But we know from experience—millions of direct mail pieces and many years—this is simply what's needed to be successful. Conversely, if you were thinking in terms of smaller numbers, there is little need to read further. Stop now and avoid the disappointment.

❻ **Think multidimensionally.** Postcards are not universal in size, shape, weight ... nor, ultimately, in postage cost. But, as a starting point, there are specific postal requirements (including penalties) that establish the territorial rules. Regulations and rates changed recently, and you can expect to pay a premium if you try to play out of bounds. Knowledgeable creative professionals can help you design the right size for maximum effectiveness without paying a premium.

Postcards provide limited real estate to accomplish a lot of tasks. When you allow space on the card for the correct address, barcode, and return address, the remaining breath-

ing room for your message is tight. Plus, typical reading time can be just this side of a few nanoseconds.

So, in addition to size, here are some other creative considerations:

❷ **Think single-focus offer.** Nail this one down tight. Postcards are offer-driven, meaning that a precise, strong offer needs to be communicated instantly. There is no time or space for long or detailed text in this media. Start and end with the main point—a clear and compelling offer. You need to grab attention and communicate a single-focus message in just a few words.

❸ **Think benefit.** Within the confined space, connect the offer/message to a benefit of importance to the reader. The offer is the "why they should act now," but the bigger-picture benefit is "what's in it for them." Maintain focus, but there may be more than one benefit.

❹ **Think bold graphics.** The visual elements of a postcard (color, picture, symbol) need to be strong to help get attention and be directly supportive of the message. Anything weak is not seen, and an unrelated graphic is meaningless, confusing, or distracting.

❺ **Think call to immediate action.** A well-composed creative message inspires response, so the means of response—your phone number, for example—needs to be obvious. (You would be surprised how often we find that the phone number is not obvious and sometimes missing entirely.) Having a clear deadline, expiration date, limited quantity, or consequence of inaction that is connected to the offer communicates immediacy and increases response.

These considerations are part of the formula for success, and frankly, it's a tough creative challenge to manage all of these tasks with a few words and small size. Still, done correctly, postcards may have a well-considered place in your marketing program. ■

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