
Add dimension for direct mail success

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There's no better way to stand out in your customer's inbox than sending a dimensional mail piece, say experts. But is it worth the extra cost? Four industry pros weigh in.



John Brogan

Executive creative director, Catalyst Direct Inc.

Who doesn't like presents? The best ones are those that we really want or need — even if we don't know it yet. Similarly, dimensional mailers have to be relevant, engaging and open the door to your offer — even if the recipient doesn't know they need it yet.

Product sampling is a great example. Take that small box of cereal and discount coupons inside the polybag with your morning newspaper — it's simple, immediate and unexpected. You try the cereal in the morning and use the coupon later. Brilliant.

It's all about engagement. You probably receive countless letters or postcards each week, right? And, if you're like many people, you sort them over the wastebasket without even opening them. Then you get a box in the mail. Oh, a present. It could be big or small, but you've got to open it. My team has created dimensional mailings both as big as a boombox and as small as a box of wooden matches. The one thing they have in common is that they engage the recipient and they work.

What you've created is that moment where it's just your target and your offer. And if your present is something they can play with for a moment, that's good. If it's something they show to their neighbor, even better. If it's something they keep and use often, that's great. And when they respond, you hit the jackpot.

So the next time your creative department comes to you with the choice of another No. 10 letter for \$1.25 per piece, or a box — that present — that rattles full of opportunity and costs \$5 more, don't dismiss it — not if your goal is to get your message into your customers' hands.

THE TAKEAWAY

Increased customer engagement makes dimensional mail worth the cost



Mary Bittle

Manager of marketing& communications, American Slide Chart

While print is still touted as a force to be reckoned with by entities like the Direct Marketing Association, I have to assume that a vocal group of naysayers trying to give print a bad rap simply doesn't understand all the options.

Dimensional print offers an even more potent marketing alternative than just any piece of direct mail. Viewed from virtually any angle, dimensional mail is a best-of-breed hybrid.

On the production side, it integrates the latest in-line printing technologies with hand assembly techniques that can produce an unparalleled degree of precision — not to mention some pretty head-turning formats. On the selling side, it combines an enticement to interact with quality paper stock.

So what's the savviest way to integrate dimensional print into your marketing strategy? Perhaps Chicago Bulls legend Michael Jordan said it best: “Talent wins games, but only teamwork wins championships.”

On its own, a cleverly designed dimensional piece can build considerable brand visibility. But too many marketers develop an eye-catching piece that operates in a bubble. Set the bar higher. Dimensional print represents a verb, not a noun. Leverage its power to grab attention by driving audience action. How can you craft copy points that tie into an existing Web presence, blog or RSS feed? Which creative calls to action will nudge your customer toward ever-increasing levels of meaningful dialog?

The answer doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. One client used a humble stock item — our Postage-Saver Pop-Ups — and imprinted a discount offer on each panel to drive regular monthly orders to its Web site. The result? An 80% response rate. The cost? Less than a quarter-page display ad. The boost to his bottom line? Priceless.

THE TAKEAWAY

Integrate dimensional mail with other channels for even more powerful results



Mike Maguire

CEO, Structural Graphics

When considering dimensional mail as part of a marketing campaign, it's important to be aware of potential production challenges.

Start by enabling your production team to succeed by giving them the two things they need – time and resources. Producing dimensional mailers takes a bit longer than flat mail and can include costs marketers don't anticipate in planning. Make sure you give your team enough time and money to make the project run smoothly.

Postal planning is paramount. Many marketers focus on the cost for physical production, but overlook postage expenses. Design your mailer with postage in mind. While “thickness” gets pieces opened, it doesn't decide the impression. By being creative with windows and teasers — for example, creating a fun pop-up — you might be able to mail at letter rates, which leads to big savings. Because postal costs are typically more than 50% of the overall cost of a dimensional project, consider using alternative shipping services to the US Postal Service, such as FedEx and UPS, which can be cost-competitive and trackable. Also, consider making the mailer a marketing tool in itself. I typically open “express packages” before regular mail.

Survivability is the most overlooked production aspect. Many marketers make the mistake of overlooking details that could mean the difference between a mailer surviving the mailing process or dying. Assume that it won't survive — then do enough testing to prove yourself wrong. Testing survivability is the only way to see if a piece needs protective measures to insure its contents will reach your audience in its ideal state.

The key to a successful dimensional mailer is to work with an experienced production partner who does this day in and day out. Ultimately, these companies have knowledge of the hiccups that might occur and they can coach you and ensure success.

THE TAKEAWAY

Addressing dimensional mail's production challenges is key to success



Susan Kerrigan-Meany
President and CEO, SKM Group

There's no doubt that dimensional mail gets attention and usually generates a significantly bigger response than flat mail. However, creating cost-effective results requires a solid strategy.

First, determine if the math works for your product or service. Obviously, the costs will be greater than flat mail. Therefore, dimensional mail works best with high value offerings that warrant the added expense. For instance, tremendous success has been achieved in the business-to-business category, where small target audiences and big-ticket products justify the investment.

If your product makes sense, focus on developing concepts that will create a substantial response. Costs always need to be considered, but your first attempt at dimensional packages should focus on creating results.

The mailer must consist of both an unusual, thought-provoking execution that underscores your position, and a relevant, compelling offer to stimulate response. Ideally, the package should be perceived as not just a mailer, but also an event that the prospect can't resist.

An especially successful dimensional approach is something we call “full-cycle direct.” The first half of the program that arrives in the mail forces the second half that's delivered during a sales call. The second half could also be a premium requested by the respondent.

Once response levels are determined, it's time to evaluate the return on investment. If you need the program to generate a greater return on investment, begin to test ways to either bring costs down while maintaining the same response or create greater response with the same costs. You can back into what the costs need to be based on the response you have been able to generate or you can enhance the offer slightly to increase response at the same cost.

Don't forget that a dimensional package may create a greater lifetime value, so evaluating the results over a period of time is extremely important

THE TAKEAWAY

A solid strategy is necessary to make dimensional mail cost-effective