Every day, throughout the United States, businesses and individual consumers receive Direct Mail. It may be designed to achieve a variety of marketing objectives, including:

- Encouraging interest in a new product or service
- Generating sales and orders
- Helping build store traffic
- Generating new leads
- Bringing news of a special private sale to a valued customer
- Maintaining relationships
- Enhancing results of other forms of advertising
- Building brand recognition
- Prospecting for new customers

Not all of these objectives apply to every business. Here are some specific ways that certain types of businesses can use Direct Mail to achieve marketing objectives.

Direct Mail can drive sales, build traffic, awareness and loyalty.

Retailers

- *Give advance notice of a sale by mailing postcards to preferred customers.*
- *Mail flyers or brochures to all nearby addresses announcing new product lines, monthly specials, new seasonal hours, etc.*
- *Raise awareness and effectiveness of advertising by mailing a postcard asking consumers to watch for these advertisements.*

Service Companies

- *Mail a periodic newsletter informing customers of new developments in your industry and providing helpful tips relating to your service.*
- *Turn your current customers into a sales force by mailing a "tell-a-friend" promotion, offering premiums or discounts to customers who refer new business to you.*
- *Prospect for new customers by swapping lists with a company in a complementary business. For example, a pet groomer could exchange customer lists with a local veterinarian.*

In 1996, **68%** of the U.S. adult population ordered merchandise or services by phone or mail.

68%

Manufacturers

- *Announce new products or prices to customers and distributors.*
- *Notify buyers of one product about the availability of other products you offer.*
- *Alert customers to the availability of upgrades and accessories to products they have purchased.*
- *Send or offer small product samples to qualified sales leads.*

Professionals

- *Mail cards to clients announcing changes in staff at the firm.*
- *Raise awareness of your services by alerting the community to special events related to your service. For example, a health clinic could mail a flyer promoting Heart Health Awareness Week.*
- *Mail a periodic newsletter informing customers of new developments in your field and providing helpful tips relating to your service.*

No matter what its special purpose, Direct Mail gets a response.

Infinite *flexibility*

You've probably already experienced the advantages of using Direct Mail in your own business. Direct Mail is almost infinitely flexible. The creative opportunities to deliver your message or a sample of your product are limitless. Send a personalized letter, a brochure, a videotape, a bowling ball, a tree sapling or, simply, a postcard. The attention-getting possibilities are endless.

But the flexibility goes beyond the format. Direct Mail can help emphasize a seasonal selling opportunity, or help to build sales in a traditionally slow time of year. Many leading companies use Direct Mail as an effective tool for reducing inventory and keeping product lines current.

Direct Mail's flexibility is also apparent in the opportunity for co-op or shared mailings. Smaller businesses that operate primarily on a local level, or franchises of larger operations, can participate in shared mailings such as Valpacks, in which many retailers or service businesses share some of the

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mailing costs. It's an efficient way for regional businesses with similar goals to participate in the benefits of Direct Mail.

Flexible timing and the ability to prepare a Direct Mail piece in a relatively short time can give you the competitive edge of surprise or the capacity to respond quickly to a competitor's effort. You can prepare and send a postcard in a matter of days. Moreover, Direct Mail efforts have the capacity to be kept secret from the competition right up to the time they are delivered to your customer.

And, of course, there is no medium which allows you to consistently measure response and return-on-investment like Direct Mail.

Pinpoint *marketing*

As you know, mail is a highly targetable medium. Television, radio and print campaigns can reach millions, but inevitably you will be reaching many people who have no interest in or need for your product or service. Direct Mail is a medium that targets the audience and then delivers your message right to their front door, making it personal and compelling.

Are you looking for a 35–49-year-old vegetarian who is a professional, has an income of $50,000+, drives a reconditioned 1951 DeSoto, takes three vacations a year, and collects *I Love Lucy* memorabilia?

No problem.

More than **36%** of Direct Marketing shoppers spent **$200** or more on items purchased via phone or mail in 1996.

36%

When done correctly, Direct Mail can

- Result in direct sales
- Generate sales leads
- Help build traffic
- Enhance brand awareness
- Develop loyalty

Your audience for Direct Mail can be targeted by any number of criteria. As a result, prospects can be identified to an amazingly precise level. Of course, there is a level that is right for your purposes. It may be as simple as targeting a ZIP Code®, or it may involve one or more items of consumer information such as:

- *Household income*
- *Family size*
- *Ages of family members*
- *Gender*
- *Occupation*
- *Education level*
- *Hobbies*
- *Leisure time activities*
- *Clubs and organizations*

Business-to-Business data may include

- *Industry classifications*
- *Size and revenues of targeted businesses*
- *Number of employees*
- *Locations*

With today's extensive databases and sophisticated demographics, you can direct your mail to potential customers who are interested in what you have to offer and have a purchasing history (as well as the purchasing power) that makes them prime prospects for your business. In addition, Direct Mail can be personalized and delivered right to your customer's home or business.

Geographical considerations don't have to be broad. Even when sending out a mass mailing to an entire region, keep in mind that it is possible, and often desirable, to "overlay" a new list onto your existing database for any demographic considerations you feel are significant. Through such data-mapping, a store selling clothing designed for young women can suppress mail in the region which reaches the homes of senior citizens or other inappropriate groups. Or they can match a new list to their "best customer" profile to increase the chances of successful response.

Today, the management of databases and the availability of lists is more sophisticated than ever before. Thanks to technology, the decisions you make on seemingly simple demographic selections are based on the amounts of information that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.

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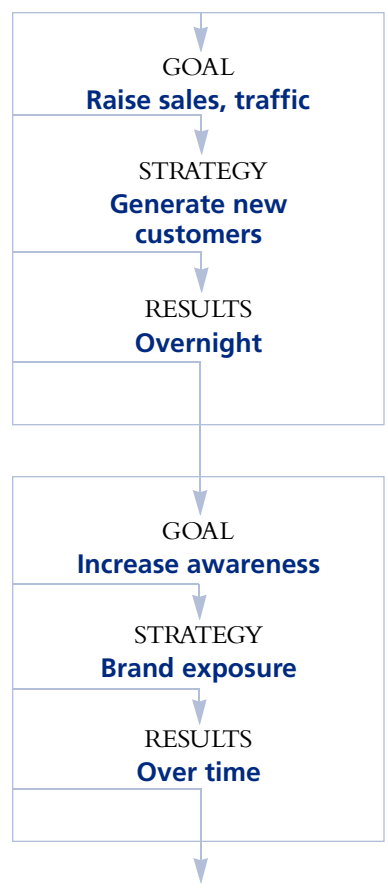
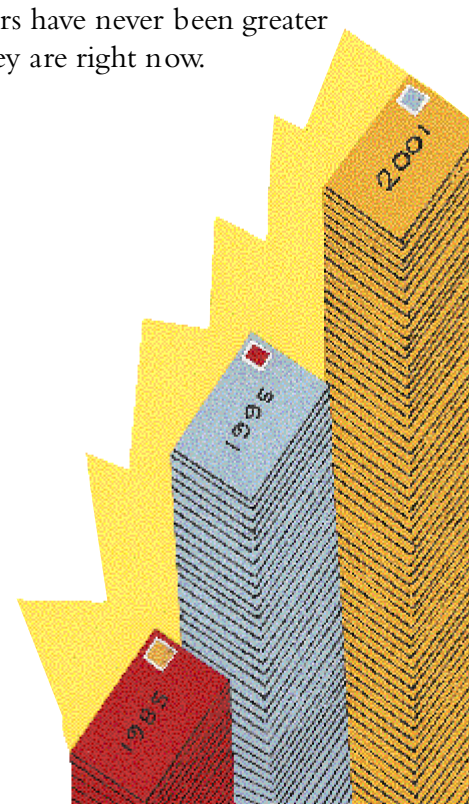
Setting goals and reaching them– *directly*

One more thing. It is important to take a moment to remember that a Direct Mail campaign is part of an overall advertising and marketing program. As such, Direct Mail, like any other advertising and marketing venture, should begin with the establishment of a goal.

It all seems self-evident, but unclear goals and indecisive strategies are often the culprits behind disappointing results. Even the most experienced Direct Mailers are subject to this pitfall. And where Direct Mail is concerned, there is a special consideration to keep in mind. Since the ability to measure the success and the return-on-investment of a mailing is one of the great strengths of Direct Mail, a distinction should be made between strategies designed to produce a measurable return overnight and those that produce a return over time.



Direct Mail as a marketing tool has been in existence for decades, but as its growth rate will attest, the opportunities for smart marketers have never been greater than they are right now.



By the numbers

In 1985, American businesses spent **$15.5 billion** on Direct Mail.

Ten years later, that figure had more than doubled to **$32.9 billion**.

By 2001, Direct Mail is expected to grow to **$46.9 billion**, a sustained annual growth rate of 6–7%. In today's competitive world, there is no stronger testimonial to the power of Direct Mail.