

Wait a minute Mr. Postman –

10 Pitfalls marketers must avoid when preparing a Direct Mail Campaign

After interviewing our resident Mail Processing Gurus, we wanted to share 10 of the most common pitfalls that can cost marketers thousands of dollars and derail a well-intended direct mail initiative.

1.) Go First Class at Coach Pricing...

The US Postal Service offers a special first class postage rate for post cards that are no smaller than 3 ½” x 5” and not larger than 4 ¼” x 6”. For example, if you have a mailing of 10,000 pieces and the sorting scheme qualifies for a 3-digit rate, the cost per piece would be \$.218 each. If the postcard were 5 ½” x 8 ½”, the price per piece would be \$.357 each. This translates into \$139 per thousand pieces in cost savings.

2.) Clean up your act!

We see it every day. Our customer wants to do a mailing; we receive a database that’s in ill repair. The examples below tell the story. Good, “normalized” data means that company name, address, city, state and zip all appear in their own unique and appropriately labeled column. Quotation marks (“”) are always a no-no in data entry.

3.) Albuquerque is not in France.

If you insist on combing International addresses in a domestic mail database make sure to include a country field and designate accordingly. Again, this prevents expensive data manipulation at the letter shop.

4.) Qualified non-profit mail travels through the mail stream at a significant discount.

Having said that, it’s important to remember that the return address on the mail piece must match the exact address information associated with the corresponding non-profit permit number at the post office location where the permit was issued. Any deviation will result in an upgrade to the more expensive standard mail rate.

5.) All priority mail weighing over (1) pound must be sorted by zone. (Failure to do this will result in a rejection at Business Mail Entry at the post office.)

6.) Gotta have the numbers!

In order to qualify for presort mailing discounts, you must have at least 500 CASS certified addresses when mailing First Class. Only 200 addresses are required to satisfy the minimums for Standard and Non-profit mail.

7.) Of course I believe you, we just need to verify things!

Make it a common practice to seed your name and address in all mailings. This will ensure that you can confirm the precise in-home arrival date along with the opportunity to evaluate the condition of the mail. (P.S. - In some cases, it might be appropriate to seed the mailing with someone unknown to the letter shop)

- 8.) Don't get caught speeding...
If you mail a presorted letter thicker than 1/4" inch, you will be penalized by paying an extra .20¢ per mail piece. This also applies for aspect ratio violations. For example, if you mail a post card that's 5" x 5", you will be charged an additional .20¢ each. In order to be compliant in the above example the length of the card must fall within the range of no less than 1.3 (x) the width, or 6 1/2" minimum and no longer than 12.5", which is 2.5 (x) the width.
- 9.) Sorry Mr. Gates, we can't play with all your toys!
If you want to become popular at your letter shop then prepare your mailing database in Microsoft Word. NOT! This creates a host of problems in the data formatting production process. Whenever possible, we prefer to receive database files in Microsoft Excel or Access formats. These columnar spreadsheet programs are better suited for data manipulation.
- 10.) Excel leading zero issue: Let's say you have east coast zip codes or customer account numbers and some of them begin with zero. You will see that if you type the number 0123 in a cell, by default, Excel will remove the leading zero and your cell will just show 123. Try it and you will see! Special formatting techniques (text) and other "tricks" will circumvent this issue.
- 11.) "Let's Dance Together"
The next time you are mailing to delivery points "out of country", ask your mailer to render a quotation on the postage rate. Then ask him or her if this is a commingled rate. If you hear silence on the other end of the phone, call the "Rate Busters" at MidAmerican and get immediate bed rest.
- 12.) Bonus Tip – "Movin' on up!!"
At MidAmerican Printing Systems, all customer mail files are parsed through NCOA (National Change of Address) and Move Update software. We mirror all addresses to the master USPS database in Memphis, TN. All addresses that have relocated within the prior 6 months of the mailing are updated with the new corrected address. This results in a new pristine database with correct address information.

If you have a question about Printing or Mailing, call the experts at MidAmerican Printing Systems, Inc.