

## 25 ways to do direct mail better

Direct mail can be one of the most efficient, cost-effective marketing vehicles available today. Even in this age of e-commerce, every marketing plan should include a direct-mail component to communicate a company's message. If you want proof of the power of direct mail, notice how Internet companies rely on direct mail to promote their web sites.

However, it's easy to waste money on direct mail. So, when planning your next direct-mail piece, consider the following questions to ensure a successful campaign:

- 1. Does the mailing create the right impression?** If it looks like junk, this is the impression it will create when it arrives. Apply the highest standards of judgement to how the mailing looks. Don't settle for "just get it out the door." Ask yourself, would you be impressed if you received your own mailings? Would you take them seriously?
- 2. Is every letter fully personalized?** Of course you can get by with "Dear Neighbor" or "Dear Valued Customer," but not if you want to make an impact. Dear Ms. Roberts, Dear Mr. Martinez, or Dear Tom makes a far more personal impression. There is no excuse for failing to personalize letters whether they are to customers or prospects. If you want to convey the message that you offer personal service, start by being personal with your direct mail.
- 3. Does the mailing have eye appeal?** If it isn't interesting on the outside, it won't get opened, and if it isn't appealing on the inside, it won't get read. Your mailing is in brutal competition with dozens of other pieces for attention. Stand out. Use color. Make the package interesting by enclosing two, three, or even four pieces.
- 4. Does it touch the reader's emotions?** If it doesn't, don't bother sending it. Your mailing must grab the reader. Make sure the reader will feel left out of a good thing by failing to respond to your offer.
- 5. Does it tell a story?** Describe for the reader how you solved a customer's problem. Tell what happened and talk about the customer's reaction to your solution. Stories are a powerful way to bring your message to life.
- 6. Have you used testimonials?** Credible testimonials are powerful persuaders, particularly today when businesses can't afford to make mistakes. But use only real people and identify them completely. No anonymity and no initials. Readers see through such deceit. And be sure to get permission and a signed release from those providing testimonials.
- 7. Is the mailing memorable?** Just another letter in another dull envelope won't do. Make it fun and interesting. If the reader remembers the mailing, your company will be remembered, too. The chances of a positive response increase.
- 8. Is the mailing different?** One mailing included a clear plastic bag filled with sand, seashells, miniature sandals, sunglasses, and even a tiny beach umbrella and record player. The attached tag read: "Just add retirement fund and enjoy." Another arrived in a box containing inexpensive binoculars with a card: "Take a closer look at our special offer."
- 9. How many times have you used "you"?** The magic word in direct mail is "you". Talk to the customer and talk about the customer. Avoid the temptation to boast about your company product or service. Talk directly to the reader about what the reader wants to hear. It's what the customer wants that's important in a direct mail presentation, not what you want to say or sell.
- 10. Are the sentences short?** Use punchy sentences. Keep them simple and clear. Anything complicated only confuses the reader. Sentences can have one or two words. Remember, be direct.
- 11. How long is your message?** Keeping a letter to one page is acceptable if that's what it takes to tell the story. But don't be afraid of long letters—three, four or five pages—if they are interesting and compelling.
- 12. What do you want the reader to do?** In other words, what action do you want the reader to take? Most direct mail fails at this crucial point. Do you want the reader to buy, call, make an appointment, or welcome a salesperson? Have a very clear picture of the action step and build the mailing around this objective.

*continued next page*

## New Year's Resolutions from anonymous printing buyers

Things I will never do again:

*"Proofread my own work. I've read this piece too many times."*

*"Print a job without asking first for a confirmation of the price. I've learned that seemingly small changes in specs can dramatically impact the cost."*

*"Submit a job without supplying a laser proof of the disk. I once did this and the wrong job got printed. The file I sent was not the most recent version, which would have easily been caught if I had provided something for the printer to go by."*

*"Print photos on gray paper. No matter what I do, I can't get them to look good."*

- 13. What's your offer?** The goal of a mailing is gaining a response. There must be a meaningful offer to move the customer to action. Here are words that stimulate an immediate response: free, limited offer, respond by this date to receive discount. Without an offer, there is no urgency for the customer to act.
- 14. Have you included a guarantee?** Customers are cautious today, and want guarantees. Mostly, they want to feel that you stand behind what you sell. What the customer is looking for is total satisfaction. If it's a product, offer a money-back guarantee. Even if you are giving away a brochure or a survey, show your confidence by guaranteeing that the reader will find it helpful or useful.
- 15. Are you talking with the reader?** Direct mail fails because the language is stilted. Cold and impersonal, it pushes the reader away (from you). Be warm, conversational and friendly. "Talk" your direct mail.
- 16. Are you still using labels?** The laser printer has made address labels obsolete even though they continue to be used on regular business envelopes. Direct imprinting is the standard for everything—including newsletters.
- 17. Are you going first-class?** Postage, that is. There are situations when bulk rate (standard rate) is acceptable. At the same time, first-class postage (and "overnight" on certain occasions) creates the impression that the mailing was directed to you—personally. Whenever possible, go first-class. And with pre-sort software, the cost of mailing first-class is cost-effective.
- 18. Are you getting inside the reader's head?** Does the mailing really focus on and deal with what the customer wants to accomplish or does it dwell on what you want the customer to buy? The only way to keep the reader's interest is to make sure you fully understand the reader's needs.
- 19. Do you test your direct mail?** Before rolling out a mailing of 5,000 or 50,000, try 1,000 to 5,000 to determine the response. Better yet, try two or three approaches at one time and make comparisons. Vary the message, the offer, the graphics, and so forth.
- 20. Are you repetitious?** You should be! The key to direct mail success is repetition. Use American Express or cataloguers as role models. The goal of direct mail is to catch readers when they are ready. If you're there, you get the business.
- 21. Are you targeting your mailings?** Avoid the broad-brush approach at all cost. It's not necessary and it wastes money. Tailor your message to smaller and smaller segments. It's the best way to convince readers that you understand their specific needs and what is important to them.
- 22. Is it easy for the reader to respond?** Offer the reader a selection of ways to respond. An inexpensive, toll-free number (800 no longer suggests that you are located at the North Pole) lets customers act quickly—when they are ready. Always enclose a Business Reply Mail card or envelope (see #23). In certain situations, you may want to ask the customer to come and see you.
- 23. Did you enclose a response form?** It may be a postage-paid Business Reply Mail card or envelope (Don't even think about having the customer pay the postage) or a fax back form (if you are mailing to businesses). Make it easy for the customer to respond by imprinting names and addresses on your response card. If you are using a fax back form, either place it at the bottom of the letter or use a separate form that is imprinted with the customer's name and address.
- 24. Have you given the customer a coupon?** An interesting, value-creating coupon will help make your offer tangible—it is something readers can hold in their hands. Use a coupon to give customers dollar amount discounts. Avoid 15 percent off because customers can't measure the offer. Numbering coupons can create additional value.
- 25. Have you ended with a P.S.?** Believe it or not, the P.S. is often the first part of a letter that's read. It's the reader's way of cutting to the chase. Use the P.S. to restate your offer—"Act before February 20 and receive a free...."

Use these questions to review your present direct-mail programs and to make response-building improvements for future mailings.

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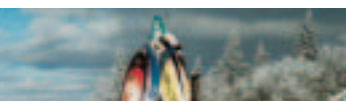
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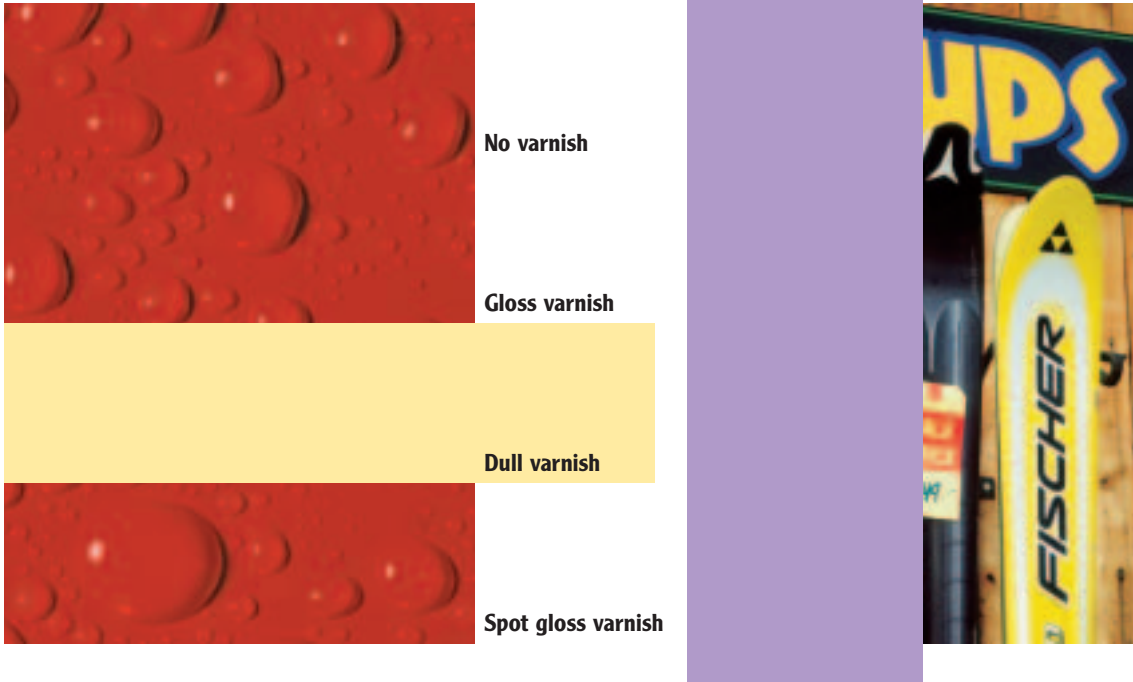
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# Varnish for visual appeal and design protection



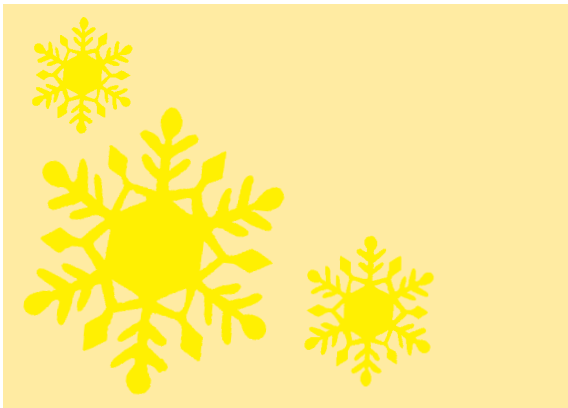
## Preview nightmares haunting you?

Remember that when you place a TIFF or EPS file in any page layout program such as Quark, PageMaker, or InDesign, what you see on the screen is not the file itself, but a low-resolution representation of the art. Many users see this low-resolution view and become concerned there is something wrong with the file, or that the file will print out looking like this rough view. Rest assured that the TIFF or EPS will print out in high resolution as long as the link is maintained. Page layout programs use low resolution screen views to speed up the layout process. If the views of placed art were high in resolution, the documents would open, redraw, and save very slowly.

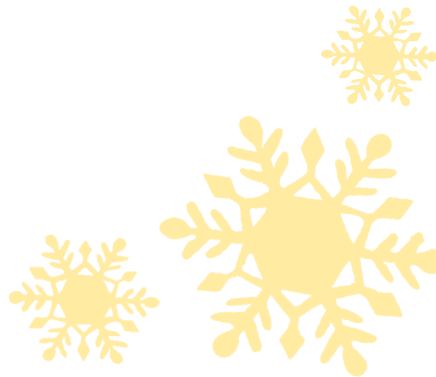
If you must see the high-resolution view in order to precisely lay out the piece, there are ways to temporarily turn this feature on. In Quark you can use the Enhance Preview XT-SE extension, available in the View menu in Quark 4, to preview selected picture boxes. In PageMaker you can obtain a high-resolution preview by holding down the control key while zooming. In InDesign, control-click on the graphic and choose Display-High Resolution from the pop-up menu.

Tinted varnish

# SUBTLE



Dull varnish with gloss varnish art



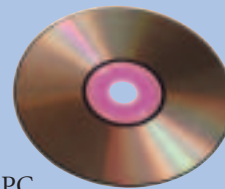
Gloss varnish with dull varnish art

## CD burning basics

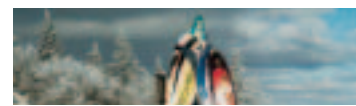
When burning CDs, pay attention to the options you choose. There are many types of CD formats: Mac, ISO Level 1 or 2, Microsoft Joliet, music CD's etc. Read your CD manual to become familiar with the different choices. If you are on a Mac and you are giving the CD to another Mac user, choose Mac.

If you choose ISO Level 1, all your files will be truncated, meaning the names will be shortened to eight characters plus an extension. All your links will be lost, the types of files will be unknown, and your fonts will be useless. If you are giving your CD to a PC user, rename all your files with the proper three-letter

extensions (.tif, .eps, .qxd, etc.), re-link all your graphics and create a PC CD. On the PC, be sure you choose a format that will retain the long file names of Windows, such as ISO Level 2, which supports up to 31 characters. Usually there is a preview of the files in the CD burner software that will alert you if the file names are being shortened. Be sure to check the CD before sending it out by opening the file from the CD. At the same time, print out a directory of the CD contents so the recipient will know exactly what it contains.



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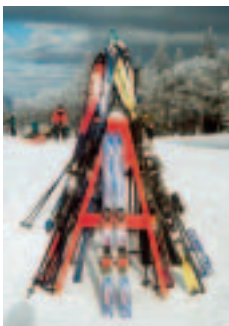
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