

Mail Format Report Shows Postcard Still Dominates

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The postcard leads among direct mail control formats, according to a new study. But look for online channels to continue take an increasingly important role among mailers.

Ballantine Corp., a print production and mailing services firm, asked its clients and marketing contacts a simple question: "What is your best-performing mailer (postcard, voucher, 6x9, etc.)...and is the recent postage hike and weakened economy forcing you to re-adjust your direct mail strategy? If so, how and why?" Respondents were also asked for whatever additional comments they might like to make.

Broken out by vertical market, marketers cited the following formats:

Senior Care: postcard, co-op

Retail: postcard

Marketing: postcard, newsletter

Entertainment: 9x12 package

Non-Profit: #9 package, 6x9 package

Publishing (Books): catalog, postcard

Publishing (Magazines): #14 package, 9x12, #10, voucher, 8 ½ x 11 poly pack, double & triple postcard, greeting card mailer, online marketing

Association: 8 ½ x 11 poly pack, postcard

Healthcare: postcard

Insurance: voucher package

Software: postcard

Financial Services: self-mailer, #10 package

One book publisher noted "The economy, not the postage hike, has had the greatest impact. We predominantly mail catalogs, and have had to reduce page count, reduce paper quality, reduce total mailings, and reduce some creative/photo."

Others were more than happy to blame – at least in part – postal costs, and attributed the success of their postcard mailings to the lower cost of sending out that particular format. Still others are trying to extend the terms of their offers, by pushing two-year deals as opposed to one-year trials.

A magazine publisher sounded almost trapped, saying "Our best performing DM package is STILL an 8 ½ x 11 poly pack. We're still trying to beat it but



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Our package is STILL an 8 1/2 x 11 poly pack. We're still trying to beat it but can't make a change until we do. So far, we haven't come close and even with the increase in postage, the most important thing is to sell the most net, paid subscriptions, so we'll have to keep mailing the poly."

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"...I believe in being a vocal advo

While many respondents recited the "don't mail more, mail smarter" shibboleth, a magazine publisher that relies on a tri-fold postcard noted "The costs and the weakened economy have forced us to actually increase our direct mailings. With fewer people wanting to spend money we have to canvass a larger audience to keep the revenue coming in."

A retail client, which uses postcards to drive store traffic, observed that even with this best-performing vehicle "Redemption is still very very low – 0.2% or less."

Unsurprisingly, the higher-tech category, software, found that e-channels outperformed traditional mail. "In terms of direct mail, the only pieces we ever send out anymore are 8.5 x 5.5 single postcards because of the cost. We used to send out double and triple folds with the same dimensions but they just don't perform any better than the singles."

Nonprofits, which often solicit either funds or involvement, continue to rely on richer-feeling letter packages. "[Our] best performing mailer with our house file is a #9 double window package with an integrated card on the reply form. It is a renewal notice," wrote one such marketer, who continued "Our best performing mailer in acquisition is a 6 x 9 color window outer with an oversized brochure within the package. Postage hike has caused us to use commingling

more to keep postage costs down. The weakened economy has not changed our strategies.”

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Balentine's own observations are that mailers are using fewer flats, and higher volumes of slim jims and magalogs. Marketers continue to test enhanced voucher package, and variations on envelope designs. And the days of very large mailings are dwindling, with marketers opting for more-frequent targeted mailings. "Nevertheless," according to the company's report, "the total volume

waters since our board is still healthy."

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