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### Stamp Out the 10 Most Common Postcard Marketing Mistakes

by Patricia Schaefer

My veterinarian has the best postcards. Always colorful with entertaining cartoon illustrations of cats, dogs and other assorted animals, they are

irresistible and a source of family delight. Of course they also contain the customary reminder on the print side that one of our dogs is due to a check-up.

They are also very effective; we haven't missed scheduling an appointment yet.

Many businesses already know what my veterinarian knows: a postcard can be irresistible and a great way to get someone's attention. Postcards are also a great way to:

- Generate sales leads.
- Promote special offers or coupons.
- Introduce a new product or service.
- Keep in touch with existing customers.
- Drive traffic to a website.
- Test several messages and offers.

Virtually 100 percent of postcards get read and the reason is simple:

Mail in envelopes has to be opened first to be read. People often look at just the envelope, decide they're not interested, and out it goes. In contrast, a postcard is already "opened," ready to read and, at the very least, the message will be seen – no matter how speedily – by the recipient.

Postcards are the least expensive form of direct mail today, are easy to create, and typically generate a high rate of response.

When you combine all these factors, it's no wonder then that businesses today use postcards as a tremendously powerful

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marketing tool.

It is, however, important to avoid some common mistakes businesspeople make in their implementation of their postcard marketing campaign. Doing so can mean the difference between its success and failure.

### **Mistake #1: Not Targeting the Best Prospects**

How much of a response do you think the Omaha Steaks company would get if they sent marketing postcards to the subscriber list of the *Vegetarian Times*? Probably zip to nil, unless there's a closet carnivore among the ranks.

Having the best-possible mailing list of prospects is one of the most – if not the most – important factors of a successful postcard marketing campaign. In-house lists are best, especially if those listed also have a proven history of acting on offers that interest them.

If you don't have an in-house list, you can develop your own or get a rented one, but be sure to go to a list broker. For a fee, you can rent subscriber lists of specialized publications and newsletters read by prospects in your targeted market.

### **Mistake #2: Lack of Repetition**

What you need is a postcard marketing campaign, not just a single mailing. It is the consistent repetitive mailings that are exceedingly more effective than a one-time shot-in-the-dark mailing. When someone sees your company name over and over again, it builds credibility and familiarity. Although it may take a number of contacts with a customer before it leads to a sale, the eventual increase in revenue usually far offsets the small cost of postcard printing.

### **Mistake #3: Sending a Postcard that isn't Personable**

You want your postcards to look professional but at the same time contain an affable message that produces a pleasant emotional reaction from readers. Postcards that contain a brief personal message generate significantly more replies than those that read like a cool and formal ad.

### **Mistake #4: Mailing Missteps**

Avoid using indicia (imprinted postage) when possible; i.e., for small mailings. People associate it with junk mail. A first class stamp costs a little more per card but looks friendlier and produces more replies. In addition, you get all the benefits of first class mail including a "return to sender" if the address is no longer valid. This is a great way to maintain and update mailing lists.

Pay attention also to postcard dates of arrival. Monday, Friday and holiday-time arrivals have been proven to be less effective; Tuesday and Wednesday arrivals get best results because the volume of mail is generally lighter on those days. Check with your postal service if you are unsure how to gauge postcard arrivals,

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especially if you are mailing out-of-state.

#### **Mistake #5: Spending Too Much on Printing**

It is not necessary today for a business to spend a bundle on postcard printing. You can print an attractive postcard on your laser or ink-jet printer for just pennies a card plus the cost of ink. For larger mailings, professional printers charge considerably less per card as the number of postcards increase, and it may actually cost less than doing it yourself.

The U.S. Postal Service requires 23-cent first-class postcards to be at least 3-1/2 inches high by 5 inches wide, but not over 4-1/4 inches high by 6 inches wide. Office supply stores have ready-made perforated postcard sheets, including those with top-of-the-line coated postcard paper.

#### **Mistake #6: Using Postcards as a Sales Pitch**

Don't try to close sales directly from your postcard. There's not enough space to provide all the information needed to do so. Use the postcard instead to grab the reader's attention and then lead them to the next step that can close a sale; i.e., visiting your sales webpage, coming to a grand opening, or using a coupon.

#### **Mistake #7: Not Enough Attention to the Headline, Image or Message**

A short attention-getting and compelling headline will bring about 20 times the response to a postcard than one with a bad headline or none at all. Combine the headline with the image side and this will then guide the reader to the message side. The image should be easily comprehended, attractive and brightly colored. And be sure that the message clearly expresses what you're promoting; otherwise, your efforts may be fruitless.

#### **Mistake #8: Not Keeping the Message Simple**

Think brevity. Your postcard will probably garner a one to two second initial glance, so don't weigh down your chances of success with clever dissertations, jargon, or a laundry list of everything you offer. Use short complete sentences with well-chosen plain language and bullet points that will get the attention of the reader. Promote no more than one key thing per card. Convey just what is important and what the reader should do next.

#### **Mistake #9: Failure to Provide Contact Information**

It sounds like common sense to provide a telephone, cell and fax number, as well as an email and return address, but too many times contact information is forgotten on business postcards. Be sure to include your company name as well.

#### **Mistake #10: Failure to Proofread**

A spelling, punctuation or typographical error reflects poorly on the sender, especially if the sender is a business. Even the best writers proofread their works, sometimes over and over again, before sending it to print. Whether or not you write or print the postcard copy yourself, it must be proofread. A good way to do this is to read it aloud. It is also beneficial to have someone else review it; another person will often catch things that you may overlook.

It is not unusual for a small or fledgling business to use postcards as a major marketing device. It is also not unusual that a well-thought-out postcard marketing campaign can lead to a significant increase in sales and revenues. By avoiding these common postcard marketing mistakes, you too will be better able to enjoy the rewards of this powerful marketing tool.

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