

DIRECT RESPONSE

DIGEST OF DIRECT MARKETING

Why your response rate may be low 7 proven secrets to getting your mail delivered

By Craig Huey, President, CDMG; Publisher, *Direct Response*

Imagine driving down the freeway and seeing a pile of boxes sitting on the shoulder. You pull off and discover that the boxes are filled with your mailing...one you thought had gone to the post office weeks before.

Or how about finding out that only half of your 500,000-piece mailing actually mailed and that your lettershop had simply pocketed the postage money for the rest.

Now stop imagining; these things really happened and...

There are lots of direct mail horror stories out there—it's not really that uncommon

And more often than not it has to do with mail that never made it to the post office.

More than 20 years ago I decided to make it a priority to protect my clients from being ripped-off by lettershops and

postal employees.

Long ago I developed a 7-point system that has proven to be very successful in guaranteeing that my clients' entire mailings actually get delivered to the post office.

In this article, I am going to share these secrets with you...

Delivery Secret #1: Always write your postage check directly to the postmaster

It doesn't matter that your printer or lettershop, or even a printing broker, is acting as your go-between. The money that you are paying for postage is ultimately paid to the post office. Therefore, there is no reason to ever write a check for postage that is not made out directly to the post office.

However, you might think doing this is enough to ensure that your money gets where it is

supposed to. *Don't bet on it.*

I have personally had checks altered by lettershops.

A check made out to the "U.S. Postmaster" was changed to read "U.S. Postmaster—ABC LetterShop." And then the funds were deposited into the lettershop's account!

While I'm not saying that the funds were misappropriated, it did leave us vulnerable.

So now I always make sure that my accounting department takes that one extra step with postage checks and completes the "Pay to the order of" line with asterisks as follows: "** U.S. Postmaster****." This ensures that the only one**



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cashing your postage checks is the post office.

Delivery Secret #2: Always open your own mailing permit account

Many lettershops will allow you to use their mailing permits. It can be a nice convenience for you, especially if you usually mail first class and want to try a third class mailing. However, doing this opens up accountability issues.

Once you have your own permit, you are able to accurately track, on the back end, how your postage money has been spent.

When we do mailings for clients, we always get the appropriate mailing permit accounts needed for each specific client's jobs.

Delivery Secret #3: Always send a representative to keep an eye on your mailing

If you or someone representing your interest is not overseeing the production of your job, you are opening yourself up to problems.

So you should always send someone to the printer and then to your lettershop. If you are using an agency to produce your work, they

will often include press checks and onsite oversight as part of the service they provide.

If it is not already being done, insist that they start doing this for you. (And then verify that they are actually going to the site.)

Members of my staff are often at lettershops across the county overseeing jobs, and that often means working around the clock, but having them there has prevented numerous disasters over the years and saved my clients from having to worry.

NOTE:

"If you or your representative can't make it to the lettershop, never tell the shop that you definitely won't be coming. Always leave them with the idea that there is a chance that you will show up."

And whether you have someone onsite to oversee the job or not, be sure you have someone in your organization checking proofs every step of the way.

I recently ran across a horror story of a mailing that got zero response. The

sender discovered too late that the bar coding information for the Zip code, which is applied at the lettershop, was wrong. So the mail went to the wrong post offices.

This could easily have been avoided had samples of the mailing been checked when the mailhouse first set it up to do the addressing.

Delivery Secret #4: Always do your own counts of what is to be mailed

Many printers and lettershops work 24 hours a day. So you want to make sure that your representative is actually at the lettershop as your job is being processed (even if that is at 3:00 a.m.).

And then, no matter what the paperwork says or what they think they've seen, have your representatives do their own counts of the mailings.

No, I don't mean count every individual piece.

But they should know roughly how many pieces are going into a mailbag or onto a pallet. And then they should make sure that there are enough bags or pallets when the job is complete to reasonably match your

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mailing numbers.

It is important, as well, to make sure that your mailing is kept separate from other jobs going through the lettershop. Don't be persuaded to mix your mail with mail from other jobs, even if it would result in a small savings. The overall safety of your mailing is more important.

You need to see that the only things going into your mailbags or onto your pallets are your pieces from your job. Some shops will commingle jobs into one bag or onto a pallet, and that can easily give the appearance that more of your pieces are being mailed than actually are.

I make sure mailings my staff oversees are carefully separated and properly counted.

Delivery Secret #5: Always watch your job being loaded onto the truck

One of my clients told me a story of a job she had handled on her own...several weeks after a mailing had gone out, she was taking a tour of the lettershop facilities. There, still sitting on pallets, was part of her job.

And she wondered why her response wasn't very good.

The answer is to watch as the mail is loaded onto the trucks going to the post office or distribution center.

If you can, I recommend that you get in your own car and follow the trucks to the post office and watch it being unloaded. (At least make them think you are going.)

We even take pictures for our clients and email the photos to them.)

And yes, this is important, because you can't just trust a written form...

Delivery Secret #6: Always make sure you see your 3602 forms and verify that the counts are correct

A 3602 form is the document that the post office uses to verify that they received your mail and that it was processed. They are time and date stamped.

3602s are a pretty good way to verify that the mail actually went out. However, they are also open to fraud. Large lettershops will often

have postal employees assigned to them.

These individuals actually have their offices located at the mailing house. It's sort of an onsite post office.

And that means that the 3602s are being completed and stamped at the letter-



shop—before the trucks even leave the shop—so again be sure that your mail actually gets on the truck.

I have heard stories of 3602 forms that had their dates and quantities altered literally in front of the person they were being created for. So always verify that the information is correct.

And I've personally seen forms that claimed a mailing had gone out and later discovered it did not.

Over the years, I have seen fraud like this committed by lettershops, by a lettershop employee, by a postal employee and by a combination of the above...

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Delivery Secret #7: Always seed your mailing lists

If you are not familiar with this term, seeding a list means that you add names and addresses to your lists that you control.

At its simplest level, you would be adding names of employees so you have verification mail was sent when they receive their copies.

In addition, you should have seed mail that you can track across a mailing being sent nationally, or more specifically, to Zip codes that reflect the actual coverage of the mailing.

The people who receive these copies should be instructed to record the date the mail actually arrives (this not only lets you know the mail made it to its destination, but it also lets you track how long it took to arrive—important if your mailing is time sensitive.)

Some companies seed by finding friends and relatives, or people in branch offices, to participate. However, this can be haphazard, so I always recommend you use a national (or international) mail-monitoring service.

This service will provide

you with a seed list matched closely to your mailing, then collect the pieces received and even return them to you as part of the service. We automatically set this up for our clients.

Finally, have a rotating set of names that include a special code run by your computer house for each list use.

This should be a different set of names from your standard seeds and the code used should identify the names with the job (by coding, I mean an identifier in the address, such as “Dept. 99”, or a special middle initial.) This will also help with your internal tracking of the job.

One more thing about seeding...make sure your list is seeded before it arrives at the lettershop and not done by their list people. It is not unheard of for a lettershop that knows who the seed are to make certain those names are mailed to first and on time, while the bulk of your mailing sits in a warehouse or never gets mailed at all.

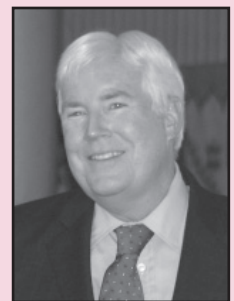
Following these 7 steps will just about ensure that your mail is delivered

Since establishing these rules with my staff, I’ve had

an excellent record for getting my clients’ mail delivered. (Of course, these steps just get your mail to the post office and help you verify it went out...we still have to contend with the occasional postal worker who decides to build a weekend cottage out of direct mail instead of delivering it.)

If you need help making sure your next mailing makes it to the post office, call me today at 1-310-212-5727. We can give you great prices (because of our volume buying), expert supervision and peace of mind knowing your mail is being delivered. For more information on my full-service agency go to www.cdmginc.com.

Mr. Huey is recognized as one of the world’s leading direct response marketing experts.



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