

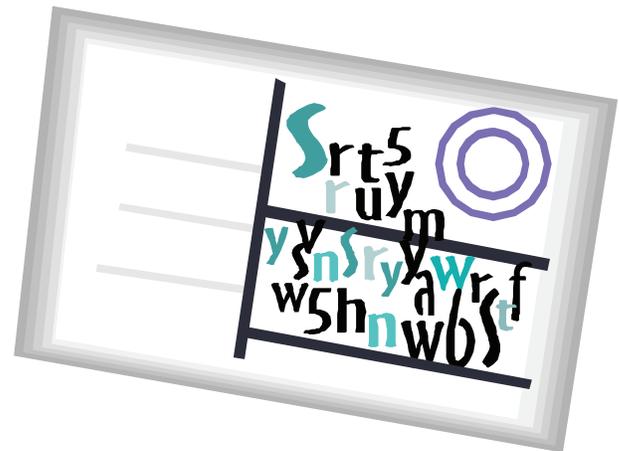


A Guide to Postcard Marketing

“Postcards are the simplest, most cost-effective format available. They’re an excellent choice for making an announcement or driving customers to a store, website, or event.”

United States Postal Service

A postcard is one of the most versatile, inexpensive, and effective tools you can have in your marketing tool kit. Compared to the effort and cost of a brochure or a traditional direct mail package mailed in an envelope, a postcard is quick, easy, and a great way to stretch your marketing budget. In addition, some kinds of postcards will help you keep your mailing list updated.



What is a Postcard?

Think of a postcard as a miniature billboard – a design space that can hold:

- a photograph of a new product, a staff member, or your location
- a handwritten message to customers
- a reprint of a press release or published article
- a reminder of an upcoming event
- a request for an appointment
- a mini newsletter
- a discount coupon or admission ticket
- a newsworthy happening in your company

The advantage of a postcard is that it does not have to be opened to be read, and if creatively designed, can have impact far beyond its size and cost.

Postcard Sizes

Perhaps when you think of a postcard, you think of two sizes: 4.25 x 5.5 inches (one-quarter of an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper) or 5.5 x 8.5 inches (one-half of an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper). These two sizes are common and popular, in part because they fit on a standard letter-sized sheet of paper.

To the United States Postal Service (USPS), a postcard is a *self-mailer* – something that is not in an envelope. A self-mailer can be either a single ply like a postcard, or can be

folded over like a brochure or an invitation. It can also be a wide variety of sizes – from 3.5 x 5 inches to 6.125 x 11.5 inches.

Though a postcard may not immediately come to mind when you think of a self-mailer, this can be a very effective direct mail marketing piece. Since postcards do not have to be opened to be read, you may be able to engage the reader with eye-catching graphics or an attention-getting headline. For example, vivid color blocks can draw the reader in to your copy without the reader’s conscious decision to participate. This allows you to make the most of the seven-to-ten-second window of opportunity to interest your reader.

The Advantages of First Class Mail

Mailing the postcard at the first class postage rate has definite advantages. First, the postcard receives delivery priority over all other classes of mail except Priority and Express. Secondly, it is eligible for *ancillary services* such as forwarding and address correction at no charge or at rates lower than for standard mail. Here is an example: if the postcard is undeliverable as addressed (UAA) and has *Return Service Requested* as the ancillary service endorsement, then the postcard will be returned at no charge to the sender with the new address or with the reason for non-delivery.

Because the ancillary service of *return service requested* is available at no charge, postcards are an excellent way to update your mail list. For less postage than it costs to mail a letter, you can get the information you need to keep the addresses in your mail list current. And with approximately 17% of the population moving every year according to the US Postal Service, this is an important part of mail list management.

When is a Postcard Not a Postcard

To be eligible for the postcard price, the card must be:

- shaped like a rectangle with an aspect ratio between 1:1.3 and 1:2.5
- not less than 3.5 or more than 4.25 inches high
- not less than 5 inches or more than 6 inches long, and
- not less than .007 inches or more than .016 inches thick

If a postcard exceeds 4.25 x 6 inches, then the USPS classifies it as letter mail for the purpose of determining postage. So despite the advantages of using a postcard size for mailing, when you need more room for your message than can fit on 4.25 x 6 inches, you will have to move to a larger size.

One popular size is 5.5 x 8.5 inches – half of a sheet of letter paper. This size offers advantages in printing, since it is a clean cut with no waste out of an 8.5 x 11 sheet. For example, if you want to take delivery of 1000 postcards, it will take a press run of only 500 sheets to produce a yield of 1000. However, since the USPS considers this letter-sized mail for the purpose of determining postage, it now becomes advantageous to consider using the standard mail class for your mailing.

Standard Mail has two very big pros over First-Class and Presorted First-Class. First, it is the least expensive commercial postage class... almost 50% cheaper than First-Class. This enables you to save quite a bit on postage. Second, it also allows up to 3.3 ounces per piece without any increase in postage. If your mail is heavier than 3.3 ounces, the postage surcharge for being overweight increases very gradually.

These reduced rates invite the interesting prospect of an over-sized postcard – perhaps 6 x 9 inches or even a full 6 1/8 x 11. These “super size” postcards are eye catching in a stack of mail because they will be either taller or longer than the rest of the mail-pieces.

Regardless of the size you select for your postcard, you will need to pay close attention to two things: the *aspect ratio*

and the mail panel. The aspect ratio is the relationship of the length to the height of the postcard. It is calculated by dividing the length by the height. To qualify as letter mail, the aspect ratio must fall between 1:1.3 and 1:2.5. If you mail often, you might want to request a handy template of letter sized mail dimensional standards from the USPS.

Seven Uses for Postcards

- 1) **Direct prospects to your website.** Using a postcard to direct prospects to your website has traditionally been one of the best ways to announce a new or updated site.
- 2) **Feature a single product or service.** Consider a series of postcards that feature your fastest selling or most useful products and services.
- 3) **Test an offer.** Using a postcard to test various offers is a cost-effective way to determine which offer generates the greatest response rate.
- 4) **Remind people about an event.** Postcards can be an important part of building attendance at an event such as a fundraising activity.
- 5) **Provide something of value.** A postcard can serve as a redeemable coupon or discount certificate in order to reward customers or encourage prospects to make an initial purchase.
- 6) **Convince prospects to move ahead.** A postcard provides an alternative to phone calls and emails in order to convince a customer to move ahead.
- 7) **Highlight a staff member.** Remember, people buy from people. Help your customers get to know your customer service and sales staff.

Effective Use of the Mail Panel

Contrary to common usage, the mail panel on a postcard does not need to take up the entire right half of one side. An addressing area of 4 inches wide by 2 1/4 inches high is sufficient for most ink jet addressing machines or for affixing labels.

When positioning the mail panel, remember this important rule – to meet the aspect ratio, the mail panel must be oriented so that the length is greater than the width. If the width is greater than the length, the postcard will be subject to a surcharge for size.

We'd also like to remind you that we would be happy to relieve you of remembering all these things by designing for you. Just give us a call at 513-248-2121 for help.

worlds

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

Ancillary service endorsement: instructions in a prescribed form that tell the USPS what to do with mail that is undeliverable as addressed. Four of the more common ancillary service endorsements are as follows: address service requested, return service requested, change service requested, and forward service requested.

Aspect-ratio: the dimension of a mail-piece expressed as the ratio of the height to the length. Used to determine whether a mail-piece fits the definition of *rectangular*. The aspect ratio is calculated by dividing the length of the mail piece by its height. To qualify as rectangular, the aspect ratio must fall between 1:1.3 and 1:2.5.

Carrier route: all mail-pieces for delivery to the same city route, rural route, highway contract route, post office box, or general delivery unit.

Destination post office: the post office that is the last stop before mail delivery by letter carriers.

First class mail: a class of mail and a postage designation. Among other things, first class mail receives delivery priority and comes with address services. *Card* is a subclass of first class postage.

Indicia: plural of *indicium*. The imprinted designation on a mail-piece indicating the method of postage payment and the class of mail.

OCR read area: the space on a mail-piece reserved for machine-printed address elements. Defined by height,

width, and distance from the right and bottom of the mail-piece.

Optical character reader: a computer-controlled piece of equipment that locates, reads, and interprets address information contained in the OCR read area; sprays on a barcode, and sorts the mail into a stacker.

Simplified address format: an alternate addressing format that uses *Postal Customer* or *Residential Customer* in place of name and address. Used when distribution is intended for each active address in a carrier route.

Standard mail: a class of mail and a postage designation. Formerly known as third class mail; often mistakenly called bulk mail.

UAA mail: a mail-piece that is undeliverable as addressed. Reasons for lack of deliverability may be that the addressee has moved or that one or more addressing elements (such as directional or apartment number) are missing.

USPS: United States Postal Service. The federal agency responsible for mail delivery. Until 1971 it was called the Post Office Department.

ZIP+4: a nine-digit numeric code consisting of the five-digit ZIP code, a hyphen and four additional digits. The first five digits identify the delivery post office, while the four-digit add-on identifies a specific delivery segment such as city block, floor of a building, department within a company, or a group of post office boxes.

T H E i d e a

Mail List Consistency & Accuracy

Consistency and accuracy are important attributes of a good mail list, and establishing and enforcing data entry standards are excellent ways to promote both.

Data entry standards are the rules for how the individual data elements in a mailing list appear. Data entry standards dictate how words are abbreviated, how to shorten data elements that are too long for the allowed field size, and what to do with data elements for which no field exists in the record.

Data entry standards should be developed, then written and published to ensure that everyone who

is working on the mailing list understands what they are and why they are important. Appoint someone in your organization to monitor and ascertain that the standards are being followed, and provide training to anyone who may be violating the standards.

For an example of the data entry standards that we use here at TechneGraphics, contact us via phone at 513-248-2121 or e-mail at info@techgra.com and we'll provide you with a copy.

W O R L D S

TRICKS & tips

Design of the Mail Panel

Knowing some tricks about the design and placement of the mail panel on a postcard can significantly increase the effectiveness of the card's marketing message. Imagine that you are going through your mail, either at home or at work. Most likely you are viewing it as presented by the letter carrier - with the addressing areas all facing the same way and sorted by size of the mail-piece.

In the case of a postcard, are you looking at the well-designed, eye-catching side of the card, or are you looking at the mail panel? How much care was taken to design the side with the mail panel for maximum marketing impact?

Contrary to common usage, the mail panel on a post card does not need to take up the entire right half of one side. An addressing area of 3 ¼ inches wide by 1 ½ inches high is sufficient for affixing most labels, and 5 inches wide by 2 ¼

inches high will usually accommodate a delivery point bar code put on the mail-piece during inkjet addressing.

One of our favorite tricks is to size the mail panel at 6 x 2 ¼ inches and position it across the entire width of the postcard. This creates an unobstructed rectangular area of 6 x 1 ¾ inches above the mail panel that is very easy to design. That is plenty of room to place an eye-catching headline or suggestion to turn the card over for more information.

Remember that a poorly designed or positioned mail panel may prevent you from qualifying for the best postage rate. For that reason, we suggest that you have us look at the mail panel before you commit to press. Just give us a call at 513-248-2121 for help.



What determines response rate?



Response rate - the number of contacts initiated by customers or prospects as the result of an outreach program - is broadly influenced by three factors: the mail list, the offer, and the appearance of the mail-piece. Of these three, the most important is the mail list, accounting for about 60% of the response. The offer and the mail-piece appearance account for about 20% each. Your in-house mail list of existing customers will always significantly outperform purchased lists.

Other factors include the uniqueness of your product or service, its price, whether it is a seasonal product, the image you project, how creatively you engage the reader, and how consistently you mail.

Regarding the number of responses, another important factor is the size of the mailing itself. A response rate of 1% applied to a mailing of 50,000 yields 500 responses. The same response rate applied to a 1000-piece mailing yields only 10 responses.

questions and answers