

Improve Your Direct Marketing ROI

Anyone can put a stamp on a letter or send out a postcard. However, getting a return on your investment in direct marketing requires a more strategic approach. Read on to learn three pre-planning steps to help you manage an effective campaign and achieve stellar results.

Before you write a letter or design a postcard, make sure you sit down and plan your direct marketing campaign. The key to successful direct marketing is to understand your target market and align your activities with your primary objectives.

Step 1: Bull's-eye the Target Market

So much about your direct marketing campaign depends on your chosen audience. If your budget is limited, focus your efforts with a small campaign that speaks directly to your target market. Although identifying your target market is often part of a comprehensive growth plan, here are a few questions to help you define your ideal client:

- What geography makes sense to market to and serve (profitably)?
- What industry do you have particular experience or specialization in?
- What size of company can you serve effectively? (Who can pay your fees? Who does the competition target?)

When defining your target market, you may need to consider other criteria as well, such as private vs. public companies, years in business, international or multi-state activity, etc. These decisions can help you narrow down the list to a manageable size and create the most compelling messages for your audience.

Not only should you identify the type of organization you are marketing to, but you should also choose the right contact for your mailing. Does your typical sales cycle begin by developing a relationship with a business owner or a CFO? Whatever the answer, you can ensure your mailing lands on the right desk by acquiring a targeted contact list and taking the time to clean it up, i.e., making phone calls to ensure you have the right contact names and information, before you mail.

Step 2: Have Perfect Timing

In addition to your firm's internal deadlines, an effective direct marketing campaign takes the target market's business cycle into account. Consider whether your mailing will arrive at a good time for the target market. If you mail to Midwest contractors in the summertime, colleges and universities in the fall or financial institutions in December, chances are you won't find many people with the time or inclination to meet face-to-face with you to discuss your services. Also, make sure the timing makes sense relative to the service you are promoting and that professionals in your firm are available to do the proper follow up, including going to appointments and working the sales process.

Step 3: Let Objectives Drive Implementation

The length of your campaign, the type of mailings you send and the right follow-up approach all depend on what you hope to achieve. What is the goal of your direct marketing effort? Are you building a brand or promoting a specific service? Do you want to keep in touch with prospective clients or generate new leads? Establishing objectives will help you make the right call for your direct marketing plan. The table below demonstrates how clear goals naturally lead to a winning strategy.

Situation	Format	Frequency	Follow-Up
New market and/or building brand	High impact first; mix it up	Monthly up to 12 months	Phone if desired
Brand maintenance, long-term follow-up	Postcards, letters	4-6 times/year	None for first 6-12 months
Good name recognition promote services	Letter	Up to quarterly	Phone, face-to-face
Generate leads for new business, fill sales pipeline	Letter	Up to quarterly	Phone, face-to-face

This step requires some self-awareness on your part. How effectively is your firm currently positioned with your target market? If your firm is new to the market, you should plan for a long-term campaign with brand building as your main objective. However, if you have already invested in this type of branding or have a solid reputation and large client base in the target market, you can raise your expectations and plan a short-term campaign resulting in meetings with qualified leads.

At The Whetstone Group, we help our clients analyze their marketplaces, utilize the best marketing tools and hone their competitive edges. Our experienced consultants can offer you ideas for both planning and implementing a direct marketing program of your own. We can also help communicate the measureable and intangible benefits of direct marketing internally. For more information about how our knowledge of industry best practices can work for you, contact us today at 319-447-6400 or info@thewhetstonegroup.com.

