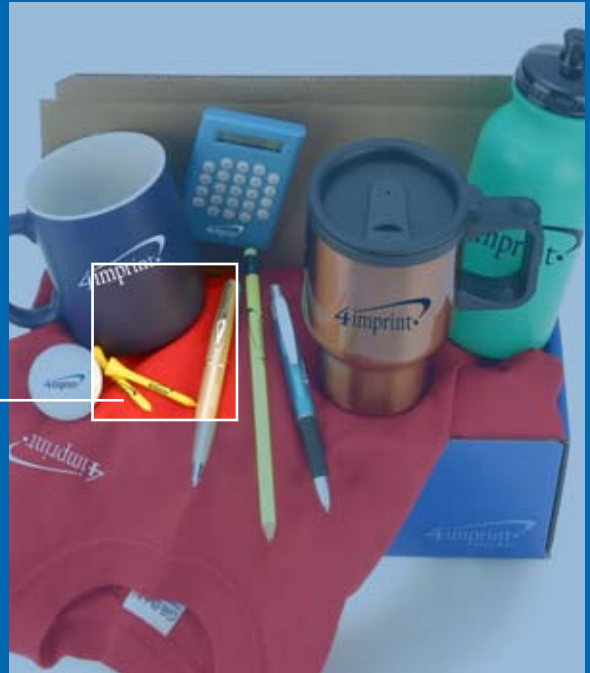


4imprint®  
Blue Papers™



# Stretching the Envelope

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Gatekeeper got you down? You're convinced your service has value to the CEO, but you can't get past his/her assistant. Or maybe your direct mail is on a direct flight to the recycling bin. You have your closing routine down pat, if only you could get through.

Sound familiar? Then it's time to get creative and harness the power of the U.S. Postal Service. Now we're not talking about any plain old direct mail campaign. We're talking FREE STUFF, gifts, and attention grabbers. We're talking about getting your recipients to shout, "Woo hoo! Where's the letter opener?!"

Okay maybe that's a little optimistic, but direct mail gifts get results. (See: The Research, on the last page of this paper) In the marketing realm it goes by several names: lumpy mail, dimensional mail, or object marketing. Some marketers make a distinction between "lumpy mail" and "dimensional mail," and for the purpose of this Blue Paper, we're going to differentiate:

- **Lumpy Mail:** At its most basic, lumpy mail is a traditional business envelope with a small, telltale bulge. Popular freebies include pens, seed packets, and emery boards. These are inexpensive promotional items that can be mailed in standard envelopes.



- **Dimensional Mail:** These are enhanced promotions that require special packaging— at minimum a padded envelope. Other dimensional packages include postal tubes, boxes, bags, and plastic bottles. Dimensional mail will draw the greatest attention, but costs more in terms of execution.

Either way, object marketing is about capturing attention. Lumpy marketing gets your envelope opened and increases consumer response rate, while dimensional mail is more about getting through to a well-protected contact. According to a 2007 report published by the Winterberry Group<sup>1</sup>, 63 percent of consumers said they were more likely to open a direct mail piece that came in an interesting package. While the promise of a free gift certainly adds interest to your mail, giveaways aren't the only tactic you can use to get your proverbial foot in the door. Direct marketers also rely on "noisy mail," priority delivery, or unique wrapping.

<sup>1</sup> *What's in the Mailbox? The Impact of One-to-One Marketing on Consumer Response. January 2007 white paper published by the Winterberry Group in conjunction with Mintel International Group Ltd/Comperemedia, Responsys and Vertis Communications. [www.winterberrygroup.com](http://www.winterberrygroup.com)*

“Noisy mail” appeals to people’s curiosity or sense of fun. We saw a campaign in which the business regularly mailed a tube containing a small hard object, like a marble. It made a ferocious racket when the tube was shaken or tilted—who could resist opening that? Another idea is to fasten squeakers (sold as replacements for dog toys) or sound chips inside the envelope.

To reinforce the importance of lumpy or dimensional mail, deliver it as a “must open now” piece. ‘Priority Mail’ from USPS, or ‘Next Day’ from FedEx or UPS (especially when a signature is required for proof of delivery), virtually guarantees that your desired recipient will get, and open, the package.

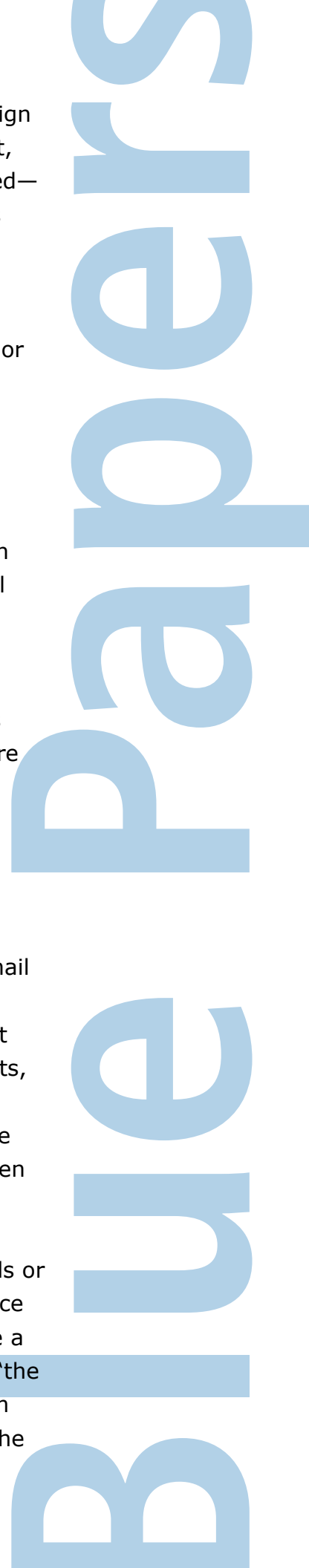
Finally, as Shakespeare tells us the apparel oft proclaims the man, so too with your direct mail. Look to a unique box design or flashy paper to make your piece stand out. Some credit card promotions, for example, have been masquerading as wedding invitations with oversized linen envelopes and foil lining. AOL is a famous packaging perpetrator. Remember when it started sending CDs in tin boxes? It seemed almost sinful to throw them away.

As consumers are increasingly besieged by marketing messages, marketers must get ever more creative to make their message stand out. This is where object marketing can have a real advantage. Targeted properly, your mail campaign provides distinct differentiation.

## Target Your Audience

With any direct mail, the more you know about your audience, the better. As outlined in the Winterberry Group report, consumers respond to direct mail messages that meet three criteria: timing, relevance, and personalization. Timing—which is about delivering your message when the consumer is most likely to respond—can be affected by lifecycle events, seasonal developments, or ancillary purchases. If you collect the right data or target a distinct consumer group, your message will have a greater impact. According to the research, 69 percent of consumers studied said they were more likely to open direct mail if the timing was right.

Similarly, relevance means your product responds to unique consumer needs or desires. Obvious . . . right? But what’s not so obvious is that your mail piece should explain why your product is relevant. Your promotion should include a message that sympathizes with or describes the consumer’s current need (“the problem”) and presents a solution (“the benefit”). Tell me what my problem is and tell me how you’re going to fix it. We’ll talk more about connecting the message to the gift/promotion later.



Personalization goes even one step further and tailors that message for individual consumers. Historically, personalization has meant using mail merge technology that simply incorporates the recipients' name into the mail piece. But, as the Winterberry report points out, consumers have come to expect personalization; simply including the recipient's name in your letter no longer distinguishes you from the clutter of direct mail. One study found that 43 percent of marketers incorporated at least two or three different customized elements based on the consumer profile data. That's almost half of all marketers who are personalizing their pieces with more than just a name! Only 7 percent of marketers never customized their pieces at all, so think carefully before you put yourself in that minority.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, targeting your audience becomes increasingly important as the cost of the campaign rises. Lumpy mailings can be relatively inexpensive, making them an effective way to target thousands of customers at a time. But with dimensional mail, targeting your audience is trickier. Depending on the cost of your promotion, you may be mailing to only a few select, top prospects. With this sort of campaign, take time to customize each individual package. Think about how changes in copy or even images could impact the recipient's reaction.

No matter how much or how little personalization you do, it's critically important to have an accurate, up-to-date mailing list of qualified candidates. Many companies call ahead of time to verify contact information before putting a dimensional package in the mail. You want to make sure your valuable promotion gets into the right hands.

Having the right name and address is only part of developing a good distribution list. Maximize your promotional dollars by targeting those companies that are the best fit for your specific services. Several years ago, one area entrepreneur sent out a promotional kit to tout her new marketing agency. There were matches to "spark" new ideas and candles and noisemakers and other paraphernalia. As a small, one-person shop, her efforts might have been better spent targeting medium size businesses that outsourced their creative work. Because, at one sizeable nonprofit on her list, the package was met with sincere interest and amusement, and it created quite a buzz among the staff. But, across town, the vice president of marketing for a major Midwest retail center was rolling his eyes. He had a large, in-house staff and had no use for paper noisemakers and confetti.

That isn't to say you shouldn't dream big. Fear of failure breeds failure. Just remember to give your mailing list special thought and consideration. Sending

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

your promotion to someone who has no use for your services is just as bad as mailing to an outdated address list.

## How Crazy is Too Crazy?

With both lumpy mail and dimensional marketing, you can choose between sober-sophisticated and outright goofy. Sophisticated is fine for the upscale market, but it can lose some of the impact of a clever, wittier promotion. Anyone can send a premium gift through the mail. It takes a company with real personality to take a risk with something fun. However . . . choose with caution. Gag marketing is risky. Will your audience be receptive or turned off? Is it consistent with your brand?

Scott Ginsberg is an author, lecturer and networking authority. Since November 2000, Ginsberg has been wearing a nametag that says, "Hello, my name is Scott." Every single day. It's even tattooed on his chest. Now that's character. So when Ginsberg needed to follow up with some potential clients, he turned to dimensional mail. It fit perfectly with his personable, approachable brand. He's a sampling of the ideas Ginsberg posted to his blog<sup>3</sup>:



- Surfboard Keychain: "If you're surfing for '07 speakers, keep me in mind!"
- Toy Cell Phone: "Thought maybe your phone was broke . . . call me!"
- Catnip Mice: "I don't want do be a pest . . . but give me a call."
- Weekly Planner: "Let's work together in 2007! Here's my schedule."

If you think those are crazy, one of Ginsberg's readers responded with this story:

Years ago we were working on a huge project for a client. We needed approvals on several aspects of it but could not make contact. He simply wasn't returning our phone calls. So, we went to a gas station and got a used tire. We packaged it up in a box with a note that said: "This is the favorite toy of a 600 pound gorilla. By now he's discovered that it's missing and he's really pissed. If you don't call us immediately, we're going to tell him where his tire is." We had it delivered to the client's office. He called within the hour, laughing so hard we could hardly understand him. He said, "Now I remember why I hired you guys."

<sup>3</sup>[www.hellomynameisscott.blogspot.com](http://www.hellomynameisscott.blogspot.com). September 4, 2006 blog post. Visited 02/01/07. Scott Ginsberg, aka "The Nametag Guy," is the author of three books and a professional speaker who helps people maximize approachability, become unforgettable and make a name for themselves.

Here's another example of object marketing: Tom Chandler is a professional copywriter with an emphasis on Internet marketing. But even though Chandler is an expert at well-crafted emails, he reaches out to potential new clients via dimensional mail. Chandler believes that dimensional marketing makes recipients feel special and handpicked, and says that traditional mail is too often overlooked in this digital age. He writes,

Imagine receiving an e-mail. Well written, carefully crafted and hugely persuasive, it's a paean to lyrical copywriting—yet it's likely to be wholly ignored, surrounded as it is by a tidal wave of other communications. For all the client knows, it's one of ten thousand mailed that morning. It's not unique. And it doesn't make them feel special. Now imagine holding a padded envelope with a lump in the middle. Or a Priority Mail box that rattles ever so slightly. And then pulling out a fun little toy attached to a strong sales message. Bingo.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the items Chandler has mailed: A bowling pin—asking his target if they were bowled over by their current service, and wind-up chattering teeth—asking if they wanted people talking about their company.

Creative-types like artists and advertising agencies may have the greatest latitude when it comes to whacky marketing, but with the right tie-in, just about anyone can leverage the power of directional mail. That brings us to the next point . . .

## Connect the Message

Dimensional mail isn't just about sending a present. Select an item that has a logical connection to your product, service, or promotion. When a customer can connect a story to the gift, your promotion will be more memorable and more meaningful. Here are some quick ideas:

### Lumpy Mailers



- Cleaning Company: Flat Sponge—"When you think clean, think Jiffy Clean."
- Travel Agency: Grip It Luggage Identifier—"TravelMore keeps you going."
- Senior Services: Credit Card Size Magnifier—"See the difference with OptionCare."
- Grocery Store: Magnetic Coupon Holder—"You'll always save at Valu-Lot."
- Nonprofit or Health Cause: Ring Charm Necklace embossed with courage, hope, or survivor—"Thank you for your gift of hope."

<sup>4</sup>[www.copywriterunderground.com](http://www.copywriterunderground.com) October 23, 2006 blog post. Visited 02/09/07.

## Dimensional Mailers



### **Go Big. Go Way Big.**

Sometimes a dimensional mailer is more about maintaining relationships than asking for any business. When one of your clients scores a big deal, say "Congratulations on Your Victory" with the 128 oz Bubba Keg Gallon Cooler. Fill it with powdered Gatorade packages, PayDay bars, or other gifts that can be distributed to the team. Search the Internet for promotional photos of the world's greatest coaches getting doused.

### **Think Fast & Hot.**

Opening a new restaurant or coffee shop in a busy commercial district? Target the area's top power lunchers by filling a Bullet Vacuum Bottle with soup or your house coffee blend. Use a courier service or enlist your staff to hand deliver while still piping hot. Best to call ahead to be sure your recipient is in for the day or instruct the delivery person to skip ahead to the next contact on the list.

### **Now Showing.**

Promote a new product launch with a movie premier theme. Fill a large bowl with microwave popcorn, theater-sized candy boxes, and free rental certificates. Hire a copywriter to draft a mock movie review of your product and send a schedule of exclusive show times when you'll be available for a presentation.

## Call Me, Thank You, I'm Sorry

Think object marketing is just about getting the sale? Not true! Dimensional mail is a great way to thank valued customers for their business or to apologize for less than stellar service. Several years ago, one area company sent out a software package that, unfortunately, still had a few bugs to work out. They got creative with their apology, sending a plain, unmarked box with a bright yellow "We may have sent you a lemon" sticker on the outside. Inside, the package was filled with an apologetic, yet upbeat letter, yellow packing paper, a new software update, and a "no bugs" lemon yellow yo-yo. This playful, yet respectful act of contrition went a long way toward customer retention. And by-the-way . . . thank you for taking time to read this Blue Paper. We appreciate your attention to this important topic because it means you value both your company and your employees.

## Yes, You Can Mail That!

Go ahead. Think outside the box when it comes to mailing your promotional item. In addition to boxes and envelopes, the U.S. Post Office will ship items

in bags, cans, and drums, provided the packages are properly sealed and adhere to weight and size specifications. You may have to pay an extra non-automation rate, but the impact is worth it. Consider a document bag, bank bag, or sport bottle that can act as both gift and package in one.

At 4imprint, we have even mailed a "sport flyer" (flying disc) as a standalone mail piece. Be aware that lumpy or dimensional mail may be classified as irregular or non-machinable, depending on the extent of its lumpiness, and billed at a higher rate. New postal regulations are scheduled to take effect in May of 2007, so even if you've mailed a lumpy piece before, check the rules before you get ready to send again; and Post Offices have been known to interpret the DMM (Domestic Mail Manual) regulations differently, meaning your own local office will determine a) whether your mail piece is acceptable and b) what the postage will be. The first step in planning your attention-getting mail project should be a trip to the Post Office for a friendly chat with your local expert.

If you're looking to send something small but heavy, take advantage of this deal: The United States Postal Service offers flat rate priority mail boxes. The boxes can be shipped anywhere in the United States for \$8.10, regardless of the weight or destination. You could even mail a couple of bricks to Alaska just in case you're a, I don't know, . . . fireplace builder.

## Follow Up

With extensive lumpy mail campaigns, personal follow up generally isn't feasible. In this case, follow up has more to do with tracking your response rate. Send out several versions of the same offer, tweaking the letter copy or the give-away item. Find out which promotion your audience responds to, and leverage that information in future campaigns. With hard data to back up your direct mail efforts, you'll be able to justify the expense again in the future.

On the other hand, once you've invested the expense into a dimensional mail campaign, you must put in the time and effort to contact your recipients. In many dimensional mail promotions, the piece is less about making a call to action and more about getting the prospect to remember you and take your call. This is the kind of reaction you're looking for: "So you're the one that sent the XYZ. All right, I'm listening."

Now that your clever mail piece has opened the door, make the most of it!





# The Research

## Baylor University Study, 1993<sup>a</sup>

- Commercial contacts who received a promotional product in a dimensional package responded at a rate that was 57% higher than those who received the same promotional product in an envelope.
- Response rates for the dimensional package recipients were 75% higher than for the group who received only a sales letter.

## Dallas Study, 1996<sup>b</sup>

- People who received a low-value promotional item were 83% more likely to respond than those who received a personalized letter alone.
- People who received a high-value promotional item were 315% more likely to respond.

## Direct Marketing Association

### Response Rate Report 2004<sup>c</sup>

- The study examined marketing campaigns with four objectives: direct order, lead generation, traffic generation, and fundraising. Of all four campaigns, the highest average response rate was achieved with dimensional mail at 5.49%, followed by telephone (5.45%), direct mail (2.73%), e-mail (2.31%), and catalog (2.23%).

## PPAI Report, 2006<sup>d</sup>

- Promotional products outscored TV advertising in terms of positive attitudes toward the ad (41% to 18%), positive attitude toward the product (20% to 16%), message credibility (54% to 33%), purchase intent (25% to 17%) and referral value (26% to 16%).
- Promotional products were the second most preferred source of information following television advertising (compared to billboards, print ads, Internet, radio, word of mouth, posters, and yellow pages.)
- In some instances, the use of a promotional product as the ad medium alone achieved maximum impact, up to 69% in increasing brand interest and 84% in creating a good impression of the brand.

<sup>a</sup>*Dimensional Mailings Improve Direct Mail Response Rates, 1999, published by Promotional Products Association International.*

<sup>b</sup>*Increasing Response Rates to an Advertising Campaign, 1999, published by Promotional Products Association International.*

<sup>c</sup>*IP Knows Direct Mail, 2005, published by International Paper. [www.internationalpaper.com/IPDF/PDFs\\_for\\_Papers/IPDeliversDM202.pdf](http://www.internationalpaper.com/IPDF/PDFs_for_Papers/IPDeliversDM202.pdf). Visited 2/13/07.*

<sup>d</sup>*Promotional Products— The Key Ingredient to Integrated Marketing, 2006, published by Promotional Products Association International.*