

FROM DESIGN TO DESTINATION

CREATE IMPACT, GET ATTENTION



Which comes first, the message or the design? Good question since no direct mail program works if these two are not in synch. They must blend together to have the impact and garner the results you want. But in a visual world, design makes a difference!

The message is the ultimate element that tells the story, but the graphic elements create the interest and “pull” the recipient into the piece. We live in an extremely visual world, so graphic elements that stand out are vital. But, they must relate to your company and your message. Pretty designs for design sake don’t sell!

STRIVE FOR DESIGNS THAT PERFORM — In simple terms, don’t expect design awards, measure your design’s value on who responds and how many buy. This is a case of designing for performance beyond appearance.

Before you sit down with a designer, do your homework. Here are questions to ask that will help direct the design process:

1. What do your top customers have in common? Do they all purchase in a regular pattern – seasonally, monthly, etc. Do they order by phone, via your website, by email or in person? Are there buying triggers you can represent graphically?
2. What is the most important benefit of the product or service?
3. What is the most important feature of the product or service you want to promote?
4. What competition do you deal with in your market area?
5. What is your competitive advantage or unique sales opportunity?



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**** TIP FROM A PRO —** Ask yourself: What do I want my customers and prospective customers to do in response to this postcard? If you can't answer that, they certainly won't.

DEVELOP A 'LOOK' THAT'S YOUR OWN

One of the greatest benefits of a postcard series is its ability to build your brand and promote recognition in your trade area. By developing an easily recognized presentation, and repeating it, you do yourself a solid service.

The overall concept of a “look” for a postcard is widely debated. Thankfully, there's no right answer – only what's right for you based on what's increasing traffic and sales! Your look can be something as simple as a standout color – at Christmas you get cards from friends and relatives and their red or green envelopes stand out in daily mail. The old saying “A picture or graphic element is worth a thousand words,” has never been more accurate – especially considering the limited space of a postcard.

While you're working on your message, keep the following design tips in mind:

- 1. SIZE MATTERS —** Consider using a non-standard size. It may cost a little bit more but it won't stack neatly in the mail and won't be overlooked.
- 2. COLOR SELLS —** Use distinctive colors – or a unique lack of color – to make your message really stand out.
- 3. PAPER MAKES A DIFFERENCE —** Select a card stock that represents the same quality and consistency of your company and its products – don't look or feel “cheap.”



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- 4. GRAPHICS ‘SPEAK’ TO READERS** — Photos, drawings, charts or whatever you choose have to be directly linked to your message. Resist the urge to be too clever – you don’t have much time to get people’s attention. A realtor promoting successful sales does well to use a picture that includes a huge SOLD sign front and center, for example.
- 5. CLEAR, RELEVANT HEADLINES** — In the limited space of a postcard (and the often limited attention span of its reader) there’s room for one main message. A hard-hitting headline that makes the message clear immediately is required. Don’t make readers work to figure it out. They won’t.
- 6. SUBHEADS ARE VITAL, TOO** — Readership studies show that even if a person doesn’t get to the fine print, they will read the headline, subheads and captions. In an age of 140 character messaging these elements can make a difference.
- 7. USE KISS** — Keep It Simple S... (KISS) is the best mantra for developing copy for any postcard.
- 8. ALWAYS USE BOTH SIDES** — No matter the size card you select, there’s space for a special offer, website reference or some critical message on each side. Use every inch.
- 9. LIST BENEFITS, LIST BENEFITS, LIST BENEFITS** — Don’t be subtle.
- 10. INCLUDE AN OFFER** — You have to provide a reason to respond. Give the people a reason to contact you. If they perceive your message to be a nice comment about a nice business or product, the response will be “that’s nice,” and the card gets tossed.
- 11. WHEN IT’S FREE, ALWAYS SAY FREE** — Always use the word FREE in all caps when your offer includes anything for FREE. Nothing gets attention like FREE.



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- 12. ONE-ON-ONE MARKETING** — or Variable Data Printing is one of the high-tech ways to truly personalize the address portion and messages on any mailing. You can add a personal message, using the recipient's name, etc. to any card so each one appears to be created just for them. It adds impact and leads to response. Especially appropriate for mailings going to existing customers.
- 13. ALWAYS TAKE CREDIT** — A surprising number of direct mail pieces go out every day missing the sponsoring company's name, address, contact information and logo. Don't forget the "small stuff," it is really the "big stuff" when it comes to personal contacts.
- 14. INCLUDE A RETURN ADDRESS** — Why post a return address if your address is in your company name or logo? Two reasons: First, a return address in the mailing label area insures that you'll get all undeliverable, returned mail from the post office so you can update your mailing lists. Second, it shows readers you're an established company with a real presence somewhere.
- 15. PROOF READ • PROOF READ AGAIN** — One chance to make a first impression means you want every phone number, website address and offer absolutely correct.

**** TIP FROM A PRO** — When everyone involved has proofed the project and you're ready to approve it, have one more set of eyes read the entire thing — go to someone who is not familiar with the project who can give it a true appraisal from a customers' point of view.

BLENDING DESIGN AND MESSAGE IS A TEAM EFFORT

Once you've determined what you are going to promote and formulate the basics of the sales message, it's time to sit down with a designer. To make the process more efficient and productive bring to the table as detailed a package of ideas as you can.



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“I’m thinking this is the most important picture, we can use this as the headline, I like bright blue ink,” etc. Invariably you’ll get a “well, we could do that,” response from the graphic designer who will then offer suggestions based on design elements. The compromise is almost always the best solution.

**** TIP FROM A PRO —** Beware of untested designers. Most designers are great with the cosmetic and artistic nuances of creating a postcard or direct mail piece, but few are well-versed in strategic marketing. Be prepared to become the “art director” and keep them focused on delivering your message in the most appropriate way. Best of all, find a graphic artist with experience creating successful marketing projects.

Before you commit to your design, obtain the appropriate size options available to you. While you have a host of workable options, the U.S. Postal Service has the final say in determining what size can be used. An experienced graphic artist will be able to share insights into which sizes work and mail with the least difficulty. Always check with the Post Office to be sure before committing to a design or printing project.

