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Top 10 Tips for Growing Your Business with Direct Mail Postcards

By Martha Retallick

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Introduction: Why Use Postcards?

If you've priced out display advertising or Yellow Pages listings, you know that they can add up to big money in a hurry. Quite often, these valuable promotional tools are beyond the budgets of many small and home-based businesses.

But since promotion is a necessity, even for the smallest of businesses, what can you do?

I've found a way around this dilemma by using four-color postcards. They've been an essential part of my marketing toolkit for more than six years, and they've brought thousands of (U.S.) dollars worth of business to my web and graphic design studio.

Here are my Top 10 Tips to help you grow your business with postcards.

Tip #1: Keep It Simple, Sister (or Sir).

The image on the front of the postcard should be simple, but attractive. I've found that brightly colored cards pull a better response than the dark, moody cards. So, I'd recommend that you save your artistic angst for some other medium.

You should also create an image that's easily comprehended. Why? Because your recipient will only give your card a one- or two-second glance before deciding to keep it or throw it away.

Tip #2: You Need a Good Mailing List.

There are many companies that will rent you a mailing list, and if you're targeting a specific industry, you'd be well advised to travel this route. On the other hand, list rental fees aren't cheap, and the fees only cover one-time use of the list.

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When I first got started with postcard marketing, I could barely afford to pay my own rent, so mailing list rental was out of the question. So I made my own mailing list instead.

I found names by flipping through directories of organizations I belonged to. The Rolodex on my desk was also a rich source of names. And since my first postcard promoted a website showcasing my family's business interests, my dad also contributed a lot of names. He still sends me a name now and then.

Before I put any name on the list, I ask myself if this person would be interested in hearing from me on an ongoing basis. If I think so, that individual goes on the list. If not, I keep 'em off the list.

Tip #3: Frequency is Important.

My dad is a man of very few words. He has this to say about promotion: "You gotta let 'em know you're still alive." In other words, a business that clients and prospects hear from is one that they'll keep in mind.

And the flipside of that statement is the old adage, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind." That's why I make it a point to send nine or ten postcards each year.

Tip #4: Give Them the Old One–Two.

It's not enough to just send your cards. You need to follow up with your key clients and prospects. You know who they are, so phone, e–mail or visit with them within a week of any postcard mailing.

Tip #5: Pictures Good, Copy Better.

My first tip was about the type of image that should go on the front of the card. Your image is important, because that's what gets the recipient's attention. But the copy on the flipside is what helps make the sale.

Although entire libraries of books have been written on the subject of effective direct mail marketing copy, let me boil these books down to this essential fact: You want your copy to get your audience to do something.

What should your postcard copy inspire your audience to do? Well, that's up to you, but here are some ideas:

1. Visit the website you just created for a client.
2. Come to the grand opening of your remodeled store.
3. Use the discount on your new product or service.

This, in essence is what sets direct marketing apart from conventional advertising. Most conventional

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advertising is aimed at building an image of a company. This requires a lot of repetition of an advertising message, and as you would expect, the process can take a long time and cost a lot of money.

On the other hand, direct marketing isn't so much concerned with building an image as it is with getting people do something NOW. This is a much more cost-effective approach for small business.

Tip #6: Follow Your Printer's Instructions Carefully.

This one goes without saying, but I have a confession to make: I delayed the printing of a crucial promotional postcard by sizing the card to the wrong dimensions. The printer was kind enough to fix my error without charging me, and for that I am very grateful.

Printer's instructions can be lengthy – and confusing. There's a simple solution to this problem: Ask Questions. Most printers are happy to help, especially if you contact them before you actually send them the stuff you want printed.

Tip #7: Proofread Once. Proofread Twice.

When I worked in the editorial field, I found myself on the receiving end of many a Boss Tirade about the importance of proofreading. This was because I wasn't very good at it, and a lot of Boss-Annoying errors got by me.

If you're a lousy proofreader with a lot of money, you can hire others to do it for you. If your budget isn't that hefty, you'll have to do it yourself. If I'm faced with the onerous task of proofreading, here's how I do it:

I read every word out loud. Slowly and carefully, just like I did back in first grade reading class. Sometimes, I decide to have some fun and do my proofreading in the form of dramatic readings. Hey, it makes the job go faster...

Tip #8: Who are you? Where are you?

My cards include the following contact information:

Lrpdesigns Web & Graphic Design
P.O. Box 43161
Tucson, AZ 85733
Telephone: 520-690-1888
E-mail: Info@Lrpdesigns.com
Web: <http://www.Lrpdesigns.com/>

I include all of this information so people can get a hold me by mail, Internet or telephone. Most of my responses tend to come via phone or e-mail. The return address is there so the post office can get the card back to me if a recipient's address is no longer valid.

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Tip #9: Maintain Your List!

If your mailing list grows to any size, maintaining it can get to be a chore. And this task can be quite time-consuming. It is for me, but I like to have an accurate list. More of the mail gets through that way.

Occasionally, people will call or e-mail and ask to be taken off my list. I do so immediately, no questions asked.

Tip #10: Keep At It!

This is another one of my dad's favorite expressions. But those three words reveal a lot of truth. Like other marketing efforts, postcard mailings must be done over and over again to have a positive effect on your bottom line.

Although postcard marketing can cost less than, say, a campaign of magazine advertising or promoting your business in the Yellow Pages, it is not cost-free. On a yearly basis, my postcard printing and mailing costs run around U.S. \$2,500. However, I believe that this is money well spent, so I keep doing it.

6 Points to Make Your Postcards Pop!

By Mitone Bennett

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If you're short on cash, but long on the need to advertise (and who isn't?), then postcards are the answer to your promotional prayers! They're less expensive than other direct mail pieces, both in printing costs as well as in stamp costs. But don't think just because they're quicker and cheaper that you should spend any less time on their creation! With the right ad copy and colorful graphics, an inexpensive investment in postcards is a good way to expand your bottom line! Don't forget to follow these few tips to increase your response rate:

1. You've only got 5 Seconds to convince your customer to keep your card! Full color postcards will grab her attention; heavy use of the word "YOU" will make her feel special.
2. It does no good to send one card. (Believe me, I know from personal experience!) It's best to back up your first mailing with a second and third to keep your Branding FRESH! And when cards are only 12 cents apiece, it won't be too expensive!

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3. Make sure you send your cards to the right people! Use a targeted mailing list, or your own database of previous customers. You can find a good mailing list by researching "mailing lists" at yahoo.
4. Tell EXACTLY what it is you're selling right away! Remember the 5-second rule.
5. Do not put too much on a postcard. The best thing to do is just sell one product per mailing.
6. Both sides of your card should sell. Don't neglect the "address" side, as that is the one folks look at to see if the mail is theirs!

Mitone Bennett is a Web & Graphics Designer, as well as the Marketing Director for a huge Bed & Breakfast in Southwest Kansas. Read more marketing ideas at her site <http://mitone.com>. Be sure and enter her Business Card Makeover Contest while you're there! Reach her at moi@mitone.com



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