

# DIRECT MAIL ADVERTISING BOOST TO SPRING BUSINESS

Public awareness of turf, tree, and landscaping services has never been greater. This spring is a good time to tap this increasing customer consciousness with a well-aimed direct mail promotion.

Many do-it-yourselfers notice the effects of professional care on neighborhood landscapes. They hear the favorable words of satisfied customers. At the same time they see the price of do-it-yourself products rise to the point that professional care can provide better results for nearly the same price. These observers are close to making a decision and an effective mailer can make their decision simpler and more attractive.

Direct mail offers many advantages over other forms of advertising. The advertiser controls who receives the advertising. He can select specific areas to receive the mailer to increase route efficiency. Direct mail contact with desired customers reduces the need for other types of advertising, such as display advertising in the Yellow Pages. It puts the brochures, which every company should have regardless of advertising strategy, to work. It is less offensive than telephone or door-to-door campaigns for both the advertiser and the customer. Finally, direct mail pieces with return coupons provide the advertiser with written proof of customer commitment. (It should be noted that use of the mails to defraud is a Federal offense and care should be taken not to mislead the customer concerning your service.)

The point is you control the advertising and therefore business resulting from it, not the other way around.

## Planning Promotion Area

The subdivision provides today's businessmen with a display area. When so many homes look alike, homeowners must rely on either house paint or attractive landscaping to make their homes stand out. Builders rarely offer more than four models in any one subdivision. The desire to express individuality is thus limited and must be directed into other areas.

In older neighborhoods, inflation has brought renewed respect for the value of property. Neatness and pride in property have increased on both the individual and neighborhood level.

In either case, homeowners notice the work of professional firms in their neighborhood. When an attractively marked truck is seen repeatedly in any one area the word spreads rapidly that the so-and-sos use professionals and their property is noticeably better in appearance.

The result is the people in the neighborhood are presold on the idea of professional care. It is up to you to make sure they get that service from you and not someone else. Direct mail is a way to do just that.

This neighborhood unity is a good reason to plan your promotion accordingly. Not only does it reduce distances between jobs, it permits you to

regularly check your work on other homes in the area. Soil chemistry, moisture conditions, fungus and insect problems, and regulations are relatively the same allowing your staff to concentrate on specific conditions.

Extension personnel can give you precise information if you ask them about a specific area. The resulting specialization or expertise can be used as a selling point over other firms. Familiarity is one of the strongest reasons for a homeowner to choose your company over others and also one reason for them to accept a higher bill.

In new subdivisions it is a good idea to talk with the developer, the realtors selling in the area, and local agricultural extension personnel. If these people are aware of your special interest and expertise in the area they may pass your name on to buyers. Of course, developers may prefer to enter into an agreement on a large-scale basis. Nevertheless, it can only help you to be well-known with the primary contacts of buyers.

After determining realistic staff and equipment limitations, map out specific neighborhoods you'd like to reach. Don't go after more than you can handle with quality service. The neighborhood unity works both ways. Mistakes were just as, if not more, noticeable as good results.

## Who Will Do the Work

You now have to make a decision. Do you have the staff and the time to address, mail, and follow-up on the mailings?

If not, mailing service companies can do a variety of jobs for you. They can help design the piece, get it printed, supply the addresses and the labels, and supervise distribution either by mail or private delivery service.

To get a better perspective, consider the do-it-yourself approach. You need to design the mailer. You must get it printed. There are addresses to obtain, labels to make or purchase, and arrangements to make for distribution. Winter slow periods can be utilized to do much of this work. Remember, you'll want to make at least two separate mailings to the same people. Actually, if you don't mind the extra work and the size of the program is relatively small, building your own direct mail program can be a challenge.

## Addresses and Names

Once you have mapped out the streets for your program, you need the name and exact address of each resident. Some areas are fortunate to have telephone directories, which list people by street and number. If these are not available in your area, the Recorder of Deeds at the city hall is your next source, unless you don't mind paying for a list that someone else has already obtained this way. The recorder has plat books which you may look at and copy from. You must first locate the plat number and then cross-index for names.

If you have a rather large program, more than a few hundred, the names and addresses are available from mailing list companies. These lists may have more addresses than you need. To purchase such a list can be expensive. To rent one is much cheaper.

Renting a list generally means that you never see the list. You provide the company with your pre-printed mailing piece and they put on the labels and mail. But, each time you mail you must rent the list.

If your program is relatively small, Xerox labels can be made from the list of names obtained from directories or the city. These labels are reproduced on a standard copier and have peel and stick backs. You keep a master list for your records and for updating.

#### Advertising Design

To design a mailed advertisement you must understand the habits and characteristics of the average homeowner. Chances are the first person to see your piece is the housewife. It must catch her eye or else end up in the garbage can. Women

spend roughly 80 percent of the domestic dollars in the U.S.

At the same time you must not forget the man who is more than likely the resident expert on maintaining his yard. The mailing must not contradict his basic beliefs of home maintenance. It can however, utilize his sense of responsibility to his family as a means of making an impression.


The mailing must make its point and get a response with the least amount of trouble to the homeowner. Opening an envelope can be considered trouble to some people. An attractive, folded card with a perforated return card can be very effective.

When you have an idea of the basic design, it may be worthwhile to have an artist do the final design. Select someone with direct mail design experience if possible. The printer may be able to recommend an artist.

If you include a return card make it very simple. A simple check-off for an estimate and a place for name and address are adequate. It should be post-paid if possible.

The outer part of the card should not be cluttered. It should have an attractive illustration (per-

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Circle 124 on free information card

## Direct Mail

haps a home landscape), a catch phrase to get the reader to open the card, and the company name. On the inside of the card should be a very concise message about your company and its services along with the offer you are making. Keep it simple and attractive. This is where an artist can help greatly.

The postage on your mailer is determined by its dimensions and weight. On large mailings an oversized card can be expensive. Before making major commitments to printing and lists, check with your post office for bulk mailing information.

## Printing

One reason to have an artist help is to figure the best combination of printing variables. Typefaces, paper stock, photographs, color illustrations, folding, and stapling are all things that you will need to decide. There is a knack to choosing the right combination of variables to obtain the most pleasing product.

The more you print, the cheaper the unit cost is. The same basic mailing piece can be used many times and for a number of years. Consider these points when determining the size of the press run.

When you have your design completed, get estimates from a number of printers. Unless your quantity is extremely large, stick to small, local

printers. Some printers will quote high prices to discourage certain types of jobs.

To give some idea of the printing process, let's consider the folded card mentioned earlier. This is for a small mailing to 500 homes in one city. You will make two mailings, the first in March and the second in mid-April. You are trying to keep costs down and still have an attractive and effective piece.

One printer quoted a slightly higher price than others but he also exhibited artistic talent when making recommendations for the design.

Together you and the printer select the typefaces and sizes for the copy. The printer sets the type for you to proofread and reduces the illustration to fit your design. The type and illustration are then pasted into position and printing plates are made.

To keep costs down and still have a colorful, attention-getting mailer, you have selected a light green card stock. The printer uses black ink to print more than 1,000 copies and saves the plates in case you will want to print the same piece again.

If you have a postal permit (very desirable for return postage), the permit number should be in-

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cluded in the design of the mailer and printed with the rest of the mailer.

The final steps are folding, stapling, and attaching labels. All these jobs can be done mechanically and are monotonous tasks when done by hand for large mailings.

Except for small companies with few and infrequent billings, lawn, tree, landscape, or sod companies regularly make large mailings and therefore deal with postal officials frequently. Check with them prior to mailing your advertisement to see how they prefer to receive large bulk mailings. They may ask you to presort the mailer by zip code.

### Summary

Direct mail advertising requires more effort and involvement than newspaper or other print advertising. However, by utilizing existing staff and equipment effectively and hiring out some of the specialty work, you can cut this extra work down to a minimum.

The areas you will probably want to contract for are getting the names, addresses and labels and artistic design of the piece. If you have a good printer he can help guide you through the whole process.

Direct mail advertising services, on the other hand, can do the entire job for you. You simply tell them what you want and they will do it. However, they may be unable to provide you with the exact area you want. You may have to accept, and pay for, a certain amount of waste advertising.

Perhaps the cheapest form of direct mail advertising is the private delivery service that puts together packets for home delivery. It can do the entire job as well, but the product tends to be buried in a batch of other companies' advertising. If you want your brochure to stand out and you want your company to have a unique, quality image, the private delivery service may not be desirable.

The first run of your mailer will be the most expensive. After you have the basic design, and perhaps the list, costs can drop by nearly 40 percent. A rough cost estimate of the double mailing to 500 homes, including artist and list rental fees, is \$600.

Once the returns start coming in, be sure to follow them up quickly. If properly done, the direct mail program will reap accounts in your standard route area. Don't be disappointed by a low return on the first mailing. It is often the second mailing that does the trick.

When you have reached a saturation point in certain neighborhoods, the direct mail program lets you grow in a controlled manner by going after specific new areas.

Control of your advertising is as important as controlling other aspects of your business. To keep your prices competitive you must guard your company from wasteful types of advertising. For the local service company, newspaper, radio, television, or large Yellow Page advertising may not be the best advertising buy. **WTT**

## Postal Information

Postal regulations are not simple and a direct mail program can be in a number of postal classes. Before you print your brochure, consult with the Permits and Third Class Information Department at your local post office. You'll be amazed how much information the individuals in this department know and can throw at you like a time and temperature recording.

Basically, third class is for circulars, books, catalogs, and other printed matter. There are no size restrictions on third class matter. Rates are based on weight.

### Third Class Rates

| Weight (oz.) Not Exceeding | Rate (per piece) |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| 2                          | 14¢              |
| 4                          | 28¢              |
| 6                          | 39¢              |
| 8 and up                   | 50¢ and up       |

Bulk mail is considered third class, however, rates are based upon weight as well as other factors. All bulk mail must be presorted by zip code and you must have a minimum of 200 pieces. Consult the post office for bulk mail rates.

First class is the other important class for mail advertising. Post card mailings fall into this category and reply cards do also. Until November 1978 the minimum size for a post card is 3 x 4½ in. After then it will be 3½ x 5 in.

First class, presorted mail is given a 1¢ per piece discount. To do this you must have a minimum of 500 pieces.

For reply post cards you need to obtain a permit number from the post office. The charge for this is \$30 per year. For each card returned you pay the first class rate plus a 12¢ per piece handling charge.

### First Class Rates

| Kind of Mail   | Rate  |
|--|---|
| All 1st class mail weighing less than 13 ounces, except post cards                     | 13¢ for the first ounce plus 11¢ for each additional ounce. |
| Over 13 ounces   | Special priority rates.                                     |
| Single post cards  | 9¢ each   |
| Double post cards (reply portion does not have to bear postage when originally mailed. | 9¢ each half  |

For the post card mailing mentioned in this article, postage would be roughly \$90 for 500 pieces, \$30 for the permit, and 12¢ for each reply card returned.