

# Direct mail

Some firms make the mistake of using it as their lone marketing tool. It should be just a part of an overall marketing plan.

by Rudd McGary and Ed Wandtke

Is direct mail still a cost-effective method of reaching the consumer?

Judging by the number of green industry companies which have used direct mail in the past decade, you would guess that it is.

But the real answer to that question is twofold:

- If direct mail is your only method of reaching the consumer, you're in trouble.

- Direct mail as a part of a coordinated marketing plan can be valuable—but not as much as it once was.

## Making your point

The company wanting to attract new customers has to use a more sophisticated marketing effort than simply mailing brochures to everyone in a ZIP Code.

The major reason direct mail is less effective today is stated in the second paragraph: everyone is doing it.

As the consumer is bombarded with direct mail pieces, he either ignores them or becomes confused as to company name or brand identification.

A second problem is lack of originality. Most companies in the green industries produce brochures similar



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## MANAGEMENT



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to that of their competitors.

You know the style. Pick one. They have a truck, male worker (always smiling), and a child or family on a green lawn.

We have 60 brochures from a wide variety of companies, and if you cover the company name you can't tell the difference.

This benefits the firms that can afford television advertising. If you can't afford TV's steep rates, you should alter your marketing plan to help build a larger customer base.

The following four steps could make you a more effective marketer:

- Coordinate telemarketing with the mailing dates of your brochures.
- Maintain a personal selling force that excels at closing.
- Alter your brochures.
- Know the final objective for using the brochures: to allow a salesperson to make a one-on-one sales effort with the possibility of closing the sale in that time period.

## One step further

Before you begin to physically alter your printed pieces, consider these changes.

- 1) Stay away from the industry norm of featuring a happy family or technician in your brochure.

- 2) Consider using drawings as opposed to photos, and make sure your

name is the most prominent feature of the piece.

- 3) For the sake of readability, don't attempt to explain agronomics to the consumer. Technical reading will turn him off.

- 4) Try using colors other than green. Dare to be different.

In the past, brochures netted a 2 to 3 percent response rate, even higher in some cases. No more. Now it's below 1 percent in certain markets, and start-up companies are experiencing return rates of below one-half of a percent.

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## Their direct mail will look different, be coupled with other marketing efforts, and performed in a systematic manner.

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We know of one company that mailed 30,000 brochures and received 16 responses. With intelligent marketing techniques, you can prevent these results.

Direct mail can still be an integral part of your overall marketing, but coordinating it with your other marketing tools is the key to attracting new business.

Believing direct mail is the key to attracting new business will lead to disaster.

Aggressive, far-sighted companies are coordinating all marketing efforts in a systematic fashion.

Their direct mail will look different, be coupled with other marketing efforts, and performed in a systematic manner.

They'll be around next year. How about you? **WT&T**