

USING DIRECT MAIL AS A MARKETING TOOL

A direct mailer may be one of the best marketing tools available to attract new customers in the landscape market.

by Ed Wandtke

Direct mail is often overlooked as a marketing opportunity, except by the most progressive of today's landscaping companies.

Many landscaping companies are sloppy in the way they use direct mail. They don't understand how to put it to work or the costs involved in building a program.

For those considering a direct mail program, it's important to note that your most likely new customer is probably living next door to one of your past or present customers. Therefore, a successful direct mail campaign will use these clients to help sell services.

Other factors need to be taken into consideration in order for a direct mail campaign to be a success in the green industry. For example:

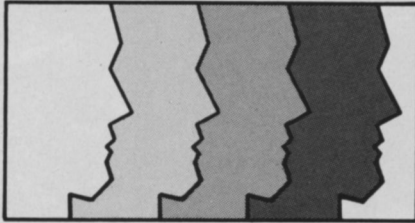
Know your market. The direct mailer as used in landscaping differs greatly from one that might be used in lawn care. You probably don't have as many customers as a lawn care company, so you have the opportunity to analyze their situation more closely.

Get some idea of the income level and home value of the people you want to service. Whether you are in commercial or residential work, you have to be able to target those people you want to reach. This will help lower the cost of a direct mail campaign while increasing the possibility that it will be successful.

Find a market segment that offers the best chance of success. Once you know your market, concentrate your efforts there. It must be a geographical segmentation, but often it's a demographic one too. In demographics we look at age, home value and income as major variables in defining our "perfect" customer.

To find demographic information such as home value, age and income, work with a mailing company. Both local and national mailing companies have this type of information at a relatively low cost. Use it to examine addresses, income and home value in different parts of your locale. You may

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be surprised to find that there are many people nearby who fit your customer profile.

Do a current customer profile. In order to locate your market segment, find out who has bought your services in the past. Potential clients who fit their profile are likely to be the ones who will respond positively to your direct mailing.

Don't limit yourself to geographical segmentation.

Strut your stuff. For artwork, use either your own renderings, blueprints or drawings, or pictures of some of your current landscaping jobs.

More than 80 percent of the buying decision is made through visual means. If you have a strong visual, use it. If it explains to the consumers what they will receive if they retain you, so much the better.

Don't be wordy. Most brochures contain too much copy. Your product is primarily visual, so show it to the customer.

Make an offer to the consumer. If you can't make an offer, there is no reason for the consumer to continue to look at your brochure. The offer can be to make the area around the home more livable and enjoyable.

Don't mail to too many people. Should you find a responsive audience, you need to be able to get to them fairly quickly for the first contact. The consumer will wait for your service after they have made the buy-

ing decision, but they don't want to wait for the first contact. If you mail too many brochures, you may find you can't service the leads quickly enough.

Be prepared to do multiple mailings. Multiple mailings are often necessary. If you send out your brochure once, you may not get a strong response. But by sending the same piece out again, you'll do little more than waste your money.

You may mail only a few hundred brochures in order to obtain enough business to keep you busy and growing. Because you aren't sending out thousands, as is done in lawn care, you should make sure that the brochure's quality is very high.

Remember that the key to successful direct mailing is to identify those people who are the most likely buyers. By combining a target market with a professional brochure, you can attract customers who would otherwise be unapproachable.

The landscape industry offers many opportunities for direct mailing. Because so little of it is done, the professional company using direct mail successfully is formidable competition in this young marketplace.

By properly targeting your audience with a high quality mailer, you'll be professional and profitable. **LM**



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