

# The best direct mail marketing programs reach *your* target group

**Marketing today is becoming more tailored to individual buyers. Direct mail marketing helps you find the best prospects.**

by Julie Springer

■ In the landscaping business, direct marketing presents a world of opportunity.

✔ **It's cost effective.** It's getting trickier to keep costs down, and in the lawn and landscape industry, certain costs just keep on coming. Equipment, fertilizer, overhead, seasonal employees...the list is long. While giving up advertising altogether may seem like the easiest way to cut costs, it is more likely that advertising *less* and advertising *smarter* is as a better alternative.

✔ **It's appropriate.** Lawn care and landscape service providers don't need to advertise in the local paper only to have half of the papers delivered to apartment dwellers. Direct marketing allows you to select homeowners, an immediate advantage.

✔ **It works.** Thousands of lawn and landscape professionals with large and smaller companies have benefitted from direct marketing, and many are likely to have elaborate databases of existing customers and potential customers.

With direct marketing, you in effect purchase the names and addresses of persons whose lives and lifestyles are such that there is a need for lawn care services: some single family homes, recently moved persons, those whose incomes exceed certain minimums; senior citizens.

If you've recognized that homeowners are a highly profitable market for you, consider this: about 4 million Americans buy a home each year and need to find local merchants and services. New homeowners will spend eight to 10 times more in the first six months after moving than an established resident will spend in two years.

Established homeowners have service needs as well. In general, the homeowner is a preferred customer profile when you consider income, buying needs, credit rating and longevity as a customer.

**Who might buy?** The first thing you need to do is pick a geographic region you would like to target.

Select ZIP codes that represent the area of your business or your trading area.

For example, if your company is located in an industrial park surrounded by newer developments and apartment buildings, your best market may be found in one or two of the older, surrounding communities with more property per dwelling.

Consider what other household characteristics or information might help make your list more useful, such as phone numbers. Knowing both phone numbers and addresses lets you execute a combination mail/phone campaign.

You can also narrow your search to include people who are known to respond to direct mail.

The next step in this system is to call a list compiler or broker who can best meet your needs. The *Yellow Pages* contains a "Mailing Lists" category. A trip to the library can also be very useful. *The Standard Rate and Data Service* lists homeowners by ZIP code.

A list compiler, such as Metromail or Polk, is staffed by people who are experienced in dealing with customers less familiar with the ins and outs of the list business.

Direct mail is an advertising medium whose results are measurable and quantifiable. A little money up front will help you determine just how successful your efforts are and see almost instant results.

Metromail has a data base containing more than 29 million names of homeowners across the U.S. Other categories help you narrow down your list, such as amount of mortgage, home cost, etc. When arranged by ZIP code, the names can total from a few hundred up to one or two thousand.

Depending on other selections that you make to narrow down that number, you can also choose to select a random sampling to keep your mailing to the size you choose.



Each list provider has a different way of handling small business orders. Metromail provides names to small businesses without the standard industry minimums (5,000-10,000 names per order at about \$65 per thousand).

Instead, as a small business person, you can receive those names for about \$50 for 200 of them (25 cents per name, with a \$50 minimum).

You also need to consider the cost of mailing information. A post card or letter is appropriate, depending how much you want to say. If you have 300 postcards printed, you will pay a quick-printer about \$65 for printing, and \$63 for postage.

The standard benchmark for a direct mail campaign is a two percent response rate. Your response rate may be higher or lower, depending somewhat on how accurately you assess your customer profile, but two percent is a reasonable, conservative figure to use for planning purposes.

The lawn and landscape industry especially lends itself to direct marketing because it is a service which people purchase hundreds of times as property owners. The dollars that it costs you to buy and name, and send out a postcard will come back to you many times over the course of your relationships with customers.

And when they move, you may "inherit" the business of the new homeowner, and retain the loyalty of the mover.

—The author is a consultant with Metromail, a supplier of direct mail lists and other helpful information for businesses. For more information, call Julie at (800) 316-2637.