

Junk mail jewels?

Don't sniff at those packets of coupons you get in the mail. They're a form of advertising known as cooperative direct mail, and some landscapers say they help to find customers.

By AMY K. REAVIS

Owning and operating a lawn care or landscape company today is a smart business venture. With the increase in one-parent households, and couples having to work outside of the home, people are

often too busy for yard work. The percentage of households using lawn care and landscape companies continues to rise. Even so, landscapers and LCOs are battling more fiercely for new customers every day.

One innovative form of advertising that many of them use to pinpoint specific geographic markets is called cooperative direct mail advertising. With this cooperative marketing concept the landscaper or LCO shares advertising costs and envelope space with other local businesses such as restaurants, dry cleaners, and automotive centers. As part of a cooperative direct mailing, with national companies such as Super Coups, Val-Pak, Money Mailer or United Coupon, each participating business has a customized coupon which is mailed in an envelope to a designated number of homes in a targeted area. Local residents gain valuable savings with the coupons.

Relatively inexpensive

Cooperative direct mail advertising is, compared to other advertising mediums, relatively inexpensive. The overall cost of a mailing is less than 4 cents per home. Generally this cost includes creative assistance from a cooperative direct mail sales consultant to design the coupon, as well as the printing, production, and mailing of your coupon to a designated area. Often the sales consultant will help you design



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Direct mail coupons

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a coupon which will convey to the public an image and message that is appropriate to your business.

Karen Heffner of Karen Heffner Landscape Design in Davidsonville, Md., has been advertising with Super Coups for the past five years and says, "I always have good results." She participates in a mailing twice a year, spring and fall, and found at first that she probably lost business because she included an expiration date. "I have stopped putting an expiration date on the coupon because of the seasonal nature of my business. People often aren't in a hurry to get landscape work done, but they do save the coupons, so this way they can use them whenever they want to."

A benefit of direct mail is the ability to reach the people you feel would most likely benefit from or partake of your services.

You can geographically target specific communities by zip code, those areas you feel should bring a greater response rate. Most businesses target between 20,000 to 50,000 homes, but generally you can start out mailing to only 10,000 homes in your local area.

When looking for a national cooperative direct mail company, make sure to ask whether your business will be given exclusivity. In other words, you want to be the only landscaper or lawn care company in the mailing for your particular mailing zone. This advantage will narrow your competition and bring you the customers you desire.

Make it colorful

A benefit of direct mail coupons is that you can personalize them with color. Several of the companies have available for your use a collection of clip art and stock photograph. That's important, believes landscape designer Karin Heffner.

"If you have a catchy logo and an eye-catching coupon, people tend to keep them and use them. I've seen my coupon on people's refrigerators," she says. "The sky's the limit and you can be as creative as you'd like, or you can simply tell your consultant what you'd like and the consultant will have it designed for you."

Direct mail coupons are especially effective in advertising special offers and promotions to ignite the interest of potential customers. Perhaps an offer of a free service with a seasonal agreement, or dollars off a project for new customers. Use your own judgment when determining what kind of offers to promote. As a general rule, coupons usually work best when targeting new customers who aren't aware of your business or service. Once you bring them in with the coupons, you will have an opportunity to impress them with your expertise and service.

Heffner has been successful in her local area with a promotion that she has been running in which she donates 10 percent of all proceeds to the Kevin Reichardt Scholarship Fund. The foundation was set up in this student's memory after his death several years ago. "Kevin was a star in the community and people want to contribute to his foundation. It gives me a good feeling to be able to do this for his family," says Heffner.

Build name recognition

It is well known that the key to successful advertising is repetition. It's beneficial to keep your company's name fresh and recognizable within your community. Consistent mailing with annual agreements involves higher redemptions and lower advertising costs. By advertising in each mailing, you inexpensively repeat your ad to the public creating name recognition, each time bringing in new customers. And since you attempt to attract a local, consistent

market of customers, it's only appropriate that you consistently target your advertising to the same general group of residents. Remember, repetition is the key to success.

According to a study by Frankel & Company and published in *DIRECT MARKETING MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE*, more than 99 percent of American households use coupons in their everyday shopping for both products and services. Of this group, more than 94 percent use direct mail coupons. With a high percent age of households guaranteed to use direct mail coupons, you can not afford not to invest in this successful type of personal marketing that allows you to enter a prospective customer's home, sometimes before they even know of your business.

Cooperative direct mail is personable, professional, of high quality and is proven to be effective. To learn more about it, look in your local Yellow Pages under Direct Mail Advertising or call one of these resources: Super Coups Cooperative Direct Mail at 800/626-2620; United Coupon at 800/368-3501; or Money Mailer at 800/624-5372. □

—The author is director of marketing for Marketing Solutions in Fairfax, VA, and an avid amateur gardener.

Tips for couponing success

- ▶ **Plan annual direct mail advertising budgets:** A preplanned yearly budget will reduce the cost of your overall campaign and will help keep your advertising consistent and repetitive.
- ▶ **Introduce new products and services:** If you have a new service, display a pertinent photo, or highlight the service on your coupon to draw in customers. Make sure your coupons say what the customers need to know.
- ▶ **Use full color:** Studies show that consumers prefer full-color ads 3-to-1 over black and white ads. Ad recall after 24 hours has been shown to be almost 70 percent for full-color ads versus 41 percent for black and white. Work with direct mail companies that can print in color for maximum results.
- ▶ **Use quality photos and clip art:** People tend to be attracted to photos first, then they read headlines before deciding if they want to search further for the specific details of an offer. Work with couponers that offer full-color art libraries as an extra free service to you.
- ▶ **Order coupon overruns:** An inexpensive way to get even better results from your coupons is to order an extra 2000 or more to display at your location, or to place in area businesses or restaurants where the public has access to them. You can also give them to clients to share with neighbors and friends. □

—by Glen Liset, vice president of Super Coups