

# Reach customers with low-tech, too

Direct mail can still be a viable way to connect with current and prospective accounts, even in the Internet age.

BY JOE SHOONER



## TAKE AWAY

Target within your demographic and market for better response.

Use new technologies to customize your piece for each recipient.

Door hangers can be cheaper than mailed pieces, yet still effective.

**D**IRECT mail continues to be an effective method for Green Industry companies to reach prospective customers for several reasons:

1. People are accustomed to receiving buying opportunities through the mail;
2. The costs associated with using the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) are still a relative bargain; and most importantly...
3. Every prospect has a mailing address.

### Start with a list

The single most important element of a direct mailing campaign is the list. It's very important to thoroughly research and target your mailing. Online list brokers such as AccuData allow registered users to run list counts based on geography and a host of demographic selections.

Before you begin running counts, though, define your ideal customer. Review your customer data, figure out the Zip codes where you have good market share already, and then define home value, income and age parameters for your average clients.

Be cautious in trying to target an area or demographic that you don't currently serve.

You will have much better results if you focus on the areas where you already work and the demographics that already buy from you.

### A mailer that works

The mailing piece you send will have a significant impact on the cost and return on investment (ROI) for your campaign. Historically, sales letters have outperformed brochure and postcard mailings. However, because Green Industry services are inherently visual, they lend themselves to full-color photographic mailers.

The USPS continues to increase postage rates and tighten restrictions for folded pieces like brochures. Consequently, oversized postcards have gained in popularity. They are efficient to print and address, and still qualify for letter-rate postage.

Speaking of postage, research shows that recipients are more receptive to envelope mailers with a first-class stamp attached. Of course, this isn't always a practical option considering the extra cost and time needed compared to a presort mailing.

Your mailing piece needs to convince the reader to respond to you. Direct mail experts recommend that you make a compelling offer to motivate your prospects. When making an

offer, try to empathize with your prospects. What will get them to act? Is it cash, a percentage discount or additional free services? Unless a prospect has some idea what a project will likely cost, cash and percentage discounts don't carry much weight.

Consider their triggers and think about making offers that bundle your services together, like a year of tree/shrub fertilization following a landscape installation, or installation of some annual flowers with a maintenance contract. These are both offers that make your primary service look more valuable — and will keep customers thinking about you after their initial purchase is complete.

### Don't make junk!

For as long as I can remember, I've been excited to see what comes in the mail. However, many consumers begrudge marketers for sending junk mail, making them less likely to

**“CONSIDER THEIR TRIGGERS AND THINK ABOUT MAKING OFFERS THAT BUNDLE YOUR SERVICES TOGETHER, LIKE A YEAR OF TREE/SHRUB FERTILIZATION FOLLOWING A LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION.”**

respond to your mailing piece. In fact, response rates for a single mailing to a new prospect list will average between just 0.5% and 1%.

One way to increase recipient interest is to include variable data in your mailing. Variable data printing (VDP) can be thought of as a full-color mail merge. Today's VDP programs make use of digital printing technology to marry data and design during the printing process. The result is a mailing piece that can be fully customized for each recipient on your mailing list. The potential uses for this are limited only by the data you have on hand.



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For example, say you have recently completed and photographed five installation projects. You generate a radius list to target the neighbors of each of these clients. You mail to a list of 500 homes, but change the photo and headline depending on which home is the one to which the recipient lives closest. Your headline may read "Have You Seen Our Work on Cedar Avenue?" or "Landscaping <Neighborhood>'s Finest Homes Since 1990" and feature the project nearest the recipient's address. This results in a piece with real stopping power.

To close the loop on this method, the use of a personalized URL (PURL) gives the recipient a personalized Web address to visit for more information. The PURL (joeshooner.yourlandscapeco.com, for instance) should lead to a landing page with a summary of the information the prospect will want to know before contacting you, as well as a form for responding.

Marketers making good use of PURL technology report a 33% to 100% increase in response rates. However, if there isn't any relevant information on the landing page, and you aren't saving the prospect time and energy, it will appear very gimmicky.

**In summary...**

The costs for any mailing project are going to fluctuate dramatically depending on the size of the list, the format of the piece, the postage rate you achieve, and the number of times you mail. The use of VDP and PURL technology will drive up your cost per piece, but ideally you will mail far fewer pieces to a highly targeted list, thus increasing your ROI. **LM**

The author is an account executive with Focal Point Communications in Cincinnati. Contact him at 800/525-6999 or joeshooner@growpro.com, or visit www.growpro.com.



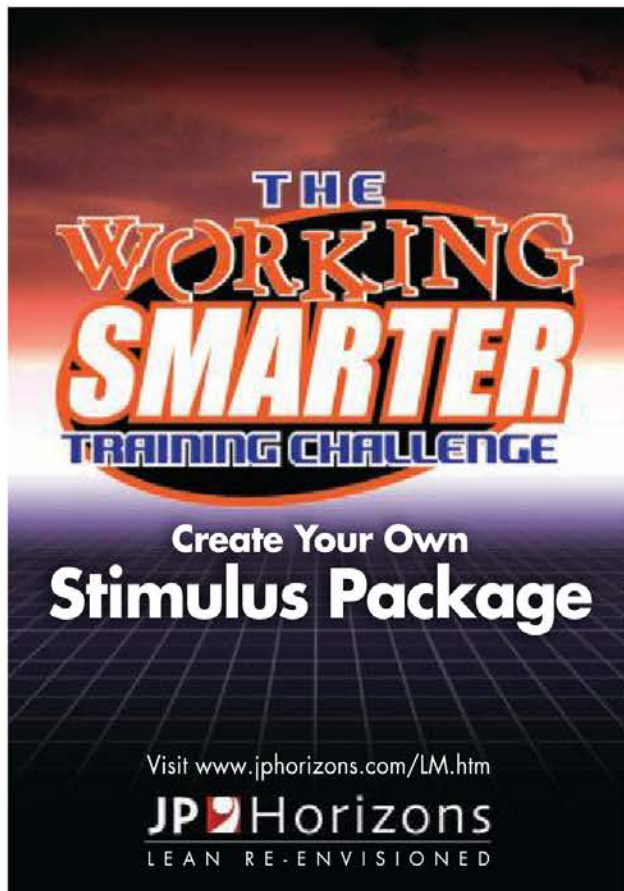
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