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Direct Marketing via the U.S. Postal Service's Every Door Direct Mail Program

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Abstract. In this paper I describe the US Postal Service's Every Door Direct Mail program which delivers postcards inexpensively to residents within a ZIP code. Extension educators interested in making the most of their advertising dollars can use the EDDM program advantageously. Best practices for advertising campaigns employing this direct mail option are provided.

INTRODUCTION

To accomplish the twin objectives of making the most of a limited advertising budget and effectively reaching an audience, consider using the U.S. Postal Service's (USPS) Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) program to create a postcard campaign. EDDM is popular among small businesses since it allows the user to saturate an area, but it can be used effectively in Extension programming as well.

This journal has reported research related to or performed by direct mail in the past—such as the works of Kandel et al. (2010) and Kelsey & Mariger (2003)—but those efforts used well-maintained mailing lists. EDDM does not require a list and is also more affordable than first class or bulk mail.

According to the Data & Marketing Association (Robinson, 2021), the average response rate for a direct mail marketing campaign is 9%—a higher rate than digital equivalents. A survey from USPS (2020) shows that 54% of those surveyed tried a new product or business within six months of receiving a piece of mail. In this article, I describe the EDDM program, share how I have used it, and suggest best practices.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

EDDM is a USPS program offering a discounted postage rate for flats weighing no more than 3.3 oz. The program ensures that these mailings are delivered to every mailbox within specific geographic areas. Small businesses frequently use EDDM to reach all addresses within specific ZIP codes or specific postal routes within a ZIP code.

EDDM features an online mapping tool that lets you choose your own direct mail delivery area and map the audience by age, income, or household size using U.S. census data. For example, a local business could target households within a five-mile radius who are likely to have children based on the demographics of the area. The advantages include:

- Users do not need to have or manage mailing lists,
- There is no requirement for permits or address specifications, and
- The method costs only a portion of what standard bulk mail costs.

According to the EDDM user guide (2017), retail users can ship a minimum of 200—and up to 5,000—mail pieces in a given ZIP code in a day.

BEST PRACTICE

For me, the EDDM program has been an effective way to reach an audience—especially in smaller towns or well-defined neighborhoods. I have received a better response utilizing this program than I have with the combination of paid advertising in traditional media, boosted posts on social media, and emails to a mailing list. Here are some practices I've employed to use the program to its highest advantage.

HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF YOUR GOAL

Think about what you want to achieve in advance so that you can target your message. For example, common goals of marketing within Extension programs are to solicit registrations for a program, increase foot traffic at an event, encourage online traffic to a website, or otherwise keep clientele informed of important information. Having defined objectives then helps you clarify the message and suggests ways of assessing the impact of your campaign.

STRATEGIZE THE CONTENT

As a former Extension specialist who traveled widely in my state, I tried to maximize my time in a community. In each location, I liked to design a mix of offerings that might appeal to various audiences, and then I advertised all the options in one EDDM mailing. For instance, I might arrange for a personal finance topic to be offered during the day and a small business topic that evening, which covers two distinct demographics. Alternately, a county office could advertise all its spring programming at once. This strategy requires that the postcard content can be easily scanned, allowing readers to discern quickly if the content is relevant to them personally or if it should be passed along to someone else in the household.

The postcard format also lends itself to other purposes, such as:

- Advertising a public meeting or conference,
- Calling for volunteers,
- Fundraising, or
- Soliciting feedback (i.e., the URL of a survey).

It is a good idea to include a call to action, such as asking readers to register for an event. No matter what specific educational efforts are offered, be sure to add a way for readers to connect with the county Extension office: a mailing list sign-up; social media accounts; or simply the office's phone number, address, and hours.

LINK UP WITH OTHER CHANNELS

Direct mail can be more effective when used alongside other marketing channels. Adding a URL or QR code to a postcard could help drive traffic online. Advertising solely through social media or an email list limits the number of people who will see your message, but direct mail can introduce new clients to your program and lead them to your website, where they can learn more about Extension, read about programming, or register for individual educational opportunities or a newsletter—at which point you receive their contact details for future direct marketing.

Using more than one channel also reinforces the original message. I have designed campaigns with EDDM at their core and then augmented the mailing with a media release, display ads (when funds were available), emails to an existing list, and social media postings. Using more than one channel helps uncover clients' communication preferences.

MAKE THE EXPERIENCE COUNT

One advantage that direct mail has over other channels is its physical presence. It must be handled. Use this to your advantage and make the first interaction count: primarily, use a designer to make your mailing look professional. If possible, print the postcard in full color and consider using high-quality paper to take advantage of the tactile advantage of mail.

MIND THE TIMING

Once USPS receives the EDDM mail pieces, they typically deliver them within a few business days. USPS does not guarantee delivery dates, so be mindful of any deadlines or time-sensitive items.

Every Door Direct Mail Program

CONCLUSION

If your target audience can be defined by a geographic area, then the USPS Every Door Direct Mail program might be an effective way of saturating this area with your message.

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