

Don't count direct mail out.(OPINION)



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Like many of you, I hear people in marketing say things like "Direct mail is dead," "No smart marketer uses direct mail these days," and "I don't need direct mail anymore--I use email now."

They are wrong. Direct mail has many core strengths. For starters, it has huge scale. In the US, \$56 billion is spent on direct mail and less than \$40 billion is spent on search, display, email and mobile advertising combined.

Almost every household in the civilized world can be reached by mail. Maybe that's why every one of our top 20 clients uses direct mail in its marketing mix.

Direct mail has four massive strengths, which separate it from other media and make it valuable in a marketing recipe:

Endurance. Consistently, research and in-market results prove that printed messages like direct mail last longer than digital ones.

Millward Brown did an analysis using MRI technology that found, time and time again, print messages engaged the brain more deeply and more emotionally than digital ones. The marketplace concurs. Direct mail response rates are consistently two to three times higher than email response rates.

Acquisition. Direct mail has always been a great method to introduce products and acquire customers. One of the greatest acquisition marketing tools of all time is the "Quite Frankly" letter from American Express Co. We wrote this letter for Amex in the 1980s and it has helped the company acquire 100 million new cardmembers around the world to date.

Do you know who uses direct mail to win new enterprise and SMB customers? None other than the digital powerhouse Google.

Impact. Direct mail has impact and importance. When people stop using direct mail for wedding invitations and send an email, then I will believe direct mail is dead. Until then, it conveys importance like no other medium.

When American Express launched its most prestigious product, The Centurion Card, they did it with mail. It was a big, important communication that brought the personal service offering to life. And it worked.

Sense. Direct mail is sensory in nature. You cannot feel a banner ad or smell an email. When IBM Corp. wanted to market its "infrastructure solutions," it used a 3-D mailing with a puzzle to let prospects experience the complexity of integrating the pieces.

Direct mail indeed has prodigious strengths, but it needs to shape up and establish new collaborations. Direct mail needs to stop competing against digital media and learn to leverage them. We must innovate with disciplined agility and purposeful innovation, built on core values and scalable platforms.

Do not count out direct mail. Use it for all its amazing strengths including scale, endurance, impact and importance, acquisition and sensory benefits. Evolve it and innovate around it with discipline and purpose.

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