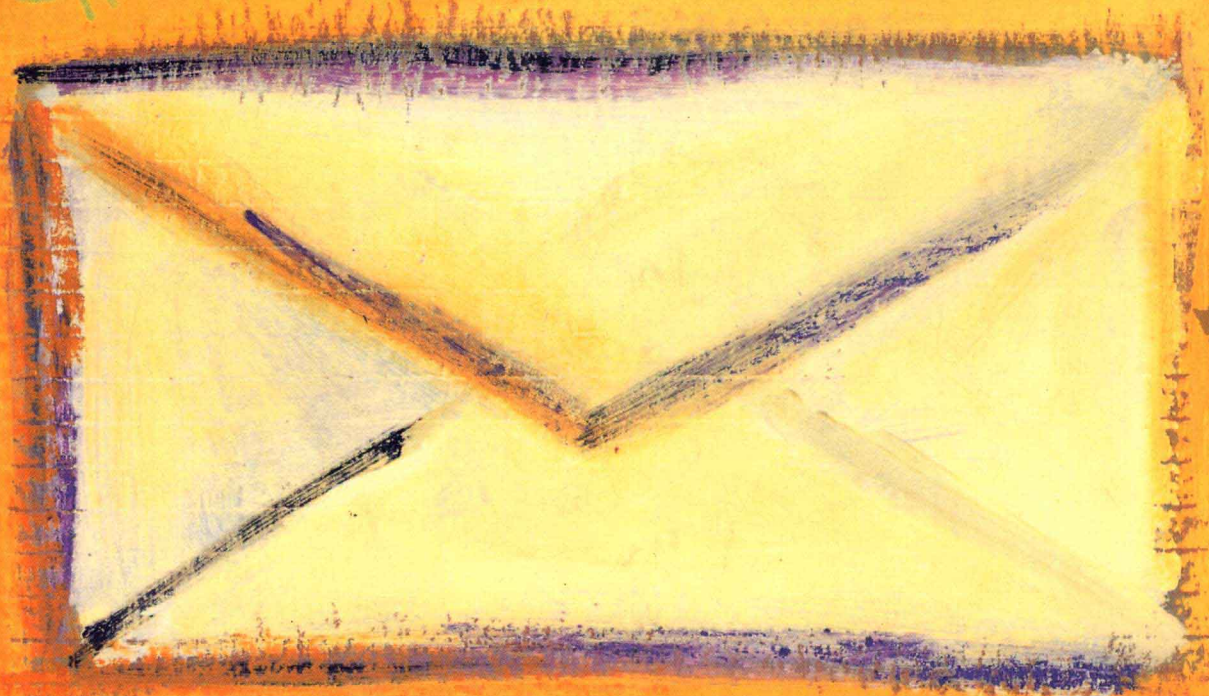


*Designing*  
**Direct Mail**  
*That* **Sells**



Sandra J. Blum

# *Designing* **Direct Mail** *That* **Sells**

Sandra J. Blum



**NORTH LIGHT BOOKS**  
Cincinnati, Ohio



## About the Author

Sandra J. Blum, president of Blum & Co. in Fairfield, CT, specializes in the creation and production of direct mail, sales and technical literature, and other forms of marketing communication. Blum's company is a full-service ad agency and communications consultancy that creates successful direct response programs for clients whose products range from computers to design magazines. The firm has also devised training programs for corporate clients such as Aetna, JP Morgan and Prudential/AARP.

Blum is experienced in graphic design and copywriting, and in all aspects of direct mail strategy, list selection, mailing services and print buying. She also consults on business strategies and market development. She is the coauthor of the CD-ROM *Mail Marketer: Grow Your Business Using the Mail* (a Pitney Bowes Best Practices Guide). She has also conducted business seminars to thousands nationally and internationally.



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For my husband, Edward, and my daughters, Ellen and Amy

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# Why You Need This Book

or

If everybody just throws away junk mail, why does it account for 14.2 percent of total advertising spending?

In the design world, direct mail is like a neglected, poorly understood stepchild, starting with the other name by which it is fondly (or not so fondly) known, junk mail. And to most designers it is visual junk, meant to wind up in the dreaded round file. However, to direct mailers, the only aesthetic judgment that counts is if the piece gets a profitable response. Lots of direct mail is designed to be an intrusive, in-your-face, do-it-or-throw-it-away experience; this book is designed to tell you why.



**D**esigners aren't alone—most Americans have a love-hate relationship with direct mail. Most people say they throw away all their junk mail, but somehow almost everybody orders something from a solicitation received in the mail. Love it or hate it, direct mail is a big area of opportunity for designers. It certainly is commanding new respect from the top advertising agencies and large corporations—the \$37.4 billion spent annually on direct mail represents 14.2 percent of total U.S. advertising expenditures and 24.4 percent of total direct marketing expenditures.

In 1997, business-to-business direct mail accounted for \$145.7 billion in sales, while consumer direct mail sales equaled \$244.3 billion. For 1998, those numbers are projected to be \$160.2 billion and \$261.1 billion, respectively. Between 1992 and 1997, direct mail advertising expenditures grew at an average annual rate of 8 percent. From 1997 to 2002, business-to-business direct mail is expected to grow 8.2 percent per year versus 5.3 percent for consumer direct mail.

### Amazing Medium and Amazing Results

Direct mail is a unique blend of art and science. You have to mail to the right people. You have to have a great offer that motivates response. You have to package the offer in a way that gets the envelope opened and that gets the reply mailed, faxed, E-mailed or phoned in. Even before all that, your direct mail faces pretty formidable odds against getting into the hands of the right person at the right time. It can be stopped at the office mail room or ignored by consumers glued to the TV following a big news story. Despite this, direct mail is an amazing medium that brings in billions of dollars to the U.S. economy every year, and knowing what makes it tick can bring you (and your clients) profitable new business!

### Direct Mail Advertising: A Growth Medium

Direct Mail Advertising Expenditures	1997	Projected 1998	Projected 2002	Compound Annual Growth 1997–2002
Consumer	\$23.3	\$24.7	\$30.1	5.3%
Business-to-Business	\$14.1	\$15.3	\$20.9	8.2%
Total Direct Mail	\$37.4	\$40.0	\$51.0	6.4%

(In billions of dollars. Numbers have not been inflation adjusted.)

Source: 1997 *Economic Impact: U.S. Direct Marketing Today*, The Direct Marketing Association.



## There's More Growth Ahead

Technological advances and the growth of database marketing mean even more growth for direct mail. Large and small companies are building customer databases that include historical and other information, which allows them to categorize their customers for marketing purposes. Corporations with huge data warehouses are using database marketing and data mining techniques to segment their markets and to market smarter to small, profitable niches. The result is customized mailings, “versioned” for each market segment—and more work for designers!

Small businesses now have access to desktop database applications that make marketing by mail much easier for them, too. The car dealer around the corner, the specialty clothing store down the block or the illustrator working from home can keep a computerized mailing list easily, and all of them have the capability to create a pretty sophisticated marketing database from customer information. Mailing lists that used to require a minimum order of five thousand names are now easily available as smaller, more specialized lists on CD-ROM or the Internet. All these small businesses and home businesses will be looking for help from local designers to create direct mail to take advantage of their new abilities to mail to customers and prospects more easily—and if they're not, you may be able to persuade them that they should be.

Direct mail is also used by savvy companies to cement long-term relationships with customers. Typically they send thank-you letters, marketing newsletters, announcements, etc., to communicate with customers by mail about once a month. All of these mailings are devised as part of a relationship marketing plan. Each individual mailing may not bring in more profits, or even a response, but customers targeted in a relationship marketing program have been proven to spend more over time and to remain customers longer.

According to the marketing gurus, advances in technology will make one-on-one marketing the next logical step—the ultimate in target marketing. One-on-one marketing requires even more specific communications, reflecting the likes and dislikes of the individual.

All this adds up to OPPORTUNITY in capital letters—if designers can master the secrets of the medium.

## Read This Book

In the pages that follow, you'll get inside secrets from the pros about direct mail creative. We'll look at some classic direct mail formats and elements, and how

the design of each works to promote response. You'll acquire new respect for the designer who can use a kraft envelope and a slip of 50# paper printed in two colors to generate millions of orders. You'll also understand why it's not too difficult to get a high response to a four-color, three-dimensional mailing with a clever premium inside. Throughout, you'll be challenged to think like a direct mailer. And then, as a grand finale, you'll meet and hear from some of the top names in direct mail design, who will share their wisdom with you.

Of course, putting words to all of this—describing the process—sort of takes the power out of it. Direct mail at its best is like a superb salesperson. When you are being sold to by a super salesperson, you forget you're even being sold to. It is so natural, it feels so good, so right.

# Living Laboratory of Direct Mail Design That Works

or

The Basics Are in Your Own Mailbox

Designing direct mail that gets high response and is cost-effective is not intuitive--at least, for most people. And getting a high response rate at the highest contribution to the bottom line is what great direct mail design is all about--it's the only thing that counts! Luckily, there is a sort of living laboratory surrounding us to give us help: the direct mail you see at your home or office every day from companies who mail millions of pieces. Direct mail from these folks is the result of constant testing. So if you see a mailing several times in a year--or even better, see it again and again over a few years--it means that mailing has beaten everything tested against it.



While you personally may not like them, Publisher's Clearing-house mailings look the way they do because that's what brings in the greatest number of responses for them. Subscription offers from magazines frequently come in 6" x 9" envelopes or on double postcards, not in #10 business envelopes, because that's what wins in tests. Business-to-business mailings for high-end products or services to upper management usually get past secretaries and mail rooms and get better response if they are more reserved, usually mailed in closed-face #10 business envelopes.

One of the reasons the elaborate 3-D packages you see in other books on creative direct mail can get high response in business-to-business mailings is that they get through screeners. And many times their creativity and memorability subtly demonstrate the superiority of the product or service being promoted. However, expensive packages that require hand processing and higher delivery costs tend to be appropriate for relatively small lists, for high-end products or services, or when it takes several months and lots of interaction to

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#### PC Ratings Test

MONIKA YAINIUS, NIKAI LLC

These formats were tested to find out which one pulled the highest response—a #10 window envelope that looks like "serious junk mail" versus a closed-faced businesslike offer (even more serious) versus an invitation-style look. The closed-faced envelope required a separate addressing step, so it cost more to produce and had to do quite a bit better than the other two packages to win. Results are proprietary (as they often are in direct mail), but you'll see the #10 window envelope in the mail.



## Tips and Thoughts From Some of Direct Mail's Top Designers

**“D**irect mail design is appreciated in a world of its own. You don't see this category in design competitions in *Communication Arts* or *Graphis*. It is often regarded as junk mail. Direct mail runs the gamut from basic or poor design through beautiful visual work. Direct mail is very challenging, and a designer has to understand it and be good at it to continue a successful career in it.”

— J Y L F E R R I S

Ferris & Company

get the sale. In chapter eleven, we'll find out when 3-D and oversized promotions do make direct mail sense. But for the rest of the time, we'll focus more on the everyday direct mail we see around us and why it works.

### Measurable Response

Simply put, direct mail is advertising mail designed to get a measurable response. And the measurable response tells you what works.

The mailer wants people to buy something, come into the business, send for more information, call, etc. How big or small the response is tells you if you sent the mail to the right people (i.e., rented the right lists, targeted the right customers). It tells you whether you made the right offer. It tells you if the way you made the offer—the copy and the design of your mailing—was appealing.

In order of importance, the success of a mailing depends on:

1. mailing lists
2. offer
3. copy and design.

But don't be misled by the order of importance. Copy and design can make a big difference in the success of a mailing. Design and copy changes can sometimes double or triple response. Doing direct mail successfully is one of those challenges where everything has got to be on target to get the greatest reward.