

The **Marketing Machine**[®]
Systematic Lead Generation & Predictable Sales

43 Ways
to Use
Direct Mail



43 WAYS TO USE DIRECT MAIL FOR PROFIT

Used in the right way, direct mail can be extremely effective in communicating with target groups and individuals. As a business owner, you need to know when direct mail will pay off for you.

Although I'm an enthusiastic direct mail copywriter, this is not a style manual. And it doesn't attempt to distinguish between good execution and "junk mail" . . . that is another subject altogether. Nor does the report attempt to list every single way direct mail can be used.

Rather, I have chosen 43 of the most common and productive ways direct mail has helped many businesses grow, and grow more profitably.

As you read it, I hope you'll be asking yourself,

"Which of these ideas will work in MY business?"

Somewhere in this list you may find a new way to solve a current business, marketing or sales problem. The key, of course, is to use direct mail selectively. I'm sure you remember the old saying about using "The right tool for the job." It certainly applies here.

And although they both fall into the category of direct mail, "hard copy" mail is one tool, and email is a different tool. Where it's important, I'll try to make it clear where I think it's important to use one or the other.

I hope that one or more of these 43 ways will trigger an idea you've been working on – one that will improve your profit picture this year. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me!

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1. GETTING SALES LEADS – Direct mail has been the cornerstone of lead generation – well, forever! Properly structured inquiries from prospective buyers represent **a person to talk to who has already shown an interest.** Both the quality (pre-qualification criteria) and quantity can be controlled and periodically adjusted (by staggering mailings & response volume) in a well-designed Direct Mail Lead Development program to yield a continuous flow of good leads. If the value of your product warrants it, a “real letter” delivered in an envelope or “dimensional package” can significantly out pull any email message you could ever send.
2. EXPANDING DISTRIBUTION - Acquiring new agents, distributors or dealers for your product or service is a natural use of direct mail. You can usually gain access to lists of organizations and/or individuals all the way down a distribution chain, using "compiled" lists (by business type, size, location, or industry association memberships), or "subscriber" lists (of specialty and trade magazines). CAUTION: If you’re planning a mailing using email addresses, you can assume the list you rent is likely to have a high percentage of undeliverables. These days people add and change email addresses frequently. Even the best email lists will have many out-of-date or incorrect listings.
3. BUILDING MORALE AND REDUCING EMPLOYEE TURNOVER – You surely have experienced how a hand-written thank-you note stands out in today’s digital world! Employees are equally delighted and inspired to receive a note acknowledging their importance to the team. The fact that you took the time to write it may be even more impactful than the words themselves.
4. WELCOMING CUSTOMERS - When you send a personal letter to new customers, thanking them for their business, you are showing a

genuine interest in their satisfaction with your product or service. This can go a long way toward cementing relationships, generating new orders and reducing cancellations. It's a sure way to greater profits.

5. **SELLING BY MAIL ORDER** - Sales of products or services directly by mail (as opposed to sales by a salesperson or over a store counter) has proven profitable to many companies . . . and disappointing to others. Selling by mail is strictly a "bottom-line" business. Each product or service sold has a profit margin which determines the maximum allowable promotional cost of sale – the amount you spend in direct mail or media advertising to acquire an individual customer. While it is true that most magazine publishers and general merchandise mail order companies actually acquire new first-time buyers at a "loss," they all have a tried-and-tested formula for making **continuous repeat sales** that turn these new customers into profitable ones. Don't confuse the terms "Direct Mail Advertising" and "Mail Order." Mail Order is a form of distribution where the customer buys directly. The term is still used even though today a customer may respond to an ad by calling a toll-free number and then receive the merchandise by UPS or other non-postal means.

6. **INCREASING BUSINESS FROM PRESENT CUSTOMERS** - Periodically sending inserts, catalogs, product updates, and re-order forms to your customers can make it easier for them to better plan their purchases. (Even an occasional letter simply saying "Thank you for being a customer" can enhance awareness and generate more sales.) Whether you send these marketing pieces via email or "snail mail," you can tailor them using your marketing database. Your timely message makes it easier for them to meet a need they may not even have anticipated!

By the way, the latest Direct Marketing Association report on response rates (for 2018) highlights the difference between direct mail (5% to prospect lists, 9% response to house lists) and email (1% response to both house and prospect lists).

7. ATTRACTING PEOPLE TO YOUR PLACE OF BUSINESS - Referred to in the advertising profession as "traffic building," this technique applies mostly to retailers. It can take the form of personal, friendly and interesting direct mail messages delivered via postcard, email or even text message, alerting people to a sale, a particular product, or a special event. These messages can bring back past customers, stimulate present patrons and attract new people into your business. The trick, of course, is to have not only the right list, but permission to mail (if it's electronic).

8. ATTRACTING NEW CHARGE ACCOUNT CUSTOMERS - If your business offers its own credit privileges to customers, you can maximize your profits from this important customer "convenience." Good credit customers, by and large, are likely to be your most profitable customers. They buy frequently because of the credit convenience. By profiling your current credit customers you can identify the most common characteristics, such as age, family status, geographic area of residence, etc. You can then use this information to select lists of prospects and, using a carefully-developed direct mail plan, acquire considerable numbers of additional qualified credit card prospects.

9. FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES AND ASSOCIATES - It is an unfortunate fact of life that the larger your organization grows, the more likely you are to become isolated from the realities of life in the "lower echelons." Properly structured surveys or questionnaires

directed to your employees can give you valuable information on products, services and customer needs. Today's email survey programs (some free) make it easy for your employees to respond and give you instant results.

10. PAVING THE WAY FOR A SALES FORCE – Build direct mail into your Sales Process. A forceful, well-planned campaign, one that is persistent and continuous, will create a field of prospective buyers who are aware of (and interested in) your products -- and ready to be sold. When you compare the relatively low cost of a mailing to the high cost of a sales call (currently estimated at something over \$500 for the average salesperson), it should be readily apparent that you cannot afford to ignore this technique.

11. COLLECTING PAST DUE ACCOUNTS - A series of diplomatic collection letters (ranging from polite reminders to stern requests) will bring and keep accounts up to date, leave the recipients in a friendly frame of mind and hold them as customers. How you actually structure a "collection series," when you use email vs. a letter, will depend on many factors, but its success requires consistent and disciplined usage.

12. SELLING TO EMPLOYEES, STOCKHOLDERS & VENDORS – If you haven't gone "paperless," enclosures with dividend, payroll and payment checks and other messages like financial statements can inform and sell to stockholders, employees and vendors on using your company's products and services and on suggesting their use to others. Each is an ideal audience with a vested interest in your activities, eager to hear of new products, services or plans. They will usually buy from you if they are made aware of your products.

13. REACTIVATING DORMANT CUSTOMER ACCOUNTS - A series of creatively designed direct mail messages to inactive customers is a proven technique for regenerating their "interest." This is more profitable than trying to capture new customers because inactive customers are already predisposed toward your product or services . . . and you can select the ones you want to direct your communication to. If your campaign doesn't increase sales, it may mean their needs have changed or they weren't satisfied with their previous experience, something you want to find out about quickly.

14. INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY OF OTHER ADVERTISING - You can create a synergistic or complementary effect by using direct mail to coordinate with and capitalize on other forms of advertising. This frequently works best when you actually refer to an ad that is about to run (or one that has already run) in a particular magazine, on TV, etc. Very often, both the direct mail and the other advertising media will show increased results when compared to their being used separately. It's also often a good idea to follow up a direct mail campaign with a personal telephone call. That can quadruple response!

15. BREAKING DOWN RESISTANCE - Direct mail, by nature of its personal and repeatable characteristics, can be used effectively to overcome resistance in the minds of prospective buyers. This is especially true with new product concepts. CAUTION: As with any use of direct mail, careful planning and thoughtful execution can make the difference. Direct mail that is viewed as "junk mail" can actually backfire on the sender. People who might otherwise be favorably impressed with your message can react negatively if they are bombarded with too many mailings that are of no interest to them.

16. EDUCATING THE SALES STAFF - In theory, all salespeople know how to sell. Some, of course, know how to sell more effectively (and consistently) than others. Everyone misses something once in a while. By communicating regularly and interestingly with your sales people, concentrating on one or two ideas at a time, you help them acquire a greater knowledge of their profession. Even the basics of good salesmanship (which all sales people know and apply daily, of course) are interesting when combined with working examples. Consider a short course delivered via email!
17. KEEPING CONTACT WITH CUSTOMERS BETWEEN SALES CALLS – - Does your Sales Process include appropriate contacts with prospects . . . direct mail, email and phone? Sending some information or simply keeping in touch with customers between calls helps build the relationship. Properly planned, this type of program can reduce the length (and cost) of sales calls and the overall Sales Cycle . . . at the same time it increases the order volume by preparing the customer in advance. Emails delivered by autoresponder programs can automate some of these important communications.
18. FOLLOW-UP TO A DEMONSTRATION OR SALES PRESENTATION - The time spent in front of a prospective customer is valuable sales time and following up with a letter to emphasize the important points can multiply the benefits. A professionally written "modular Letter Bank" of flexible sales letter texts can be invaluable to sales people in getting appointments, reinforcing credibility and following up.
19. BUILDING UP WEAK SALES TERRITORIES - Direct mail can be used to stimulate customers and prospects in a specific region whenever you choose. This "controllability" is a strategic advantage. Unlike print, radio and TV advertising, heard and seen by broad

audiences, you select specific companies and individuals with whom you wish to initiate a dialog.

20. DEVELOPING SALES TO SPECIFIC "TARGETED" GROUPS - With direct mail you can direct your selling messages specifically to persons you have selected as good prospects. You can tailor your message to conform to language the recipients will best understand, develop an offer that suits their particular needs, and relate to them in a way that stimulates them to action. Imagine how you would position your computer product for the President of a Fortune 500 company. Now, how would you position it for an engineer in that same company? It's not the same message! Does your marketing database allow you to send these versioned communications?
21. CROSS-SELLING OTHER ITEMS IN YOUR LINE - Mailing pieces, newsletters, package inserts or "hand-out" folders can educate customers on products and services other than those they are already buying. Even if your salesforce is expected to do this, you are faced with the factor of timing. The customer may not have been "ready" at the time of the last call or there may have been a change in the budget - or even personnel! Don't overlook the tremendous potential of this idea. It has been known to double volume in a territory! Be sure to include personal messages whenever possible.
22. BUILDING LISTS OF CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS - You can use direct mail very effectively to obtain names from rented lists, distributors, salespeople, clerks, stockholders, and many others who have access to the names of special group members; referrals and recommendations of friends and customers; from mail surveys, questionnaires, etc.

23. **OBTAINING DONATIONS AND RAISING FUNDS** - Direct mail advertising offers an organization an opportunity to solicit funds from specific groups of people. You can find persons who have an affinity with a specific purpose or who have donated to several worthy causes. Many lists of such like-minded donors and individuals are available for exchange or on a rental basis. Current and previous donors are the best prospects. (As email scams multiply, a hard-copy letter arriving in an envelope conveys a sense of security/reality to the recipient.)
24. **ACKNOWLEDGING EVENTS** - Marriages, births, birthdays, promotions and graduations are among the many events which are important to nearly everybody. An alert firm can capitalize on them as an opportunity to promote good-will with their contacts and customers. Yes, we're familiar with our insurance agent or chiropractor sending a birthday card – and the reason they do it is because it works!
25. **CORRECTING MAIL LISTS** - Keeping a database or mailing list up to date has become a major challenge in our modern and highly mobile society. Direct mail can be effectively used to keep your lists accurate by periodically questioning customers about their address or by asking if there are other people who should be receiving your material. Many firms even ask prospects if they want to receive future mailings, and how often. This also serves as a "qualifier" of their interest.
26. **PROMOTING TO YOUR "INFLUENCE" MARKETS** - Direct mail is an excellent medium for getting information about your product or service to professionals, counselors, and institutions that advise or

prescribe to your market. The lists of such persons (and institutional personnel) are legion and available to rent. Results can be extremely rewarding, due to the built-in "multiplier" this type of mailing promotes. Each response has the potential of creating several customers.

27. EDUCATING RETAILERS - Clerks often represent the narrow "neck" or end point of the sales funnel in your retail selling process. If they know the features and benefits and believe in a product and the company behind it, their influence is a powerful aid to sales. Specially directed mail that is understanding, friendly, helpful and stimulating will increase their knowledge, win product loyalty and enlist their cooperation. The result will be a rising sales curve.

28. ANNOUNCING CHANGES - Whether you change a product, a service procedure, an address or telephone number, it affords you an excellent opportunity to communicate creatively with your customers and prospects. A letter and/or printed announcement sent through the mail has a strong personal appeal that can register your message better than any other form of advertising. Too often companies take their internal changes for granted, missing the chance to communicate with important audiences.

29. RESEARCH - Surveys, whether via email or hard copy, uncover facts, opinions and suggestions for improving products, services and images. Properly planned direct advertising research can have a beneficial effect on your marketing effort . . . often resulting in drastic increases in profit! Using direct mail for research is an inexpensive way to learn where your profitable sales are coming from so that you can focus efforts on those specific activities which lead to more of the right kind of customers.

30. DISTRIBUTING SAMPLES - Many products lend themselves to trial usage or "sampling" by prospective users. If you have such a product suitable for mailing you have an excellent opportunity to help prospects convince themselves of its merits.
31. PROTECTING PATENTS OR SPECIAL PROCESSES - Claiming ownership of patents, special techniques or processes by direct mail leaves no question in the minds of customers and prospects as to ownership and the benefits they will derive from continuing to do business with you. At the same time it gives you greater protection from possible infringement.
32. INQUIRY FOLLOW-UP - Direct mail and email are ideal ways to answer inquiries that have resulted from advertisements, publicity or even personal recommendations. It is an opportunity to send a longer, more detailed message to those who have demonstrated some interest in your offering. A properly devised reply device, built into your website or mailing package, can provide you with direct sales or leads which are "qualified" by their interest. You can even establish a direct "chat" mechanism on a website for instantaneous inquiry follow up.
33. REFERRING INQUIRIES - Today's digital mapping programs make it easy to refer inquiries to local distributors or retailers. Referral affords a double opportunity in that you can expand on your selling points while directing people to the point of purchase. Where it is feasible, a copy of the message should go to the appropriate dealer for personal follow-up.

34. **ANNOUNCING & PROMOTING SPECIAL EVENTS** - A special "week" or "day" devoted to the greater use of a product, an anniversary, a new product line launched by a dealer, special "openings" and scores of other events - can all be promoted effectively by direct mail to increase sales. We know of a bakery that sends out a text message to announce that today's afternoon chocolate chip cookies are out of the oven!
35. **REMINDERS** - Direct mail advertising is an excellent means for keeping your business or product in front of customers and prospects. Calendars, note pads, blotters and other novelties will go a long way towards helping them "keep you in mind." Can you think of a useful item that would be appropriate to advertise your products or services?
36. **TESTING NEW MARKETS** - Mailing lists available for rental include consumers according to their interests, life situation, job and buying habits and even distributors classified by the customers they serve. Through direct mail you can "test" the profitability resulting from efforts directed toward new markets before you commit to larger scale and expensive distribution.
37. **PROGRESSIVE SELLING** - A series of several mailings can be designed to present a complicated overall sales message in stages. Each mailing should be carefully planned to stress one or more points in logical sequence and will progressively educate your prospective customer on the reasons why he or she should buy your product or service. By dividing your message into parts you make it easier to read, understand and retain. In fact, most major purchases **MUST** go through this step-by-step process. Sometimes the person to whom the message is directed changes in mid-

stream. Again, a well-thought-out direct response campaign can accommodate these necessary adjustments.

38. **SECURING INFORMATION FROM DEALERS** - Letters, printed messages, questionnaires or inserts in a bulletin or house magazine that promotes involvement by inviting response will bring back helpful data from the individuals who actually sell your product or service. A newsletter, house magazine or bulletin can become a forum for presenting success stories and sharing case histories that other recipients have contributed.

39. **BUILDING GOOD WILL** - The possibilities of building good will and solidifying friendships through direct mail are unlimited. It's like a handshake through the mail to cement business relationships and help hold onto your customers.

40. **CREATING DEMAND & BUILDING YOUR COMPANY BRAND** - Direct mail, used repeatedly, can stimulate the demand for your product and remind the customers to ask for it by name. Discount coupons, booklet offers and satisfaction guarantees can boost response even more.

41. **DEALER AIDS** - Assisting your dealers with direct mail (perhaps on a split-cost basis) and "point-of-purchase" sales aids will sell your product or service faster and step up inventory turnover. A good promotion will win hearty cooperation. Use direct mail to sell the dealer on the program and ways to capitalize on results for maximum profit.

42. BRING BUYERS TO PLANT OR SHOWROOM - Personal invitations through letter or printed announcements will bring prospective customers to your showroom or factory where you are infinitely better prepared to close the sale or solidify the relationship.
43. DEVELOPING SALES IN OUTLYING TERRITORIES - Many communities are too small to visit regularly or are even unapproachable because of distance, bad transportation schedules or poor roads. An alert company will generate sales and sales leads direct by mail until volume makes it feasible to invest a salesperson's time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...



Virginia Nicols is a Direct Marketing Copywriter with numerous awards to her credit. Years of business experience lend credence to her business-to-business writing, particularly when it comes to writing to and for executives. She especially enjoys the challenge of presenting the case for high-ticket, high-tech products and services.

If you have a direct mail project in mind, consider contacting Virginia directly at her website, <http://VirginiaNicols.com>.

Note: Many of these 43 Ways make reference to series of mailings, different levels of recipients, etc. If you would like more in-depth information about how we identify and plan these communication sequences for professional services businesses, you may find our new book series of interest. Check out the [Business Marketing Series](#).