

A Special Report: 10 Tips for Making the Most of Your Testing Program

by Automatic-Mail.com

One of the reasons direct mail is such a robust marketing medium is that it gives you the ability to test and make adjustments to increase your return on investment. While there is a lot of creativity that goes into writing and designing mail, testing should be a careful and disciplined process.

Here are a few ideas to assure that you are testing properly and reaping the rewards of more effective and efficient direct mail.

1. **Always be testing.** Every time you mail, you should have in mind something that you want to learn. Whether it's testing a new list, trying a variation on an offer, or mailing an all-new direct mail package, you need to decide what each mailing will teach you. Your direct mail is a laboratory for business insights.
2. **Test one item at a time.** It may be tempting to test a variety of things in every mailing. However, this makes it impossible to know what element is responsible for changing your results. If you use a new envelope at the same time you mail to a new list, which change will affect your results? By testing only one change per mailing, you can immediately see what causes your positive or negative results.
3. **Test against your "control."** Your control is the direct mail piece that has proven it to be a winner. Once you have a winner, you can test new direct mail pieces against it. It works like a contest, with the old and new competing against each other. If your control wins, you know you should continue mailing it. If the new piece wins, you know you might have a new control and should consider mailing the new piece instead.
4. **Retest "winning" direct mail.** Whenever you have a new direct mail piece that outperforms a standing control, it's important to retest to make sure the results hold up. This is most important when the results between the old and new piece are close or if you're not confident about the statistical validity of your test. If a second test shows similar results, you can be far more certain that you have a new control.
5. **Never shelve direct mail that works.** It's understandable that you could be tired of your current direct mail piece and you want to try something new. But you should never make a change in what you're mailing until you find something that works better. Some direct mail pieces can work year after year. Others need to be refreshed from time to time. The response numbers and sales figures should be your guide.

6. **Watch what others are mailing.** You can learn a lot about what works and what doesn't by paying attention to the mail of your competitors. You can even learn a few tricks from mailers in totally different industries. But use this only as an idea source, not as a means of making decisions about what to mail. Other businesses may not be as smart about testing as you are. If you see a competitor mailing something over and over, you should always test the idea before adopting it.
7. **Test something "out of the box."** Most of your testing will be about making small changes to your mailings. But now and then, you should consider trying something completely new. If you're using a postcard, try a big self-mailer. If you're using a self-mailer, try a complete direct mail package or even a dimensional mailing. How about a different offer? Or a radically different copy approach? Sometimes an idea you think won't work ends up being the very idea that works best.
8. **Track your results.** You should try to keep a detailed report for each mailing. This should include the number of pieces you mail, your total number of responses, actual sales data, your costs, the net dollar return, and every other piece of data that you will need. Not only will this show you how well your mailing performs, over time this data will become a gold mine of marketing information.
9. **Keep testing.** Trying out new ideas and tracking results is part of direct mail. It's an ongoing process. Even when you have a solid mailer that has been working for a while, it's vital to consider new formats, new offers, and new creative approaches that might improve your results. Every direct mail piece, no matter how successful, will eventually fatigue. If you don't have testing results to fall back on to find a new mailer, you could face an expensive and prolonged testing period where you are struggling to discover what works.
10. **Use your results to make decisions.** There will always be a difference of opinion on creative issues such as how your envelope should look, how long your letter should be, or whether it's better to use cards or self-mailers. With good testing, these debates can be resolved by simply looking at the numbers. This is your customers' way of telling you what they like and what they respond to. What *they* think about your direct mail is always more important than what *you* think

About Automatic Mail Service, Inc.

Your 360° Direct Marketing Success

We drive sales! Since 1971, Automatic Mail has served its customers with A+ service:

- Ensuring your success
- Freeing you to focus on your business
- Making your marketing efforts more effective and your direct dollars go further

Automatic Automated Marketing integrates your direct print marketing and lead generation with your Website, email marketing, and a master customer data management system. Increases response, ROI, your bottom line.

Keeping up with your clients' needs is overwhelming. Managing your sales pipeline is a challenge.

Automatic Automated Marketing delivers sophisticated, easy-to-use marketing integration tools.

- Improve ROI of direct mail
- Track who is doing what with your print mail, emails, Website.
- Accurately target print, broadcast, online messages.
- Nurture leads and deliver the information they want.
- Cross-sell & up-sell more effectively.
- Manage your clients and your prospects easily, successfully.

Automatic Automated Marketing delivers sales ready leads plus the tools to manage them throughout the entire customer lifecycle.

Feedback

If you have any feedback or any questions, please email or call Automatic. No matter is too small.

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Call 1-800-474-9109