



DIRECT MAIL INFLUENCE STUDY

## HOW DO CONSUMERS RESPOND TO DIRECT MAIL IN THE DIGITAL AGE?



# IN A WORLD DOMINATED BY DIGITAL MEDIA, IS DIRECT MAIL A RELIC?

## IS IT RELEVANT TO CONSUMERS?

## IS IT EFFECTIVE?

Our research reveals that not only does direct mail play a unique role in the daily lives of consumers, it's also a critical element of a successful marketing campaign.

In an extensive survey, we asked participants questions about how frequently they read direct mail, how they engage with it, and how they respond to it. The findings demonstrate how the tactile and tangible nature of print materials affect the way consumers interact with direct mail. With results analyzed by Dr. Martin Block, Professor Emeritus in the Integrated Marketing Communications program at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Communications, this report examines the distinctive and complementary qualities that make direct mail uniquely effective in a time when digital marketing is everywhere.

Amidst the proliferation of online ads and promotions, this study uncovers the specific benefits that make direct mail an essential and effective element of a multichannel marketing campaign. The results underscore the enduring power of mailed print advertisements in influencing consumer perceptions and decisions, providing valuable insights for marketers seeking to optimize their advertising strategies.

Our report builds upon the **2019 study by Temple University's Center for Neural Decision Making<sup>1</sup>** which found that multichannel marketing campaigns incorporating print media are more likely to succeed. The findings support the idea that having a physical component like a printed ad in marketing campaigns is crucial for better memory recall and engagement. The 2019 study complements the team's 2015 study, which that revealed that printed ads generated a greater neural response than digital ads, signaling a greater intent to purchase.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fox School of Business, "Fox School Researchers: Consumers More Likely to Recall Printed Ads Than Digital Ones," April 3, 2017

<sup>2</sup> USPS, Enhancing the Value of Mail: Human Response, 2015

What does all this mean for marketers? For those aiming for ads that stick in people's minds, physical ads have more psychological influence. Essentially, use digital ads if you want quick attention and delivery of a message; for a strong emotional impact and lasting impression, use print. Each format meets a different but necessary objective for marketers.



The concurrent validity demonstrated across separate studies conducted by RRD and the USPS supports the continued need for media plans to include direct mail messages to optimize consumer engagement. What gives print ads their edge, according to the studies, is they are more effective at leaving a lasting impression”

Dr. Martin Block, Professor Emeritus, Medill's Integrated Marketing Communications program, Northwestern University



## TEMPLE UNIVERSITY / USPS® DIRECT MAIL STUDY FINDINGS

- Print ads leave a longer-lasting impression than digital ones, regardless of the viewer's age
- Participants spent more time with and remembered print ads better than digital ads
- Print ads evoke stronger emotions and have a longer-lasting impact
- Brain activity shows that people subconsciously value and desire products advertised in print
- Print ads excel for getting and remembering information; digital ads are better at grabbing focused attention<sup>3 4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> USPS, Is Direct Mail Advertising Effective? A Research Study, 2019

<sup>4</sup> USPS, Enhancing the Value of Mail: Human Response, 2015



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# 01

## DIRECT MAIL ENGAGEMENT IS A DELIBERATE HABIT

### Delivering intentional mail rituals

In an era dominated by the passive consumption of digital communications, the act of engaging with physical mail has become a distinctive habit for consumers. As businesses continue to leverage the enduring appeal of direct mail, understanding and appreciating these routines is crucial for creating impactful and meaningful interactions with their target audience.

### INTEGRATED INTO DAILY ROUTINES

**49%** consider direct mail a part of their shopping routine (especially parents, **55%**)

**56%** use it to plan their weekly grocery shopping, with parents leading at **62%**

### REGULAR ENGAGEMENT

**72%** regularly read or look at ads in the mail, with Gen X leading at **78%**

**82%** of direct mail readers look at advertisements at least once each week

### PLANNED ATTENTION

**51%** start noticing and collecting direct mail when in the market to make a purchase or schedule a service, rising to **60%** among parents

**54%** consider taking time to read the mail a planned part of their daily routine; **57%** for parents and **58%** for Hispanic consumers

# 01

## DIRECT MAIL ENGAGEMENT IS A DELIBERATE HABIT

### EVENING MAIL CHECK

This simple act of retrieving the mail is a daily ritual. People routinely spend time sorting through the mail, setting aside specific pieces for further attention.

### HOME INSPIRATION

Direct mail, particularly in the form of home decor and home improvement catalogs and brochures, serves as a source of inspiration for those looking to enhance their living spaces.

### COUPON CLIPPING AND SAVINGS

Clipping and organizing coupons received in the mail has become a habitual and financially savvy practice for those looking to make the most of available discounts.

### SHARING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The impact of direct mail is often extended as recipients routinely pass along mail to family and friends.



# 02

## PEOPLE ROUTINELY SPEND TIME WITH DIRECT MAIL

### Delivering elevated mail moments

From morning rituals with coffee to weekend reading sessions, people routinely allocate time for engaging with direct mail. With its tangible presence and personalized touch, direct mail has carved out a unique space in the daily lives of those who appreciate the deliberate, unhurried nature of interacting with printed material.

### ENGAGEMENT DURATION

1.6  
minutes

for a direct mail ad

1.1  
minutes

for a digital ad

### SUSTAINED INTEREST

48%

spend at least one minute or  
more reading a direct mail ad

55%

pay more attention to direct mail ads  
compared with 39% for digital ads

### DESIGNATED SPACE

36%

have a specific place in the house where they  
save print ads of interest



## 02 PEOPLE ROUTINELY SPEND TIME WITH DIRECT MAIL

### ANTICIPATION AND SURPRISE

Unlike the instantaneous nature of digital messages, the delivery of physical mail is often anticipated by readers, leading to a sense of surprise and curiosity upon its arrival. This anticipation contributes to the intentional act of setting aside time to explore the contents of the mail.

### COFFEE AND COUPONS

For many people, the morning routine involves a cup of coffee and a leisurely browse through direct mail pieces as a relaxing and enjoyable start to their day.

### WEEKEND READING

Weekends offer people more leisurely moments. Whether it's flipping through a magazine or exploring promotional offers, people allocate time during the weekends to engage with the content delivered to their mailbox.





## 03 PEOPLE FEEL GOOD ABOUT DIRECT MAIL

### Delivering positive vibes

Direct mail is a unique and enduring channel that consistently elicits positive emotions. The tangible nature of direct mail, coupled with its personalized touch, has the power to make people feel good about the messages they receive. They experience positive emotions when engaging with direct mail, highlighting the factors that contribute to the feel-good factor associated with this traditional form of communication.

### ENGAGEMENT AND ENJOYMENT THROUGH REGULARITY

**49%** look forward to mail from advertisers that deliver on a planned frequency

**54%** find reading through mailed advertising enjoyable, rising to **66%** among millennial parents

### DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE

**54%** say it's relaxing, pleasurable to look through, especially parents (**58%**)

### GENUINE CONNECTION

**47%** believe direct mail gives the impression that the advertiser is more genuine

**54%** of millennials and **61%** of millennial parents find ads in the mail more personal than digital ads

# 03

## PEOPLE FEEL GOOD ABOUT DIRECT MAIL

### TACTILE PLEASURE AND TANGIBILITY

The tactile sensation of holding a well-designed postcard or flipping the pages of a glossy mailer enhances the overall sensory experience.

### PERSONALIZATION AND RELEVANCE

Direct mail, when tailored to individual preferences and interests, generates a sense of personal, positive connection, because people feel acknowledged and valued by the sender.

### VISUAL APPEAL AND CREATIVITY

From aesthetically pleasing graphics to innovative packaging, the creativity displayed in well-designed direct mail can contribute to a positive emotional response.



# 04

## PEOPLE TRUST DIRECT MAIL

### Delivering a reliable reputation

Direct mail stands out as a medium that continues to instill a sense of trust among recipients. The tangible nature, personalization, and authenticity of direct mail contribute to its enduring credibility.

#### RESEARCH AND PLANNING

**58%** find direct mail trustworthy, rising to **67%** in terms of privacy concerns

**50%** use direct mail ads to research and plan purchases because they provide more information

**64%** say direct mail is easy to use to compare products, services, or stores

#### PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND TANGIBILITY

People tend to trust something they can hold in their hands, and the physical nature of direct mail adds a layer of authenticity that contributes to its overall credibility.

#### PERSONALIZATION AND RELEVANCE

The inclusion of a recipient's name, personalized content, and targeted offers enhances the relevance of the communication, fostering a sense of trust.

#### ASSOCIATION WITH LEGITIMATE BUSINESSES

The association of direct mail with reputable and legitimate companies adds a layer of trust to the medium.





# 05

## DIRECT MAIL DRIVES PURCHASES

### Delivering positive persuasion

Direct mail is a powerful influencer in shaping consumers' shopping behaviors, guiding decisions on where to shop, and what to buy. It leaves a lasting impact on consumer choices, from steering them toward specific businesses to influencing their purchasing decisions.

### RESEARCH AND PLANNING

**75%** agree that direct mail makes them aware of a product  
Almost **50%** prefer direct mail for learning about products and services

### INFLUENCE ON PURCHASES

**60%** say direct mail is easy to remember when ready to make a purchase, compared with **44%** for digital ads

**47%** are spurred to make a purchase, and **36%** make impulse purchases based on direct mail



My assessment and conclusion of the study finds that consumers who use print ads are happy, confident, and consistent. Why is this significant? Years of conducting and reviewing this type of research shows a predisposition for happier people to shop and spend more."

Dr. Martin Block, Professor Emeritus, Medill's Integrated Marketing Communications program, Northwestern University

# 05

## DIRECT MAIL DRIVES PURCHASES

### TARGETED PROMOTIONS AND DISCOUNTS

Retail stores, restaurants, and local businesses leverage direct mail to communicate exclusive offers, personalized discounts, and time-limited promotions. This motivates consumers to choose specific stores over others, driving foot traffic and influencing shopping decisions.

### LOCAL STORE AWARENESS

Community-specific mailers highlight nearby stores. This local emphasis encourages consumers to explore local retailers, fostering a sense of community engagement and influencing where consumers shop.

### SEASONAL AND TIMELY OFFERS

Direct mail campaigns are often timed to coincide with seasons, holidays, or special events. The timely nature of these mailers prompts consumers to consider specific stores when making purchases related to specific occasions or seasonal needs.

### BUILDING BRAND LOYALTY

Regular communication through personalized direct mail establishes a connection between the consumer and the brand. This relationship, built over time, influences consumers to prioritize certain brands when deciding where to shop and what products to buy, fostering a sense of loyalty.



## Direct mail occupies a singular space in consumer advertising

In the ever-evolving landscape of marketing, direct mail remains an essential and powerful tool for engaging and influencing consumers. Contrary to the belief that it is a relic of the past, our findings reveal that direct mail is a deliberate and pleasurable habit for a significant portion of the population. Although digital strategies often take center stage, direct mail serves as a potent and intentional tool for businesses aiming to forge connections with their target audience.

Furthermore, direct mail is a strategic and effective component of a comprehensive marketing plan. Marketers seeking ways to connect with and engage their target audience should consider the unique advantages offered by this traditional yet enduring medium—from sustained engagement to the establishment of trust.

**Ready to harness the continued power of direct mail?  
Contact us.**

### ABOUT THE STUDY

The RRD *Direct Mail Influence Study*, conducted in November 2023, involved 1,815 respondents. The participants, all at least 18 years of age and residing in the contiguous United States, were carefully selected through an online consumer research panel. All data based on consumers who engage with both direct mail and digital advertising. The study was conducted in partnership with Prosper Insights & Analytics. Results were analyzed by Dr. Martin Block, Professor Emeritus in the Integrated Marketing Communications program at Northwestern University's Medill School.

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