

Direct mail on a budget

21 Ideas to lower your marketing printing expenses

Direct mailings to targeted households are still an effective method of promotion. If you're looking to reduce your overall marketing expenses, cutting paper and printing costs is an excellent place to start. One advantage of a tight economy is that some businesses are more willing to negotiate on price. Don't be afraid to ask for a discount if you have a sizeable order or multiple projects. Combine a few of these tips, and you'll be amazed at how much money you can save on your marketing campaigns.

1. RETHINK FOUR-COLOR DESIGN.

Two-color design can be just as appealing as four-colors when it includes tints and shades of those colors, and for about half the cost. If you opt for full-color design, go with four- or six-color printing rather than three or five.

2. AVOID BLEEDS. Bleeds are blocks of color that extend to the edge of the page. It's not possible to actually print to the edge of the sheet, so the work has to be printed on oversize stock then cut to size. More paper, more labor, more money.

3. AVOID USING SPOT COLORS WITH CMYK. Adding a fifth color (or more) with CMYK requires two print runs and adds significant expense.

4. FORGO FOUR-COLOR ENVELOPES. The envelope is a throw-away piece. You might do just as well with simple graphics and teaser copy to lure readers inside.

5. PREPARE YOUR PRINTING JOB. Most printing jobs are submitted electronically, which saves typesetting and other costs, but shifts the responsibility of preparation to you. Be sure to include: a page containing a list of the submitted files by name and the program in which they were

created; a PDF of the entire design; all the original files of the copy and art; color models and PMS ink numbers; all printing instructions; contact information for you and/or your designer in case the printer has questions.

6. DESIGN FOR STANDARD SIZES.

For mailings, that's 8.5x11-inch sheets or derivatives of that size: 5.5x8.5 and 11x17 inches. Envelopes are pre-made for these sizes, too. The odder the size, the higher the costs.

7. AVOID DATING MATERIALS. You may be able to use the leftovers later on.

8. DESIGN FOR AUTOMATION.

The less a piece has to be handled, the less expensive it is to mail. Make sure the piece meets automation requirements by creating a mock-up of the entire piece, envelope and all, get approval in writing, with a signature, from the post office or your mailing service.

9. PROOFREAD CAREFULLY. It's easy to overlook small things, so get more than one set of eyes to proofread the piece.

10. DESIGN A MULTI-DATE PROMOTIONAL MAILING. Print all the pieces in one run on the same paper and in the same ink colors. After the first mailing, you could have the next batch over-printed with new info in black ink and still save money.

11. COLLECT BIDS ON EACH JOB. Even if you have a favorite printer, you'll always know if his prices are competitive. There could also be circumstances when one printer can give you a better deal than another.

12. ASK WHAT OUTPUT SIZES WORK BEST. The printer might have suggestions that will save you money without denigrating the design.

13. PLAN FOR PRODUCTION TIME. Avoid rush charges.

14. MAKE SURE THE SHOE FITS.

When you make your mock-up for the post office, make sure the contents fit into the envelope, that the right information appears in the outer window, and that the postal permit has the correct information.

15. KNOW THE PRESSES. Find out the differences in print quality and costs for the various processes, including open-web, heat-set web, jet offset, sheet-fed and flexographic printing. A good printer will be willing to work with you to experiment with screens, halftones, bleeds—design elements that will yield the best results from the equipment.

16. PRINT ONLY WHAT YOU NEED. Order the amount you actually need, regardless of volume discount.

Discounts don't save you anything if you're left with materials you can't use.

17. CLEAN UP YOUR MAILING LISTS REGULARLY. This saves materials and postage.

18. CHECK PAPER QUALITY. The look and feel of paper has an effect on the perceived value of the product. Get samples and prices from your printer.

19. ASK YOUR PRINTER ABOUT HOUSE SHEETS. Papers of various finishes, weights and grades that the printer keeps in stock versus special orders.

20. DO THE TWO-STEP. Instead of mailing brochures, mail a lead-generating piece that prompts interested prospects to call.

21. ASK ABOUT CLOSEOUTS AND ENDS. If you have a onetime project that doesn't require a specific paper, ask your printer what paper is available on the spot at a discount. ■

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