



7 Steps to a Better Outer Envelope

By Hugh Chewning

INTRODUCTION

Your outer mailing envelope (OME) has only two purposes: 1) to carry its contents to the recipient and 2) to get opened.

I like to associate good direct mail with successful door-to-door salespeople. And your outer envelope is you knocking on the door. And it's where you make your first impression.

Like the door-to-door salesperson, you have only a brief moment to get your foot in the door. Eye-study research reveals that recipients spend no more than **7 seconds** deciding whether to open your envelope.

Think about it. Of all the long hours and hard work you've put into your mailing, it all comes down to 7 seconds. In this brief time, recipients decide to open your letter or trash it. You can go from hero to goat in 7 seconds.

ELEMENTS OF THE ENVELOPE

Fortunately, you have a set of 5 tools to make a successful outer envelope. They are the envelope's:

1. Address piece (label, window, personalization)
2. Teaser
3. Return address
4. Postage type
5. Color and stock of paper, and the graphics

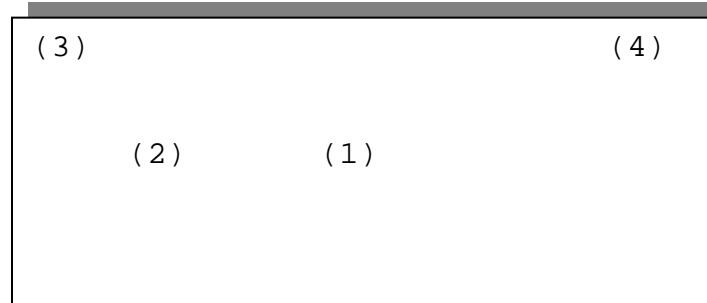
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According to Professor Siegfried Vogels' *Eye Flow Studies Provide Clues for Improving Your Direct Mail* (see "How to Use Graphic Devices to Boost Direct Mail Response Rates" and "Understanding How People Read Your Direct Mail" in the CDM Resource Center), here's how people look at an outer envelope.



First, their eye goes to the mailing address (1) and then to the left of the address (2). From there, the eye moves to the return address (3) and then to the postage (4). The package's color and paper stock are typically the last things noticed.

7 POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN DESIGNING YOUR NEXT OUTER ENVELOPE:

1. The **mailing address** is the first place people look. They like to see their name, so get it right!
2. When you use a **teaser**, Vogel's study says it belongs to the *left* of the mailing address. But if you don't have a good teaser, don't force one. Not having a teaser can actually tease. If you have a FREE offer, go ahead and shout it, but don't feel that a teaser is required.

Use your choice of typestyles to make the teaser more effective. Sometimes big, bold type is best. Other times, a "handwritten" font works better. But recognize that you have choices, and make your choice based upon the look and feel of the entire mailing package.

3. Vogel's study shows that a **return address** on the outer envelope *is* an important factor when people are deciding whether to open your mailing. You can use a "handwritten" or Courier type for a personal look. Or you can print the return address in a formal type along with the company logo. It all depends on the look and feel of your *entire* package. For acquisition mailings—especially when you're repeatedly re-mailing the same people—you may want to test using the return address *without* the company's

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name. But when mailing to repeat customers, showing the company name will typically add credibility to the mailing. (If it doesn't, you have a problem.)

4. Your choice of **postage** is not a decision left to chance. When using First-Class postage, multiple stamps typically beat a commemorative stamp. A commemorative stamp will beat a regular stamp. And a stamp will beat postage-meter indicia, which will regularly beat preprinted indicia.

Even if you have to overpay postage by a penny or two—when the denomination of available stamps doesn't exactly meet the actual postage cost—live stamps typically more than pay for themselves.

However, like your teaser and return address, make sure your choice of postage type fits the image of the entire package. For example, live stamps are the most personal—especially multiple stamps—while preprinted indicia are the most impersonal. Yet, if you have official-looking outer envelopes, preprinted indicia fit the image far better than do stamps. *You have choices, so use them to your advantage.*

A final note on postage: First-Class postage adds perceived value to the correspondence. When using live stamps, pick stamps with colors that contrast with the envelope. And anytime you are mailing First Class, make sure the recipient knows you're investing extra money to deliver your message. Don't keep it a secret. In big, bold letters imprint:

FIRST-CLASS POSTAGE

Don't let there be any doubt. You consider your recipients special and you're investing extra money to deliver your message to them.

5. **Stock and Color** may be two of the most over-tested components of a direct mail package. Both color and stock do help convey the overall image of your package. For example, for "official" packages, I like to use a brown kraft stock. When I'm using a teaser to promote a free offer, I like yellow or white stock because of its contrast with the type. Overall, I try to stay away from cool colors when selecting paper stock.
6. **Always test new outer envelopes** Outer envelope tests are the easiest and most cost-effective way to keep a control fresh.
7. And perhaps most important, the outer envelope is **only one part of the total package**—not an independent component. You wouldn't use an official-looking envelope with a handwritten letter inside. Likewise, you wouldn't use a live stamp with most official letters. All the envelope's

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components must work together, and the envelope must work with the entire package.

Follow these guidelines when designing your next outer envelope and you'll have a better chance of getting the envelope opened and your message read. And this can mean only one thing—higher sales.

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