



The Return Envelope

7 Points to Remember

By Hugh Chewning

INTRODUCTION

The return envelope is the Rodney Dangerfield of the direct mail package—it probably gets less respect than any other component of the mailing package. It's something we almost take for granted.

Yet anytime we provide for a mail-back response, our success depends upon the recipient's willingness to put his or her response in the return envelope.

Here are 7 thoughts to consider when designing your next mailing's return envelope. You probably have your own ideas, so drop me an e-mail so I can add your ideas to the list.

7 POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Include one. Don't rely on a reply card. Privacy is one reason people like to use direct mail and a return envelope gives them both privacy and security. Even if you're featuring an 800 number or Web site for the return, give the recipient the added option of a return envelope.
2. Consider the envelope's color and stock. Remember, this is an action device. Pale-blue envelopes don't motivate action. Use warm, action colors—or a brown-kraft stock which signifies security to many people.
3. When possible, personalize the envelope's return address.
4. Test and retest the type of postage – live stamps, BRE, no postage. Return envelopes without prepaid postage have become the norm. However what works today for one offer—or one list segment—might

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not be the most profitable choice for future mailings. Test and retest regularly. But when you do use “live” stamps, test multiple stamps.

5. When using a BRE, request the donor to add a stamp. Nonprofits can save tens of thousands of dollars every year simply by adding a “handwritten” message asking the donor to add a stamp to the BRE.
6. When using a BRE, remember it’s not a “postage-paid” envelope. It’s “postage-free.”
7. Restate action steps on the back of the return envelope. For example:

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Fill-in your Savings Certificate
2. Fold and put your completed Certificate into this postage-free envelope
3. MAIL TODAY

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Although the suggestions here are not “make or break” ideas, they can make a difference in your campaign results. And as direct response professionals, it’s our job to “milk” every response from our mailing – or we should consider a new profession.

And when you test what postage, if any, to affix on the return envelope, breakout individual segments of your mailing list. High-dollar segments may justify the added expense of applying postage, whereas lower-dollar level customers may not. It’s something you need to test and retest.

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