I admit, I am a direct mail junkie. My grandfather started a direct mail firm in 1949 and I spent my summers running machines, sorting for Bulk Rate (before they started calling it Standard Mail), and going door-to-door in downtown Los Angeles with company brochures in hand.
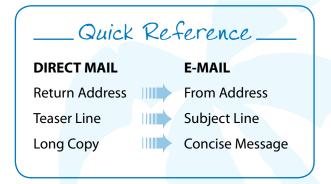
Through the years, I learned everything I could about how to be successful with direct mail. And then along came e-mail, the supposed successor and conqueror of direct mail. It never happened. Nor do I think it will. But I have come to realize that e-mail could be a great complement to direct mail. In fact, this type of integrated marketing has turned out to increase ROI dramatically. So as the marketing landscape changes, so must we all. This guide will show you how to use direct mail principals to create successful e-mail campaigns, hopefully used in combination with plain old direct mail. If you want to learn the *design specifics* of creating an e-mail marketing message (no HTML needed), see our article on How to use Direct Mail Creative for your E-mail Campaign.

What are you trying to accomplish?

Before you design anything, this is the first question a direct mailer always asks. Are you trying to get orders, vs. prospects? Are you driving people to a retail outlet or building brand awareness? These same questions should be posed with an e-mail campaign but understand that e-mail can be used to either deliver a strong standalone message or merely act as a compliment to your direct mail, depending on your offer. Easy to understand offers, such as getting a free appetizer at a great new restaurant, should be mimicked in the e-mail, but more complex selling propositions should be left for the direct mail portion of the job or as part of a well-designed website. In these cases, it is up to the e-mail to draw interest and then refer the user to either the coming direct mail piece, or to an existing website.

General "look and feel"

Direct mail is designed a certain way to showcase a company's image, create certain feelings and above all, to deliver a message. Things are no different with e-mail, except that you have less space to make your same case and small text is difficult to read on a computer screen. Figure out the most important part of your message and make this the crux of your e-mail. If it is to "come to an event", "eat at our restaurant", or a "special on tires", this should be foremost in your message. Most importantly, your e-mail should look like your direct mailer in terms of colors and graphics. That way, they play off each other. Repetition is important in any marketing message, and by making the e-mail and direct mail similar in terms of "look and feel", the recipient is likely to link them together in his mind.

___ Quick Reference ___

DIRECT MAIL		E-MAIL
Return Address	▷	From Address
Teaser Line	▷	Subject Line
Long Copy	▷	Concise Message

The Subject Line

The most important part of any e-mail marketing message is the subject line. It's here that the customer decides to peruse the message or click delete. Think of the subject line as a teaser on an envelope. You are trying to do the same thing here. No lying. No fantastic claims. Though, you definitely want to draw interest without giving everything away. Tell them the best part of your offer, without any of the drawbacks.

Examples:

Restaurant subject line:
Complimentary appetizer for you.
In the e-mail text:
They need to purchase an entrée to get the appetizer.

Tire company subject line:
Four new tires, as little as 99 bucks.
In the e-mail text:
Multiple tires and pricing. The $99 is for the low-end tires.

County Fair subject line:
County Fair, April 12th & 13th – Have fun!
In the e-mail text:
Hours and cost.

Now let's make these subject lines better. Adding something a person recognizes will always lead to better results. This means brand name recognition, city of an event or of a location, even a local sports team or landmark.

Improved Examples:

Restaurant subject line:
Complimentary appetizer at our Burbank location

Tire company subject line:
Four new Goodyear tires, as little as 99 bucks.

County Fair subject line:
County Fair Coming to Kalamazoo – April 12th & 13th

Other Subject Line Rules:
1. Keep the subject lines to 55 characters or less.
2. Stay away from SPAM techniques.
   a. No ALL CAPS.
   b. Use alternate words (complimentary instead of free, cost instead of money).
   c. Avoid the following words in your subject line whenever possible:

Profits	$$$	Cash
Earn	Thousand(s)	Help
%	Reminder	Discount
Giveaway	Lowest	Amazing
Deal	Save	

And anything else that just sounds like SPAM.

The From Line

Just like the subject line is similar to an envelope teaser line, the "from line" is similar to what you would put in the return name and address area of an envelope. One difference between them is that while direct mail can go without return information, an e-mail must always bear the name of the sender's company in order to follow CAN-SPAM practices. When using e-mail, the "from line" should always complement the subject line, as they go hand-in-hand. Again, using brand name or city recognition is helpful, especially if this was not used in the subject line. Below are examples of how we put the "from line" with the subject line to give the recipient a complete example of what the message may be about.

From Line: **Don Jose Mexican Cuisine**
Subject: **Complementary appetizer at our Burbank location**

From Line: **Burbank Tire Outlet**
Subject: **Four new Goodyear tires, as little as 99 bucks**

From Line: **What to do in Kalamazoo**
Subject: **County Fair Coming to Kalamazoo – April 12th & 13th**

Your Offer

The offer goes back to *what you are trying to accomplish*. If you are trying to mimic your direct mail piece, it should just have the same offer that your direct mail piece has. If your objective is trying to get people to read the mail piece, you should at least hint about the offer. "Look for our mail piece to learn how you can save thousands of dollars…"

In Conclusions

Like direct mail, e-mail marketing is not rocket science. The easiest thing to do when you're creating an e-mail campaign is to ask yourself, assuming you were the target recipient, "Would I read this e-mail?" and "Would I respond to this e-mail?" And finally, "Does this e-mail campaign look similar to the direct mail campaign?" If you can answer yes to these questions, you've done a good job. And this will generally translate into higher ROIs and happier customers – which is what we all want!