

Direct Mail

MASTER'S TOOLKIT

SERIES



Module 3

Design

Whether you tackle design yourself or hire someone, you should have a clear understanding of what you want and what works, so you can clearly lead creative direction. Design encompasses format, paper type, printing technique, color, photography, images, special printing effects and folds.

If you are working with a tight budget, you can have a highly effective piece using simple design elements like folds, strategically placed color and bold images.

Format 

PRINTING TECHNIQUE

PAPER TYPE  **Color**

PHOTOGRAPHY

STOCK IMAGES **Folds**

CUSTOM PRINTING  **Folds**

Format

There are five common types of direct mail. Always consider your audience to determine what format works best for your goals.

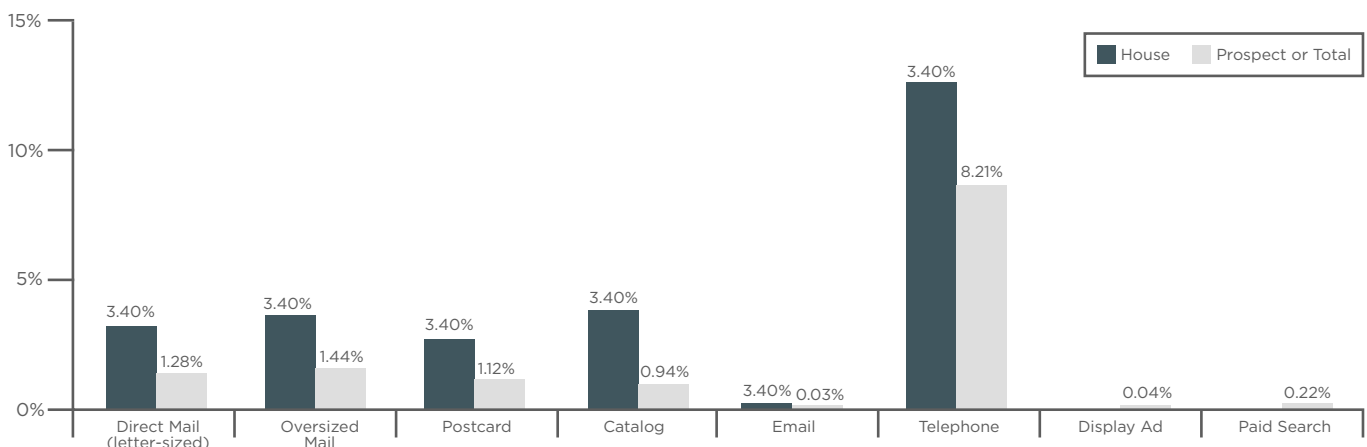
1 Cards and Postcards
The simplest and most cost-effective option is a two-sided piece, usually printed on heavy card stock.

2 Self-Mailers
Self-mailers are similar to postcards, but have one or more folds to house additional information. Self-mailers often include reply cards or tear-off order forms, but no envelope.

3 Letters
Sales letters are individually printed on company letterhead and mailed in an envelope. Letters have a personalized and familiar feel, which can increase open rates.

4 Dimensional
These include padded envelopes, tubes and boxes. They resemble a gift and have higher perceived value, this makes them the costliest mailings to produce, but typically have the highest response rates.

5 Catalogs and Booklets
From handbooks to technical manuals to full-color glossy spreads, catalogs are often a key factor in earning customer interest, trust and loyalty.



According to the Direct Mail Association

Paper

Standard types include:

- 70# Uncoated
- 80# Gloss or Dull/Matte Text
- 100# Gloss Cover
- 100# Uncoated Cover
- 120# Gloss Cover or Dull/Matte Cover
- 200# Gloss Cover 24 pt.
- Premium and specialty papers are also available.

Offset Printing

Offset printing technology uses plates, usually made from aluminum, which are used to transfer an image onto a rubber “blanket,” which then rolls that image onto a sheet of paper. It’s called offset because the ink is not transferred directly from plate to paper. Offset printing is the best choice when larger quantities are needed because it provides accurate color reproduction and crisp, clean, professional-looking printing.

Digital Printing

Digital printing does not use plates the way offset does. Instead, digital printers either use toner, similar to laser printers, or they use liquid ink, as is the case with larger printers. Digital printing shines when lower quantities (perhaps 20 greeting cards or 100 flyers) are needed. Another benefit of digital printing is its variable data capability. When each piece needs a unique code or name, digital is the way to go.



Color

A variety of color options exist. The most common option is full color. You can also have color on the front and black on the back, or make the entire piece grayscale. Prices increase with color, but the visual impact can be significantly greater than black and white alone.



Fonts

We talked about the best font styles to choose in the last module, but font also influences design. Try not to mix more than three fonts in a single piece. Create a hierarchy for headlines, subheaders, offer and body copy using different fonts and sizes.

Photography

Photography is a popular choice for direct mail. You can feature a picture of the product, company locations, or employees. If you use photography, make sure the photo is in focus and the composition is visually pleasing. Do not copy images directly from the web, because you run the risk of working with a low resolution image. Low resolution means the image can look grainy, pixelated or blurry. An original image is always the best option.

Stock Images

If you do not plan on using product or company photos, stock art is an excellent choice to liven the piece and support the copy. Just be sure to pick images that are relevant to the text. I recommend staying away from cheesy “business shots” like handshake close ups, thumbs up or the ever popular meeting around a conference table. Look for images that fit the shape of the piece. If the piece is 4X6, you have a landscape format, and a horizontal image will fit best. Searches can be time-consuming since the selection of stock art is extensive. I suggest outlining images that come to mind and narrowing your focus before you begin searching. There are great illustrations, symbols and other vector based graphics that add impact without the cheese.



Custom Printing and Special Effects

Adding one or more custom finishes is one of the most impactful ways to stand out.

Folds

While most of the marketing materials you see fall in the 'standard' fold category, the possibilities are endless—you're only limited by your imagination. Paper can be scored and folded in some pretty crazy shapes and sizes. Creative folding is a smart, budget-friendly way to stand out.

A helpful source for ideas on creative folding is Trish Witkowski—a self-proclaimed "Folding Fanatic." Check out her YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/foldfactory>.



Foil Stamping

Foil stamping, hot stamping or hot foil stamping is the application of pigment or metallic foil to paper using a heated die. Foil stamping is frequently combined with embossing to produce a shiny, three-dimensional image that makes elements on the piece pop.



Embossing

Embossing is the process of using male and female etched dies (typically made of magnesium, brass or copper) and heat to raise or push letters or a design above the surface of a sheet of paper; it creates an eye-catching three-dimensional effect that enhances the tactile response for the customer.



Die Cutting

A die cut is created by using a sharp steel blade formed into a particular shape, then cut through the paper. The shapes for die cutting are nearly limitless—circles, squares, holes, curves, stair-stepped, rounded corners and sharp points, just to name a few. Die cutting is one of the most effective ways to stand out from the typical square or rectangular printed material.



Metallic Ink

Metallic inks are special inks with subtle reflective metallic particles that create a shine and luster you will not see in standard inks. Silver and gold metallic are most common, but metallic inks also come in bright blues, vibrant purples, hot reds and burnished coppers. Metallic inks are ideal for presenting that high-end image because they add attention-grabbing shine to any printed piece without the higher cost of foil stamping.



UV Coating

Because of its eye-catching appearance and versatile applications, UV is one of the most popular printing techniques available. While it may sound futuristic, UV is a relatively simple production method. Ultraviolet light is used to instantly cure the glossy varnish. Entire pieces (flood) or just portions (spot) of the piece can be visually enhanced using this treatment, especially if on dull or matte paper. UV flood coating helps add shine and durability.



D • E • S • I • G • N CHEAT SHEET

1

Pick your format. Formats include:

1. Cards and Postcards
2. Self-Mailers
3. Letters
4. Dimensional
5. Catalogs

2

Paper options are vast, from standard offerings to premium stocks. **What paper will you choose?**

3

Will you have variable data?

4

Do you have all of the photos you will need? Are they high resolution?

5

If you do not plan on using product or company photos, stock art is an excellent choice to spruce up the piece and support the copy. Just be sure to pick images that are relevant to the copy.
Do my images look believable or cheesy?

6

What will I utilize in my piece? Custom printing effects include:

- Folds
- Embossing
- Metallic Ink
- Foil Stamping
- Die Cutting
- Spot UV Coating