



Print Tips

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Post Cards: The Work Horse of Direct Mail Marketing

A post card is one of the most versatile, inexpensive and effective tools you can have in your marketing tool kit. Compared to the effort and cost of a brochure or a traditional direct mail package mailed in an envelope, a post card is quick, easy and a great way to stretch your marketing budget. In addition, some kinds of post cards will help you keep your mailing list updated.

What is a post card?

Think of a post card as a miniature billboard – a design space that can hold

- a photograph of a new product, a staff member or your location
- a handwritten message to customers
- a published article
- a reminder of an upcoming event
- a request for an appointment
- a mini newsletter
- a discount coupon or admission ticket
- a newsworthy happening in your company

The advantage of a post card is that it does not have to be opened to be read, and if creatively designed, can have impact far beyond its size and cost.

Post card sizes

Perhaps when you think of a post card, you think of two sizes: $4\frac{1}{4}$ x 5 inches (one-quarter of an $8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 sheet of paper) or $5\frac{1}{2}$ x $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches (one-half of an $8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 sheet of paper). These two sizes are common and popular, in part because they fit on a standard letter-sized sheet of paper.

To the United States Postal Service (USPS), a post card is a *self mailer* – something that is not in an envelope. A self mailer can be either a single ply like a post card, or can be folded over like a brochure or an invitation. It can also be a wide variety of sizes – from $3\frac{1}{2}$ x 5 inches to $6\frac{1}{2}$ to 11 inches.

Postage for post cards

Depending on its size and shape and the quantity being mailed, the postage for a post card could be any of four

rates: first class, first class presort, standard presort or card. First class and first class presort are the highest postage rates, followed by standard presort. The card rate is the least expensive postage rate.

The card postage rate

The card rate is worth understanding. It is a subclass of first class mail, which gives the mail piece delivery priority over standard mail. (*Standard mail* is the term adopted by the USPS in 1996 to replace the term *third class mail*.) In addition, like all first class mail, the card rate comes with address services – the USPS term for letting the mailer know when a mail piece can't be delivered as addressed.

Here's how these three things – lowest postage rate, delivery priority and address services – can be used to advantage. Let's say you are planning to mail a very expensive mail piece – a large catalog, or a sophisticated traditional direct mail package. If you do a "premailing" of a post card at the USPS card rate, you will be able to update your mailing list and minimize

the amount of undeliverable catalogs or letters for the expensive mailing. By sending post cards at the card rate 4-6 weeks prior, you will receive returns and can make the address changes and deletions. With a clean mailing list, you will gain greater confidence that even standard mail will be delivered as addressed. Also, if correctly worded, the post card can serve as a teaser or suspense builder to set up the main mailing.

Qualifying for the card postage rate

To qualify for the card postage rate, the post card must be a minimum of 3½ x 5 inches and a maximum of 4¼ x 6 inches single ply and meet the USPS *aspect ratio* (the relationship between the height and length). It must also be a minimum thickness of 0.007 (7 points in paper caliper measurements). If there are at least 500 pieces in the mailing, the post cards can be presorted to gain a postage discount, and if the post cards are addressed with a delivery point bar code there is an additional postage discount for automation-compatibility with USPS mail processing equipment.

One important thing to keep in mind about the card rate – the popular post card size of 4¼ x 5½ does not meet the aspect ratio requirements for automation-compatible postage discounts. If you would like to have this discount and also the economy of getting four post cards from a standard letter-sized sheet of paper, then size the post card at 4 x 5 inches or 4¼ x 5½ inches, both of which meet the aspect ratio requirements.

Using oversized post cards

Sometimes getting the lowest possible postage rate is not the marketing objective. When you want an eye-catching post card, consider an oversized or super-sized version.

As we mentioned earlier, a popular post card size is 5½ x 8½ inches – half of a sheet of letter-sized paper. This size offers advantages in printing, since it is a clean cut with no waste out of an 8½ x 11 sheet. For example, if you want to take delivery of 1000 post cards, it will take a press run of only 500 sheets to produce a yield of 1000.

On the other hand, it is such a popular size that many post cards in a batch of mail may be this size. To be more eye-catching to the reader going through a batch of mail, consider some alternative sizes. For instance, we like 6 x 9 inches – this size is half an inch higher and wider than the popular 5½ x 8½ inch post card and so will “stick out” in a stack of mail. Even more compelling is a “super size” post card measuring a full 6½ x 11½ inches. And because the USPS considers any size between 4¼ x 6 and 6½ x 11½ inches to be letter-sized mail, all three sizes of post cards – popular, oversized and super-sized – mail at the same postage rate. Do

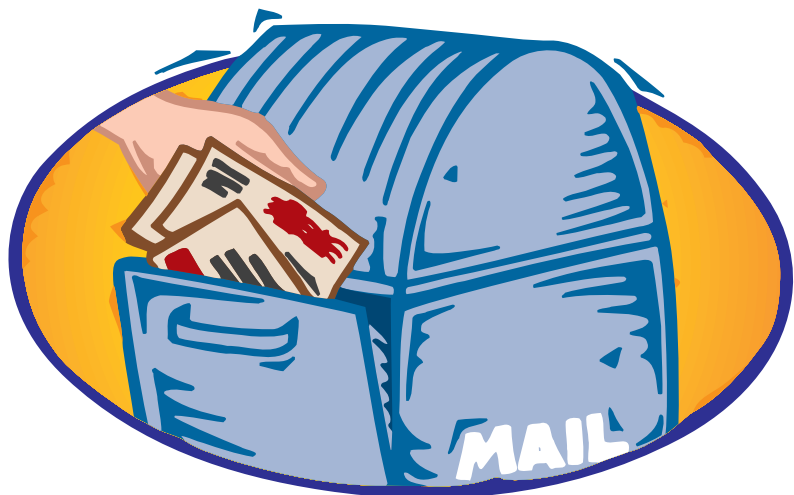
remember that you will have to use a stock with a higher base weight to satisfy the USPS standards for thickness, stiffness and tear strength.

Post cards: the work horse of direct mail marketing

Direct mail marketing continues to be one of the most effective and flexible advertising mediums available.

Incorrect or invalid addresses can mean the difference between success and failure in a direct mail campaign. IMPACT #1: Many prospects do not receive the offers and cannot respond. The response rate is artificially reduced. IMPACT #2: Time-sensitive promotions may be rendered ineffective as inaccurately addressed mailers may be delayed. Receiving notice of a great sale after it is over doesn't help much.

We hope you have some new ideas about how to use post cards to make your direct mail marketing more effective. We would be glad to help you plan a series of post cards that will accomplish your marketing objectives while fitting within your budget for printing, mailing and postage. Call Cary Bowman or Robin Smucker to make an appointment at your location or ours.



worlds

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

Ancillary service

endorsement: Instructions in a prescribed form that tells the USPS what to do with mail that is undeliverable as addressed. There are four ancillary services: address service, return service, change service and forward service.

Aspect ratio: The dimension of a mail piece expressed as the ratio of the height to the length. Used to determine whether a mail piece fits the definition of *rectangular*. The aspect ratio is calculated by dividing the length of the mail piece by its height. To qualify as rectangular, the aspect ratio must fall between 1:1.3 and 1:2.5.

Bulk mail: Term applied to all mailings, regardless of class, that consist of a specified minimum number of pieces prepared and presented in trays or sacks with appropriate Statement of Mailing.

Delivery point barcode: A ZIP+4 barcode containing two additional digits that designate a specific delivery point.

Directional: An address element. The four directional are north, south, east and west.

First class mail: A class of mail and a postage designation. Among other things, first class mail receives delivery priority and comes with address services. *Card* is a subclass of first class postage.

Indicia: Plural of indicium. The imprinted designation on a mail piece indicating method of postage payment and class of mail.

OCR read area: The space on a mail piece reserved for machine-printed address elements. Defined by height, width and distance from the right and bottom of the mail piece.

Optical character reader: A computer-controlled piece of equipment that locates, reads and interprets address information contained in the OCR read area; sprays on a barcode and sorts the mail into a stacker.

Standard mail: A class of mail and a postage designation. Formerly known as third class mail; often mistakenly called bulk mail.

UAA mail: A mail piece that is undeliverable as addressed. Reasons for lack of deliverability may be that the addressee has moved or that one or more addressing elements (such as directional or apartment number) are missing.

USPS: United States Postal Service. The federal agency responsible for mail delivery. Until 1971, called the Post Office Department.

ZIP+4: A nine-digit numeric code consisting of the five-digit ZIP code, a hyphen and four additional digits. The first five digits identify the delivery post office, while the four-digit add-on identifies a specific delivery segment such as city block, floor of a building, department within a company or a group of post office boxes.

Q. The design of my post card simply won't work in a horizontal orientation.

Will my postage rate automatically include a shape surcharge?

A.

Maybe not! If you can orient the mail panel itself in a horizontal position, you can still use a portrait orientation for the message portion of the post card. This is because the USPS determines whether a mail piece meets the aspect ratio (the ratio of the height to the length) from the orientation of the mail panel, not the post card itself.

So after you design the post card with a portrait orientation, rotate it 90 degrees to landscape orientation before you create the mail panel and see if you can find an appropriate place that will allow you to comply with requirements for automation-compatible postage discounts.

questions and answers

Updating Made Easy

A post card can be an excellent way to keep your mailing list updated without incurring the cost of return postage. The USPS offers a postage rate called *card* as a subclass of first class mail that is actually lower than the comparable rate for standard mail. And since first class mail includes address service, you will automatically be notified at no additional cost if the post card is not deliverable as addressed.

To gain this advantage, you must meet two requirements. First, the size of the post card must be no smaller than 3½ x 5 inches and no larger than 4¼ x 6 inches. Secondly, you must provide specific instructions to the USPS for what action to take if the mail piece is not deliverable as addressed.

There are four types of address services, but only one will always return the mail piece at no cost to you – *return service*. The wording to use is *return service requested* and it can be placed under the return address, between the return address and indicia or stamp, or above or below the indicia or stamp. With this wording, called an *endorsement*, a mail piece that cannot be delivered as addressed will not be forwarded, but will be returned to you along with either an address correction or the reason for nondelivery.

TRICKS & tips

Designing the Mailing Panel

Knowing some tricks about the design and placement of the mailing panel on a post card can significantly increase the effectiveness of the card's marketing message. Imagine that you are going through your mail, either at home or at work. Most likely you are viewing it as presented by the letter carrier – with the addressing area all facing the same way and sorted by size of the mail piece.

In the case of a post card, are you looking at the well-designed, eye catching side of the card, or are you looking at the mail panel? How much care was taken to design the side with the mail panel for maximum marketing impact?

Contrary to common usage, the mail panel on a post card does not need to take up the entire right half of one side. An addressing area of 3¼ inches wide by 1½ inches high is sufficient for affixing most

labels, and 5 inches wide by 2¼ inches high will usually accommodate a delivery point bar code put on the mail piece during inkjet addressing.

And this area does not necessarily need to be at the bottom of the post card – it can also be at the top or even appear as a block positioned mid-way up the post card. One of our favorite tricks is to size the mail panel at 6 x 2¼ inches and position it across the entire width of the post card. This creates an unobstructed rectangular area of 6 x 1¼ inches above the mail panel that is very easy to design.

Remember that a poorly designed or positioned mail panel may prevent you from qualifying for the best postage rate. For that reason, we suggest that you have us look at the mail panel before you commit to press. Just call one of our sales reps for help.

PRINT. IT WORKS.

There's nothing experimental about print. It just works.

Whether direct mail, branding materials, investor relations or your corporate identity, a well-printed piece makes you look your best. Give them something tangible to keep your message top-of-mind.

Need help? Call one of our Sales Representatives. That's what we're here for.



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