

Getting the Best from Election Campaign Direct Mail



A Short Essential Guide for Prospective Candidates and Campaign Managers



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Introduction

Washington Direct Mail (WDM) recently did a huge amount of direct mail service work for various political parties during the 2017 UK General Election.

As a UK Mailing House and the neutral supplier of direct mail services to candidates we were in a privileged position to see how candidates and campaign managers handled having to pull all the disparate elements of a direct mail campaign piece together, many of them doing so for the first time.

The results were mixed.

This booklet is based on several blog posts that first appeared on the Washington Direct Mail website in June 2017. It is designed to provide politicians, prospective candidates and their campaign managers with a well-intentioned, down-to-earth guide to improving their chances of persuading voters to vote for them at the next election from a marketing point of view.

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How Political Parties used Direct Mail Services in the 2017 UK General Election

What is Candidate Mail?

Candidates for constituency seats are allowed, by Law, to access a Royal Mail direct mail service called 'Candidate Mail'. They are allowed one direct mail campaign delivered without charge by Royal Mail to either each household within the constituency if the mail is unaddressed, or each eligible elector if the mail is addressed.

Crucially, although there are no postal costs, the direct mail design, digital or litho printing and fulfilment for each direct mail piece still needs to be paid for by the candidate. So although the cost is reduced, it's important to maximise the direct mail's effect not only because it can help the candidate get elected, but also because each candidate has a finite budget to get elected with.

(For a full description please see the Washington Direct Mail Candidate Mail services webpage available at <https://www.wdmonline.co.uk/service/candidate-mail/278>)

Initial Thoughts on the 2017 General Election Candidate Mail

What struck our team most, was the sheer variation in levels of knowledge about copywriting, design, printing knowledge, logistical planning and organisational ability.

It ranged from knowing nothing and wanting someone else to do it all, through to requiring full control over every aspect of the direct mail service process, from paper grammage, lamination and folding, to arranging for the campaign to drop on a specific day.

Of course, it didn't help that almost every political party, even the Conservatives in Government it seems, was caught 'on the hop' by the General Election announcement. Yet within an hour of the announcement, Washington Direct Mail was receiving calls and in discussions with campaign managers about using our direct mail services, variable digital printing and fulfilment of Candidate Mail.

But inevitably, due to the surprise, there were several key issues that candidates and campaign managers needed to surmount to take advantage of Candidate mail.

These included:

1) Lack of Data

Many candidates literally did not have the time required to request their constituency data and to segment and cleanse it enough to take advantage of the Addressed Candidate Mail.

This resulted in unaddressed leaflets having to be printed and anonymously door dropped (think 'To the occupier') rather than being personalised and posted specifically to a voter.

2) Lack of pre-written copy

Most candidates struggled to provide copy that was tailored to the electorate because they a) were not themselves copywriters, b) had not expected to provide copy at that point in time, and c) lacked the time to sit down and write brand new copy.

This resulted in some copy being pulled together from various previous disparate places that looked and sounded different within the same leaflet.

3) Lack of pre-approved Candidate Mail templates

Some candidates were altogether new to the whole Election and Candidate Mail process. They had not been introduced to Royal Mail Candidate Mail rules and regulations, and struggled to understand the opportunities and limitations of what could and couldn't be achieved.

This resulted in every single candidate mail design provided by the candidate or campaign manager – as opposed to being provided by the mailing house – being different. Some were within candidate mail regulations, some were not. Some artwork was 'print ready', some needed a lot of alteration. And so on.

A lack of awareness of restrictions and processes also resulted in the need for a 'crash course explanation' on all aspects of design, copywriting, page layout and printing requirements by Washington Direct Mail. Naturally, because these were one-to-one contacts with candidates, the same explanation had to be provided many times. This led directly to the creation of this article as a means of providing 'exactly the same information' to everyone.

4) Lack of Message Clarity

Driven, to some extent, by a lack of clarity from their central teams, some candidates were unsure about their messaging priorities.

This meant that in some cases there were competing messages within the same candidate mail, and in others, that an inappropriate message was prioritised.

5) Lack of Political Party Brand Knowledge

More than a few candidates were either a) unaware of their Political Party brand guidelines, b) were not constrained by them, or c) were not bothered about them.

This, coupled with a wide variation of printing press qualities across the country, ensured that on some occasions no two direct mail pieces looked or sounded the same.

Recommendations for Future General Election Candidate Mail Marketing Campaigns

Now that the dust has settled... perhaps... we thought it might be time to provide some of our learnings in the form of the top tips for future political candidates and to highlight how a good direct mail service provider can make all the difference to an election campaign.

The following advice from Washington Direct Mail, a politically neutral UK mailing house, is kindly meant and genuinely intended to help future candidates and campaign managers. We hope you enjoy reading it...

1. Be Brand Aware

Each major political party has its own set of brand guidelines that have been developed by design agencies. They've been developed for a reason. That reason is to present a united face and appear professional in front of the electorate. Candidates and campaign managers should ensure they have a copy of their party's brand guidelines, understand what is required of them by their central leadership, and what leeway for individualism they have. Candidates should think very seriously before they decide to 'go rogue' and ignore brand guidelines because this might lead to recriminations at a later point should the election not go as planned.

2. Be Data Driven

Direct Mail, and especially Personalised or Variable Direct Mail, is much more sophisticated than it was. These days it's heavily dependent on audience data and knowledge of the area to personalise each piece of candidate mail with known personal details and images of local landmarks, quotes, soundbites and other relevant messaging. So the process of creating a successful direct mail candidate campaign actually begins and is driven by the data you have.

Candidates and Campaign Managers should always ensure their data is as clean as possible before use, breaking down or 'segmenting' their audience, and allocating the most appropriate images, quotes and messages for each segment. By taking these easily completed actions, candidates and campaign managers are vastly improving the chance that the voter will read their direct mail.

3. Use a Pre-approved Template

By using a pre-approved template candidates and campaign managers can short-cut the timescales needed to get their candidate mail out to the voter.

Mailing Houses that deal specifically in Candidate Mail will already have templates that have been approved for past elections.

4. Give it some Space

This point is incredibly important but often forgotten... Space helps readability!

Decide on the space first. It's far easier to understand how many words are required if you know the space you need to fill rather than to have too much text and try to squeeze it into the space.

5. Use an Appropriate Text Size and Font

Direct Mail marketing tests have shown that the best readability comes from using black text on white paper at sizes of at least 11 points, and using a font with a serif. Forget using text with tints of grey or a colour. Candidates and Campaign Managers should be trying for maximum contrast to increase the level of readability and therefore increase the chance of their message being read.

Limit the use of italics as much as possible. Again, direct mail marketing tests have

shown that italics actually reduce readability, so reserve them for quotes and short sections where something needs to be highlighted.

Equally limit the use of WORDS OR SENTENCES USING ALL CAPITALS. Firstly it looks like you're shouting, and secondly... you guessed it, direct mail marketing tests show it reduces readability.

It should be pointed out that there are times and places for using different coloured text, italics and capitals. We're just saying that they should be used to increase impact. Use them too much and Candidates and Campaign Managers are simply increasing the percentage chance that the voter will stop reading.

6. Layout

Never, ever, put a headline above a photo or image, with the body of the text below the image. The human eye is designed to look at images first, then read down the page. If a headline lies above an image, then that headline is likely to be missed as the voter skim reads the direct mail campaign piece.

7. Have Something Socially Positive to Say

It should be obvious, shouldn't it? But it's amazing how many Candidates focus on saying how bad things are when, in tests, a socially positive message can improve results by as much as 472%*

** Current Directions in Psychological Science 12:105-6*

8. Define your Message Priority

When Google assesses a website it recognises what's important about that page by using 'headers' that mark-up priority as H1, H2, H3, body, footer, etc. Humans can't do this. They rely on text size and, in the Western World, reading what's most important from top left to bottom right on a page. Equally, when a voter is reading a multi-page direct mail item, they will often look at the front, then the reverse, and only then look inside.

Understanding how the voter will read the candidate mail piece, and what they will look at first and last, and what order they will do it in is crucial. Only by understanding what a Candidates message priorities are and where they should be placed, can a Candidate Mail marketing campaign piece be effective.

9. Make It Relevant

Try to ensure that any copy included in your Candidate Mail is relevant to your audience. It seems common sense, but like most things that are common sense, it's only common sense when it's pointed out... voters are more concerned with 'what's in it for me?' And not just what's in it for me but 'what have you done for me?' and 'what will you do for me?' Occasionally a wider issue might appear, but as the 2017 UK General Election showed, "all politics is local" and voters were still enormously concerned about tangible things like the state of the local roads, their local NHS, how new taxes would affect them and their families directly, how social care will be replaced and what it would mean for them personally, and so on.

10. Be Personal

During the recent 2017 UK General Election there was a good example of this. In one constituency where YouGov rated it a 'Toss up' the rival candidates had very different approaches. One used a personal, direct, first person voice for their copy "I have, I would, I am", and backed this up with testimonials "I have known, His experience, His values". The other's text spoke in the third person "He did this, He will ensure, He secured" and backed this up with a central message that made no reference to the candidate.

Needless to say, the candidate that used a more personal tone won the seat.

Why should this happen? Well... although we can never say for certain that this was inevitable, we can suggest that being personal 'humanised' the winning candidate, and equally, we can say that speaking in the third-party might suggest the losing incumbent candidate was cool and remote.

This might never make the difference in a safe seat, but in the marginals... you never know. A Candidate in a marginal seat needs to stack the deck as much as possible in his or her favour.

11. Give them Reasons to Believe You

It's not enough to simply say 'the candidate will do this or that', voters need to be convinced. And the best way to convince them, is to provide proof of their honesty and previous good character through testimonials from people who look and act like the voter.

In one famous study, the likelihood of getting a person to be more environmentally friendly was 33%* higher if that person was told previous people had been environmentally friendly too.

** Journal of Consumer Research. "A Room with a Viewpoint: Using Social Norms to motivate environmental conservation in Hotels"*

12. Ask for Engagement

According to research if you can get someone involved, by asking for something in a small way, it almost doubles the candidates chance of getting support* (in the test case it was for a donation). Candidates and Campaign managers might want to ask what they could ask the voter to do that is negligible, and which might improve their willingness to do more.

** Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 34: 599-604*

13. Ask the Electorate to Vote for You

Let's return to the recent 2017 UK General Election and that knife-edge constituency we talked about in point ten. Not only did the losing candidate seem remote, he didn't ask his audience to vote for him. If you don't ask your elector to vote for you, should you really be surprised if they don't? Think this was an outlier? A rarity? Think again! Of the four candidates standing in that constituency, only one, the winner, specifically asked the voter to 'Vote for [Name]'... and even here it was almost an after-thought.

If you'd like to talk about a potential direct mail or direct marketing idea you have, get in touch with us or call us on 0191 487 5148. We'd be more than happy to share our insight and help you get the best possible results from your Candidate Mail.

What is the definition of a Mailing House or Mailing Company in the UK?

The English Oxford Living Dictionaries defines a 'Mailing House' as:

“A company which arranges the large-scale dispatch of mail on behalf of other organisations.”

Broadly this is correct, but a modern Mailing House or Mailing Company does so much more than simply despatching mail for businesses, because, as with so many industries these days, today's mailing houses have blurred the edges, pulling in other industries to create a more rounded set of services.

A more modern definition of a Mailing House or Mailing Company would be:

“A company that provides outsourced design services, personalised digital printing, litho printing, print finishing, and fulfilment of direct mail, then arranges the large-scale despatch and reporting of mail on behalf of organisations.”

What Mailing House Services do UK Mailing Houses offer today?

Automated Enclosing

Automated enclosing is the staple service of a mailing house. This is the automated filling and sealing of enveloped direct mail and usually caters for all the standard UK envelope sizes.

Two, Three and Four Way Enclosing

Two, Three and Four Way enclosing is an extended version of the above automated enclosing, where each envelope must include two, three or four pieces of personalised elements that need to be 100% aligned together, such as a set of personalised accounts, bills or legal paperwork. A Quality UK Mailing House will achieve this through 2d barcodes, optical character recognition (OCR) and weight reading technology.

Polywrapping

Polywrapping is another version of automated enclosing except here the direct mail elements are 'wrapped' in either see-through or opaque polythene. This enables the client to differentiate their direct mail items from the normal envelope and provides more weather-proof protection during delivery.

Hand Packing

Hand packing is exactly as it sounds... the manual packing of direct mail elements into envelopes or boxes in preparation for posting. Hand packed items are limited only by the client's imagination and the physical capacity of the packaging.

Individual Inkjetting

The Inkjetting process is usually combined with pre-printed litho direct mail items such as one-piece mailers, postcards or enveloped and sealed mailers. Address data is then inkjet printed onto the outer face rather than using address labels.

Personalised Digital Printing

If anything emphasises the evolution and rehabilitation of direct mail after the struggles of email marketing for 'message cut-through', it is personalised digital printing or variable direct mail. Personalised digital printing by a Mailing House can individualise each and every single colour printed direct mail piece, in whatever volume is necessary – whether that's dozens or millions. When this service is combined and integrated with personalised digital advertising the result is especially powerful, creating a 'halo' effect where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Litho Printing

Many Mailing Houses still recommend litho printing as a suitable method for some direct mail campaigns. Although it is impossible to personalise using the litho process, litho's greatest USP is that, once the job is set-up, the longer the print run, the cheaper each printed item becomes, making it perfect for items such as blank forms.

Print Finishing

Print Finishing is a catch-all phrase for a very wide variety of improvements to printed items. These improvements can include, but are not limited to, folding, perforated lines,

laminating, overprinting, gloss, matt and silk finishes, die-cutting, embossing, scoring, binding and gluing. A quality Mailing House will have many of these services in-house, but inevitably others are so specialist that partner-supplier arrangements are often made across the industry.

Despatch

Mailing Houses usually have several methods of despatch, and the choice of despatch can have a huge impact on project costs. For instance, clients need to be sending a minimum of 4,000 letters or 1,000 large letters to be eligible for a postage discount, and the amount of discount is variable dependent on volume.

MailMark Reporting

A quality Mailing House will be registered as a Royal Mail 'Mailmark' partner. This allows them to register each posting of a mailing on Royal Mail's systems, and reports can be generated showing when a particular job has been delivered.

Who uses Mailing Houses or Mailing Companies and why?

Mailing Houses are used by people, not organisations. This is an important distinction because it is directly relevant to why their mailing services are used.

Candidates and Campaign Managers

Mailing Houses are usually approached when someone, a candidate or campaign manager recognises that they need additional capacity, external knowledge, specialist printing and fulfilment machinery, or access to external logistical processes, and when they recognise that they cannot provide these internally within their political organisation due to budgets, structure, authorisation, capacity or timescales.

Marketing Agencies with Political Clients

Marketing agencies are specialists within their own right. As such they often make a conscious choice to stay within their sphere of expertise, outsourcing delivery of direct mail services to a Mailing House both on a regular basis, as a partner, or irregularly as their own client's needs require.

Political Group - Heads of Marketing, CMO's and Marketing Directors

Heads of Marketing CMO's (Chief Marketing Officers) and Marketing Directors often out-source direct mail services and printing to a Mailing House because the relationship can be both easier to control and it circumvents getting authorisation for internal structural changes in terms of either technology installation or employment of new staff.

Political Group - Internal Marketing Teams

Members of Internal Marketing Teams are often running at capacity, and they can sometimes feel that they're more managers of marketing, rather than creators of it. Employing a Mailing House that they trust and can be relied upon allows them to increase their workload without overloading their capacity. Quality Mailing Houses act more like an extended part of the marketing team, providing the heavy lifting for marketing staff, and enabling them to concentrate on driving towards their targets rather than filling envelopes or doing the design work themselves.

What are the Benefits of integrating a UK Mailing House into your Political Campaigns?

Experience and Expertise

A quality Mailing House holds a huge amount of expertise gained through years of experience in working with clients. So those approaching a new partnership with a Mailing House have a huge opportunity to increase their pool of knowledge and insight into what works and what doesn't almost overnight. Of course, sometimes clients simply want a pre-defined project completing on time, on budget and to a standard that they have already agreed... and that's fine, any Mailing House worth their salt would do this. But if someone really wants to explore an open-ended idea, they could do worse than co-opt the Mailing House into their plans from the start, because their knowledge and experience might help improve success, avoid repetition, or even side-step disaster.

Reduced Overheads

Mailing Houses know the printing, fulfilment and mailing system like the back of their hand. Quite often they can reduce a client's overheads simply by suggesting a revision in the direct mail design, composition or use of a different postal process.

Saves Time

One of the reasons clients use Mailing Houses is to save time. Mailing House processes and systems are often highly technological and complex. Realistically clients cannot hope to replicate them without introducing major structural changes to their organisations. It's quicker and easier simply to outsource the projects to the experts.

Latest Equipment

Even if a political group were to introduce print and mailing services into their organisation, the cost of maintaining and updating digital and litho presses, booklet makers, binders, folders, cutters, polywrappers and envelope enclosure machinery would be prohibitive. Clients realise that using a Mailing House allows them to adopt a hands-off approach which frees them from capital expenditure, leasing, insurance, and health and safety agreements, giving them the ability to flex production of campaigns up or down as need be.

Outsourced Members of your Team

As a regular partner, Mailing House employees quite often become unofficial members of a client's team, taking part in brainstorming, offering creative advice and running and reporting on projects. In essence, outsourcing allows organisations to have many of the benefits of an employee, without the hassle of employment contracts.

Defined Service Level Agreement (SLA)

The best Mailing Houses will operate on an SLA basis for regular standards of work. This enables clients to drive the Mailing House to hit deadlines or suffer penalties, which in turn gives the client a measure of peace of mind that they can rely on the outsourced direct mail services.

What sort of Costs are involved in using a UK Mailing House for Political Campaigns?

Design

Mailing House design costs are usually based on an hourly rate. The number of hours is dependent on how individual the client would like the design to be. Template designs tend to take less time, but generally have less impact. Clients should agree beforehand how much time should be allocated to a design and any agreement should include a number of alterations based on feedback.

Materials

Mailing House material costs are usually dependent on the paper grammage or card stock chosen, as well as any additional items such as glue dots, seals, and so on. A good Mailing House, will help a client to understand how to design a direct mail piece, that will maximise the number of designs that can be printed on the chosen paper, thereby saving the client's money.

Print and Finishing

Mailing House print costs are based on one of two processes:

Digital Print: costs are accrued for each printed piece and at the same rate for every piece, ie: if a client wanted 100 pieces at £1 per piece, the total cost would be £100. Crucially, this cost structure does not change even if every single one of those printed items was different.

Litho Print: costs are based on an initial set-up of the printing press, and then there is a sliding scale of costs for the printed items depending on how many the client requires, ie: if the set-up costs are £20, and the costs for printing 100 pieces is £80, then the total cost would be £100... but if 200 were printed instead, the print cost might fall to £150, and if 300 were printed it might be £175, and so on, reducing as the volume is increased.

In addition, a printed piece is usually 'finished'. As has already been mentioned, the term Finishing covers a huge range of subjects... folding, scoring, perforating, laminating, enclosing, embossing, booklet making, binding... the list is almost endless. Clients should work with a Mailing House to understand the opportunities and limitations of each type of finish, brief them on their requirements and agree a total cost for the materials, printing and finishing, to avoid any misunderstanding.

Fulfilment

Mailing Houses usually have several methods of fulfilment. Clients should work with a Mailing House to understand the opportunities and limitations of each type and agree a total fulfilment cost for each project.

Postage

Mailing Houses have access to a wide range of postal services and, dependent mainly

on speed of despatch this choice can have a large impact on overall costs. Clients should work with a Mailing House to understand the opportunities and limitations of each postal service and recognise how this might impact overheads before agreeing a choice.

Management

Finally, usually, but not always, a Mailing House will charge a management fee. This will be based on an estimate of hours needed to manage the whole project, or in the case of a regular project, a number of allocated hours per month. Clients should work with a Mailing House to understand how long this will take and agree a figure prior to commencement of the job, because there might be ramifications that result from run-away management overheads.

How can you assess the quality of a UK Mailing House for a Political Campaign?

A quality UK Mailing House or Mailing Company will be both ISO certified and industry accredited. In addition, they should be able to supply previous customer testimonials, show a TrustPilot score, and provide customer reference sites upon the signing of a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) on demand.

Below is a list of the main certifications and accreditations clients should look out for:

- Direct Marketing Association (DMA) Member
- Royal Mail, MailMark Partner
- British Print Industry Federation (BPIF) Member
- ISO9001 Certification
- ISO14001 Certification
- OHSAS18001 Certification
- ISO27001 Certification
- Testimonials
- Client References

How do you get the Best from a Mailing House for your Campaign?

Prepare a Brief

The first and most effective method for getting the best from a Mailing House, is to prepare a good design brief. Clients should ensure they know exactly what they want

to get out of the job, setting project objectives in terms of timescales, milestones and deadlines, defining who their target audience are, agreeing what messages are required, what mandatory items need to be included, and so on. The more information that has been pinned down and agreed prior to the start of the project, the better.

Define Success

Defining Direct Mail Campaign success is not necessarily the same as knowing what the project objectives are. Defining success is about literally deciding what qualifies as a successful Direct Mail campaign. A Direct Mail Campaign might achieve all its project objectives, but not produce tangible outcomes that can be traced back to the activity. On the other hand, another Direct Mail Campaign might produce outcomes but not enough to warrant the expectations of the organisation. By defining what a successful outcome looks like early on in the process of working with a Mailing House, clients can then make factual decisions on what to spend their budget on. For example, if a major expression of success is a lowering of the cost per engagement, then it might actually – paradoxically – be worth increasing the cost per Direct Mail piece to try to improve the response rate per volume. Equally, if the measure of success is defined as the level of engagement then it might be more suitable to create a baseline survey prior to the campaign and build in a post-campaign survey to measure the variation.

Ask Advice

Hopefully, clients will already recognise the value in using a Mailing House' knowledge and experience. This article unashamedly promotes this, and makes no apology for doing so. Clients should take absolute advantage of the years of experience and industry knowledge that Mailing House employees have. No questions are stupid... all questions are welcome. The best Mailing Houses will give clients invaluable short-cuts along the road to successful projects and direct mail marketing campaigns.

Confirm Stability

Clients should always confirm the stability of a Mailing House before putting projects their way, or setting up a regular partnership. A salutary warning should be taken from recent experience when a Mailing House went into liquidation without warning, leaving several clients completely at a loss for an alternative and having to request advice from Royal Mail at very short notice to enable fulfilment of their deadlines to customers. Many smaller Mailing Houses win business simply by barely making a profit. Initially,

this is great for the client, but over the long term it leads to financial unprofitability and unsustainability. Often a sure sign of this instability is reflected in the frequent name changes of a company as it exhausts its lines of credit.

Confirm Abilities

Clients should always confirm the technical ability of a Mailing House. They can do this in a number of ways, a) on-site visits, b) sample packs, c) test pieces, d) employee CV's, e) testimonials, f) TrustPilot reviews, and g) existing customer references.

Identify Key Contacts

Clients should always have a clear line of communication with the Mailing House. It's common sense again. People take holidays, are ill, move on, etc., and contacts and alternatives should be agreed prior to the commencement of any project.

Have a Service Level Agreement (SLA)

Before we go any further, an SLA need not be an official document, and they are not strictly necessary... clients can make any sort of agreement they want with a Mailing House after all... but they can often protect both the client and their Mailing Company supplier, shielding them from miscommunications and preventing disagreements within a relationship. Whatever format that SLA takes... be it an email, a letter, the pdf of notes from a meeting... as long as both sides have confirmed their agreement, there will be less conflict likely to arise within the project as it moves forward.

Conclusion

So there you have it. Hopefully, this guide to what Mailing House or Mailing Company is has given you a better idea of the pros and cons of outsourcing to them. If you'd like to speak to one of our Mailing House pro's, or if you would like a quote on our Direct Mail or printing services, feel free to get in touch.

If you'd like to talk about a potential direct mail or direct marketing idea you have, get in touch with us or call us on **0191 487 5148**. We'd be more than happy to share our insight and help you out.

What is the future of Direct Mail Political Marketing Campaigns? What does this future mean for candidates and campaign managers? Does direct mail political marketing even have a future?

And if it does have a future, how can candidates and campaign managers use direct mail marketing to its fullest without breaking their campaign budgets?

Does direct mail marketing have a future?

Let's be clear... yes, Direct Mail Marketing Campaigns do have a future, but it isn't a return to the mass marketing volumes of the past. Today, the future of Direct Mail Marketing Campaigns is personalisation at volume.

Email and social media marketing is a God-send for marketers and campaign managers. Its mass use is still relatively new... it's cheap... it's more easily budgeted for... it has instant gratification because it is measurable, can be easily A/B tested, and it circumvents gatekeepers.

In short it is everything that direct mail marketing is not. But, as has happened in the business world, email and social media marketing has already started to sow the seeds of its own failure.

Its very cheapness and speed is encouraging more and more marketers and campaign managers to use it. Huge volumes of mass email and social media marketing will see engagement rates diminishing and digital marketers sending out more and more emails and posts to receive less and less response.

And that's why direct mail marketing will continue to be relevant.

By culling the worst of the physical direct mail campaigns through a switch to email and social media... by switching to digitally printed direct mail... and by integrating it with data and other digital channels-to-market, the perfect conditions will be created for message 'cut through'.

What do future direct mail marketing campaigns look like?

Well, to start with, the future is now! This is already happening.

The printing industry, realising that it needed to compete with personalised email and social marketing, has moved away from the traditional Lithographic, or Litho, presses.

Today, the most successful direct mail marketing campaigns are almost always data driven. They access both text and image data records for the target individual and merge this with a design to create a personalised message to that specific person.

Put simply, today's campaigns are a very much more complex version of a Microsoft Word merge, pulling in tailored offers, images, product and service recommendations, all based on an individual's past interactions with the company.

And due to the advances in digital printing press technology, these marketing campaigns are not shackled by volume. Even if you were to have a million-strong direct mail campaign, every single marketing piece could be unique and individual.

What does this mean for candidates and campaign managers?

It's a fantastic opportunity.

Imagine being able to create a direct mail marketing campaign that treats each voter on your customer database as an individual... that talks to them in their own way... that makes the most suitable appeal to their nature... and that suggests the most appropriate methods of contact and of making their voice heard.

But does it really work?

Yes it does! Chances are you will already have seen it work and have bought something through the same process already... through Amazon.

Yes... Amazon uses the same thought process. When you go on Amazon you see recommendations and suggestions and options that are completely tailored to you based on your previous choices and interactions.

All digitally printed direct mail marketing campaigns are doing is using a different format and channel-to-market.

Is it affordable?

Yes it is. The beauty of personalised or variable digital printing is that there are no set-up fees. You simply pay 'by the click'. So if you want thirty marketing pieces, you only pay for thirty. If you want 100,000... you only pay for 100,000.

So how can candidates and campaign managers use direct mail marketing to its fullest without breaking their marketing budgets?

In this new age of Direct Mail Marketing Campaigns the key to success lies not in understanding the printing issues – we've already established that it's basically a mail merge – but in understanding your data.

Whether you have a few dozen voters to reach or hundreds of thousands, candidates and campaign managers can create a set of rules on how they will appeal to them and apply those rules to the data.

As with most things... the business world tends to lead the way, so let's take a real-life example borrowed from Washington Direct Mail's business records. In this case, we've excluded the company name and tried to explain how the process works rather than concentrating on the product.

Example Direct Mail Marketing Campaign Process

A UK business wants to promote a product and would like to invite anyone on their database who has either visited their website, made a digital enquiry or who had previously attended an event and had left their details.

Although limited, the business still knows quite a bit about each potential individual.

- **Salutation**

- **Name**

- **Location**

- **The product they have been looking at in the past**

- **Potential spending power** (in political terms this might be social leverage or affiliation with a political group)

- **Nearest event location**

Here's what they do...

- 1) Clean their data, filtering out all the records that are incomplete or unsuitable in some way. This reduces their printing, postage and sales management overheads, ensuring they get the maximum possible response rate for their campaign.
- 2) Choose the most suitable promotion they can for each person using their knowledge of the individual's previous interactions. They also choose the most appropriate financing option based on additional socio-economic open data. As an added bonus, they partner with another non-competing business to offer a suitable event setting for the promotion, off-setting some of their campaign costs.
- 3) Pull together an image database and align each individual data record with suitable pictures, maps, financing and location of the nearest event.
- 4) Work with a designer and a Mailing House to create a variable printing template that has merge fields for the data.
- 5) Merge the data with the variable printing template, proof it, then once approved, go to digital print.
- 6) Automatically fulfil the campaign at the Mailing House, matching up all the components using weight measurement and OCR technology to ensure each person gets the correct pieces, then mail them.

That's it! It's not hard and the benefits are obvious.

With a political slant to the example it can clearly be seen as not expensive and each potential voter gets a personalised marketing piece, with a tailored appeal, using tailored imagery, tailored calls-to-action, and because people are receiving much more junk email these days, the impact is enormous, making them much more likely to engage and vote for them.

And that's what every candidate and campaign manager wants isn't it?

So, if there's one thing I would want you to take away from this article it would be this... the time is definitely right for you to take another look at direct mail. Digital social media advertising and email campaigns are the current vogue, but this will begin to lose ground year on year as everyone pitches in. We've already seen it in the business world, and it's already happening in the political world... think Fake News.

The smart candidates and campaign managers will integrate personalised direct mail into their marketing strategies. Those that do are more likely to prosper and be voted for.



About Washington Direct Mail Limited (WDM)

Washington Direct Mail Limited (WDM) is a leading Mailing House that offers a UK wide, full direct mail and printing service – litho printing, personalised digital printing, digital labels, finishing, poly-wrapping, auto enveloping & hand packing, Mailmark reporting, Mailsort, design, email & SMS campaigns, and data management service.

They have been in business since 1983, hold ISO9001, ISO14001, and OHSAS18001 certification, and work to ISO27001 regulations with certification.

They regularly work with customers such as Gentoo, Trafford Council, Sage, FSB, Ryan Direct Group, Great Run Company etc.

They provided extensive direct mail services for three of the main political parties in the 2015 and 2017 UK General Elections.

If you would like help with any direct mail, email or sms campaigns, you can contact them using the details below:

Call - 0191 487 5148

Email - info@wdmonline.co.uk

Online - www.wdmonline.co.uk



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