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Direct Mail—The Right Tool For The Target Market

This chapter explores why direct mail is a favorite among professional marketers and the right tool to reach your target market. You'll learn how to hone in on your market with the best direct mail list, design materials that draw interest, and integrate direct mail with your print and electronic media campaigns to boost the overall performance of your paid advertising program.

Direct mail is the high-powered rifle of every advertising arsenal because it's particularly suited to the multi-faceted communication requirements of the senior housing industry. Given the very specialized nature of your product and services, and the unique profile of your target market, it makes little sense for you to gear your promotional efforts toward the general public using just newspaper, radio, or television advertising. First, it is unlikely that you can afford to employ these media on a consistent and sustained basis. Even if the resources were available, why would you spend money communicating with the market en masse when your message and services apply to only a few? So here's the beauty of direct mail: It enables you to precisely target

those individuals who qualify for your community, and enables you to do so on a one-to-one basis. What could be better?

Another benefit of direct mail is that it gives you room to effectively communicate your message. Think about the businesses you're in. At minimum, you provide housing, services, and perhaps healthcare. Each of these areas has benefits that must be clarified in order for the consumer to understand your concept. It's tough to convey your offerings in a quarter-page newspaper ad or a 30-second radio spot. Direct mail, however, lets you tell your story, either in one well-designed communication or in a series of exposures over time.

Senior adults tend to prefer direct mail as well, or any printed medium, such as brochures, letters, newsletters, or postcards. Actually holding something in their hands allows them to absorb information at their own pace and appeals to their propensity to consume news and information through reading versus watching television or listening to the radio.

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It is also a concept-appropriate medium. There's something not quite right about seeing a newspaper ad for a major life change sandwiched in between ads for used-cars, laundry detergent, and lingerie—that is if it's even noticed. Think about how many times you've had to search for the location of your community ad in the newspaper!

Some marketers rebut the use of direct mail with the notion that your materials are lost in a sea of junk mail. That may be true for the general consumer, but not the senior consumer. We all know that for most older adults, meal times and mail times are the highlights of their days. This profile may change as the next generation enters our continuum in large numbers, but for now, we are still working with and serving a generation of readers.

Direct Mail Campaign Planning

The multiple benefits of direct mail don't mean that it's the only advertising tool that you use, or that it's used at the exclusion of other media. It only means that if you're working with limited resources, and most of us are, you'll get more mileage out of your advertising dollar when direct mail is the dominant medium in your advertising plan. You should plan your direct mail campaign for a 12-month period and it should correspond to your events and print media calendar. Your plan needs to identify with whom you will communicate (reach), what the message will be (piece), and how often you will communicate (frequency). You'll find the Direct Mail Planner in the *Marketing Plan Template* to be a helpful tool to outline these and other important program elements that we'll discuss in a moment.