

Direct mail is a way of advertising in which advertisers mail printed ads, letters or other solicitations to large groups of consumers. Bulk-mail rates are used to lower the cost of the mailing, and targeted mailing lists are used to maximize potential response.

Direct mail is used in many different situations, limited primarily by the imagination of the advertiser. Stores typically use direct mail to advertise new products or to distribute coupons. Charities typically use the it to raise money. To create a direct mail mailing, advertisers will work to create an ad that will appeal to a substantial number of people. They will then send it to a large group of people, depending on the potential audience of the ad. That could be a ZIP code, particular demographic, or entire nation.

Advertisers have found direct mail appealing for a number of reasons. It takes their message directly to the consumer. While consumers might walk away from a television ad or flip past a newspaper ad, they will eventually open their mailbox. Advertisers also like that they can direct their message as narrowly or broadly as they want, using bulk mailing rates. By receiving the mail at home, direct mail puts the advertiser's message in the hands of the consumer at the time the consumer might be likely to read it, along with the rest of the mail.

Direct mail is not without its problems. Over the years, direct mail also became known by another name: junk mail. Some consumers became irritated at receiving numerous ads in the mail each day. Many threw away the suspected ad-filled mail.

Since consumers often throw away mail associated with ads, marketers were challenged to ensure that consumers read their ads. Direct mail marketers now use a variety of techniques to ensure that the recipients open their envelope. Some go to great lengths to make the envelope and mailing appear personal, even using special computer fonts that look like handwriting. Others will target the mailing to the most-likely customers by using targeted mailing lists. Many direct mail marketers have realized that one of the biggest challenges can be getting the reader to simply open the envelope and read the ad.

Direct mail has entered the world of the internet, and many of the same techniques are showing up electronically in email. Some advertisers now send emails with ads to large groups of consumers. They take advantage of the relatively low cost of obtaining a long list of email addresses and the little time

needed to mail to thousands or millions of people. Perhaps not surprisingly, many computer users reacted by deleting what they perceive as "junk email".