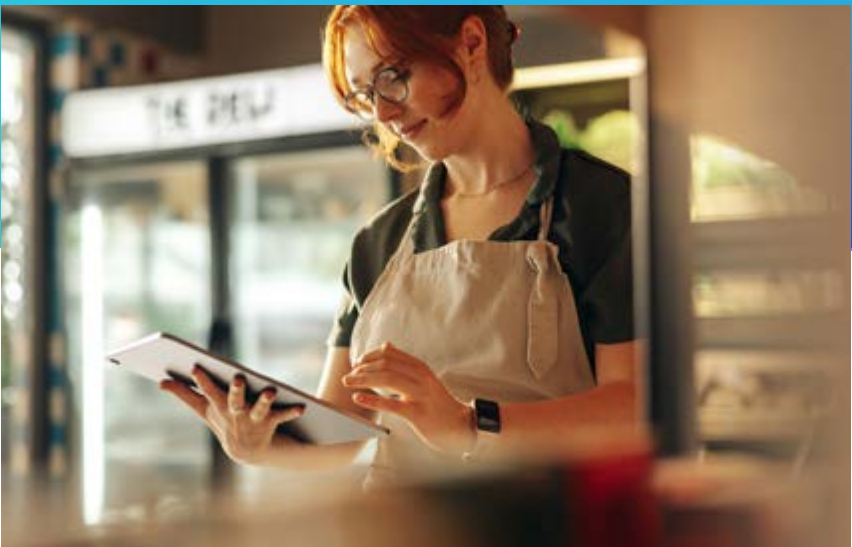




# Direct Mail Marketing

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An Idea Book for  
**E-Commerce & Retail**



## INTRODUCTION

**F**OR E-COMMERCE AND RETAIL BRANDS, direct mail bridges the gap between the endless digital din and real connection. In this world of digital fatigue—crowded inboxes, fleeting social ads, web site popups—a well-designed physical mailer stands apart by delivering a sensory, personal experience that digital can't replicate. Direct mail offers memorable touchpoints at every stage of the buyer's journey, from awareness to loyalty. Today's brands are increasing direct mail budgets because it drives engagement and lifts response rates. What's more, it creates lasting brand impressions—even among digitally native consumers.

Unlike fleeting online communications, physical mail is often saved, shared, and revisited multiple times. Studies show that 70 percent of consumers find direct mail more personal than online interactions; it has a longer shelf life than email (17 days vs. 17 seconds); and opens doors to all customer segments, from first-time buyers to established brand advocates. When paired with digital tools—triggered mail following a site visit or a QR code bringing customers online—direct mail amplifies the impact of omnichannel campaigns, boosting ROI by up to 40 percent and creating synergy across channels.

So, to help you take advantage of all direct mail has to offer, this "Idea Book" sets out proven plays and creative strategies for e-commerce and retail marketers. You'll find actionable ideas to drive awareness, win back lapsed shoppers, deepen loyalty, and generate referrals—with each strategy matched to a specific and suggested mail format. Discover how to blend data-driven precision with physical creativity to spark action, deepen relationships, and grow your brand.

### Simply put, with direct mail, you can:

- Build long-lasting customer relationships through personalized, thoughtful outreach (with response rates averaging 4.9 percent for targeted campaigns).
- Drive multi-channel engagement by linking print with digital journeys, increasing conversion rates by 28 percent.
- Use analytics for smarter targeting and precise ROI measurement, with trackable elements such as PURLs and QR codes.
- Stand out from the crowd by delivering surprise, value, and relevance straight to your customer's mailbox—where 98 percent of mail gets opened.





**SUSTAINABILITY**

# You print one. **We plant one.**

Printing for Less is committed to sustainability and proud to announce our partnership with PrintReleaf. PrintReleaf empowers organizations to sustain and grow the global forestry system...one print job at a time.

For every tree consumed by the production of paper and corrugate products at Printing for Less, a new tree is planted in a global area in need of reforestation. PrintReleaf certifies that, as of August 31, 2025, customers have offset the equivalent of 3,485,389 lbs. of paper consumption by reforesting 42,657 standard trees.

Scan the QR code to learn more.



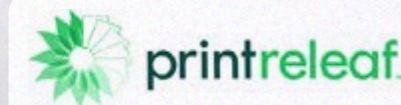
**PLANET. PEOPLE. PURPOSE.**

Choose products you can feel good about with items from forward-thinking brands and eco-friendly styles.



**LOOK FOR THE LEAF**

Sustainable and eco-friendly products that are better for the planet.





# The Customer Journey

Direct mail is not just for pushing promotions and coupons. It creates connection at every stage of your customer's relationship with your brand—whether you're welcoming new shoppers, reactivating dormant accounts, or rewarding loyal fans. Tailoring your campaigns to specific customer behaviors and life stages results in three-times higher ROI and more meaningful impact.

## Awareness/Engagement

- **Catalogs & Lookbooks:** Introduce your brand story, latest products, or seasonal lines with beautifully designed booklets. These build excitement and serve as a physical reminder of what makes your store unique. (Average shelf life: 20-plus days).
- **Sample Mailers:** Let potential shoppers experience your wares with a multisensory introduction. Especially powerful for new product launches or entering new markets. (Conversion rates: 18 to 25 percent when followed by digital nurture).



Organizations can create campaigns that are more targeted, relevant, and effective at each stage of the customer journey. This can lead to higher customer acquisition, retention, and lifetime value.

- **Event Invitations:** Invite VIPs or other groups to online exclusives, early access sales, or pop-up events, building engagement and buzz. (RSVP rates: 15 to 20 percent higher than email-only invites).

## Consideration/Conversion

- **Abandoned-Cart Mailers:** Send a timely, personalized postcard or self-mailer after a cart is left behind. Including a QR code or personalized URL moves customers back into their shopping journey. (Recovery rates: 10 to 15 percent).
- **Limited Time Offers:** Drive urgency with postcards highlighting flash sales, limited stock, or exclusive deals. (Lift in conversion: 20 to 30 percent when time-bound).
- **Personalized Recommendations:** Use purchase data to send printed recommendations—for instance, "Picked for You" product sets or accessory pairings. (Average order value increase: 15 to 25 percent).

## Retention/Loyalty

- **Loyalty Kits & Rewards:** Welcome new loyalty members with a branded kit, celebration card, or exclusive reward. (Member retention: 23 percent higher with physical welcome kits).
- **Thank-You Notes:** A handwritten or branded thank-you card after a purchase turns shoppers into loyal fans. (Repeat purchase rate increase: 30 percent).
- **Anniversary Notices:** Celebrate a customer's "shopiversary" with a card or small gift. (Response rates: 25-35 percent).

By weaving direct mail into your retail and e-commerce sales journeys, you'll amplify results at every touchpoint—creating a cycle of engagement, conversion, and loyalty that keeps your brand top of mind. Here are some of the very specific ways to do that.





## POSTCARDS

# Idea 1

## Welcome to the Brand

Introduce your e-commerce or retail store to new customers or subscribers by showcasing your story, values, and unique offerings. Postcards—whether mailed after an account creation, email sign-up, or first order—invite customers into your brand’s world with tangible impact. Their format is perfect for a warm welcome, limited-time discount, or special invitation.



### WHY IT WORKS

Postcards are instantly engaging and cost-effective. Their visual nature lets you share vibrant product imagery, founder stories, or customer testimonials at a glance, making the brand memorable. The tangible feel of a printed card fosters trust and sets the tone for a long-term relationship, especially for brands seeking to surprise and delight new shoppers. First impressions delivered via mail see 70 percent higher brand recall than does email alone.



### PRO TIPS

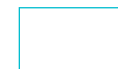
- **Targeted Outreach:** Use “Every Door Direct Mail” (EDDM) to reach specific neighborhoods or demographics aligned with your mission.
- **Visual Storytelling:** Feature compelling images of beneficiaries or impactful moments from your programs.
- **Calls-to-Action:** Include a QR code linking to your donation page, volunteer sign-up form, or a video about your work.
- **Highlight Achievements:** Share concise statistics or milestones (e.g., “We’ve provided 10,000 meals this year!”).
- **Personalization:** Address recipients by name if possible and tailor messaging based on local community needs.



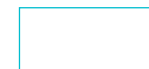
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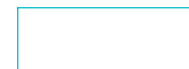
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## POSTCARDS

# Idea 2

## The Cart-Saver

Recover potential lost sales by triggering a postcard to online shoppers who abandoned their carts. This “second chance” reminder uses personalization, urgency, and incentive to bring shoppers back. With average cart abandonment rates at 70 percent, even a 10 percent recovery rate significantly impacts revenue.



### WHY IT WORKS

A timely, well-designed card stands out in the home, often arriving three to five days after digital reminders have faded. Including images of carted products and a one-time discount or deadline increases motivation to complete the purchase. Physical reminders achieve two to three times higher conversion than do email-only recovery campaigns.



### PRO TIPS

- Dynamically print images of the actual products left behind using variable data printing.
- Include a limited-time discount code (10 to 15 percent or free shipping) unique to the customer.
- Add a QR code that takes recipients directly to their saved cart in a single scan.
- Send within 48 to 72 hours of abandonment for best results (before the purchase intent fades).
- Use messaging that aligns with your brand’s voice—playful (“Your cart misses you!”), helpful (“Need help deciding?”), or exclusive (“Don’t miss our VIP shopping event!”).
- A/B test urgency levels: “Items in your cart are selling fast” vs. “Take your time—here’s 15 percent off when you’re ready.”
- Include customer service contact for questions about sizing, shipping, or products.





## INVITATIONS

### Idea 3

#### The VIP Launch

Send your best customers an exclusive invitation to your latest product drop or collection launch. Make them feel special with a premium card, early access link, and insider perks. VIP programs see 20 percent higher lifetime value when physical touchpoints are included.



#### WHY IT WORKS

Recognizing loyal shoppers turns them into advocates. An attractive invitation feels more personal than does an email and builds anticipation—and, often, social buzz. Physical invites see three to five times higher engagement rates and generate 40 percent more social shares than do digital-only announcements.



#### PRO TIPS

- Segment your top 10 to 20 percent of customers by spend, frequency, or loyalty tier.
- Use heavy cardstock (16 lb. or more) or creative finishes (spot UV, foil, die-cuts) to signal premium value.
- Feature exclusive artwork, product photography, or sneak peeks from the new collection.
- Offer a compelling incentive: 24-hour early access, surprise bonus with purchase, or VIP-only color and designs.
- Create FOMO with limited quantities: “Only 500 pieces available for our VIP preview.”
- Encourage social sharing with a branded hashtag and photo-worthy design.
- Follow up with SMS/email day-of to maximize participation.



## Idea 4

### Appreciation & Loyalty Builder

Send handwritten or printed thank-you cards after key purchases, milestones, or loyalty achievements. Acknowledge customer anniversaries or cumulative spending with a heartfelt message and a special perk. Personal thank-yous increase customer lifetime value by an average of 25 percent.



#### WHY IT WORKS

Thank-you notes stick with customers in a way that automated emails do not. They reinforce brand warmth, boost retention by 15 to 20 percent, and inspire word-of-mouth (recipients are three times more likely to recommend your brand).



#### PRO TIPS

- Personalize each note with customer name and specific purchase details ("We hope you're loving your blue ceramic vase!").
- Include a surprise, such as offering 10 percent off the next purchase, a free-shipping code, or loyalty points bonus.
- Reference specific milestones: "Thanks for 1 year with us!" "You're one of our first 100 customers!" "Your 10th order!"
- Use quality materials that reflect your brand: recycled paper for eco-brands, luxe cardstock for premium retailers.
- Strategically timed mail, say, two weeks post-purchase (after delivery), on customer anniversaries, or after big-ticket purchases.
- Make sharing easy—include a photogenic element and encourage social posts for additional rewards.
- Track impact by measuring repeat purchase rates and timing for thank-you recipients vs. a control group.





## LETTERS

# Idea 5

## The Win-Back Letter

Reconnect with lapsed shoppers through a letter or folded self-mailer, reminding them of what makes your brand unique and extending a “We Miss You” offer. Win-back campaigns via direct mail see a three times higher response rate than does email alone.



### WHY IT WORKS

A personalized letter feels substantial and caring, showing your brand values long-term relationships. The physical format allows for longer messaging and multiple touchpoints (letter + coupon + product highlights).



### PRO TIPS

- Segment by recency, say three to six months, six to 12 months, and 12-plus months inactive (with escalating offers).
- Reference past purchases specifically: “We notice you haven’t reordered your favorite lavender soap”.
- Highlight new products, features, shipping options, or sustainability initiatives since their last visit.
- Include powerful social proof, such as customer reviews, ratings, or user-generated content.
- Create urgency with expiring offers, such as 20 to 30 percent, which typically performs well for win-backs.
- Use variable messaging based on past behavior—big spenders get VIP treatment, sale shoppers get exclusive deals, etc.
- Measure success beyond immediate ROI by tracking 90-day reactivation rates and subsequent purchase frequency.



## SAMPLES

# Idea 6

## A Simple Surprise

Put your product directly in the customer's hands by sending them a sample or trial-size item—ideal for introducing new lines, upselling, or cross-selling to current customers. Sample mailers see 18 to 35 percent conversion rates, far exceeding digital-only launches.



### WHY IT WORKS

Physical samples tap into the “try before you buy” impulse, increasing purchase intent by 73 percent and word-of-mouth by 81 percent. The surprise and generosity of receiving a free sample are memorable—samples generate twice as many social shares as do discount offers.



### PRO TIPS

- Use predictive analytics to send, say, skincare samples based on past purchases or food samples based on flavor profiles.
- Include compelling CTAs, which could be a QR code for 25 percent off full-size, exclusive bundle offers or subscription sign-ups.
- Package strategically to showcase brand quality with minimal, sustainable packaging that photographs well.
- Time around key moments—for instance, two weeks before major shopping seasons—with seasonal product launches or post-purchase for complementary items.
- Create unboxing moments that include tissue paper, stickers, or mini-cards that encourage social sharing.
- Follow up digitally with email five to seven days post-delivery with reviews, how-to content, and purchase incentives.
- Test sample sizes to find the sweet spot between cost and impact (typically, a three-to-seven-day supply works best).





## REFERRAL MAILERS

# Idea 7

## Refer-a-Friend

Activate your fanbase as ambassadors by mailing a referral kit—with dual-sided cards, gift certificates, or shareable codes for both sender and recipient. Physical referral programs see four times higher participation than do digital-only versions.



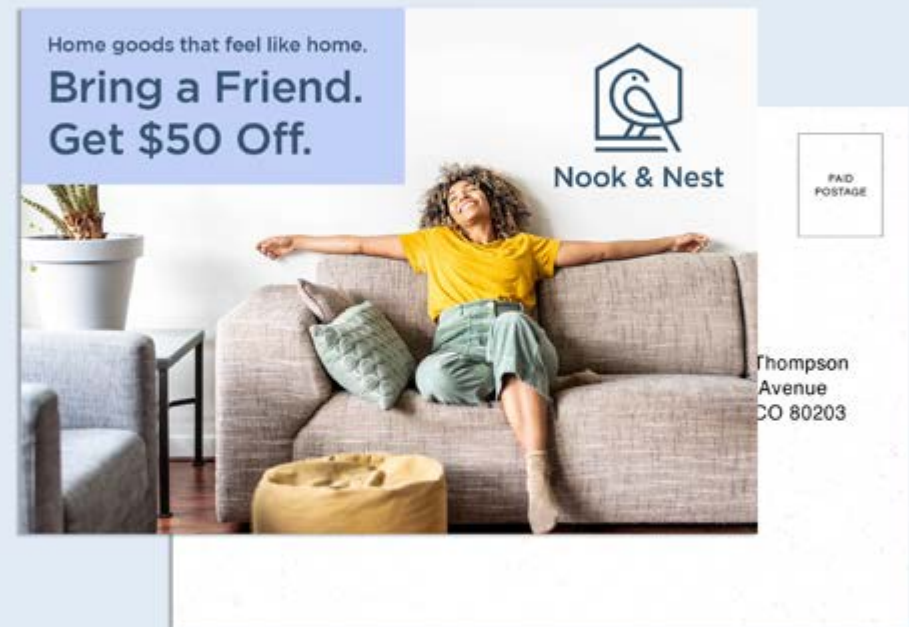
### WHY IT WORKS

People are 65 percent more likely to act on referrals when there's a physical element to pass along. Mailers spark conversations, foster gift-giving psychology, and slice through digital fatigue. Referred customers have 37 percent higher retention rates and 25 percent higher lifetime value.



### PRO TIPS

- Include two physical elements—"One for you, one for a friend!"—each with clear, equal value (\$10 to \$20 works well).
- Perforated cards, gift-card-style carriers, or mini-envelopes are designed for easy handoff provide shareability.
- Personalize strategically by using the customer's first name and purchase history to suggest perfect recipients.
- Create urgency with 30-to-60-day expiration dates (but be generous with extensions if asked).
- Track meticulously with unique codes for referrer and referee to measure program ROI.
- Layer incentives with, say, immediate rewards for sharing plus a bonus when a friend purchases.
- Follow up digitally asking, "Did you share your gift?" reminders at seven and 14 days to boost participation by 40 percent.



## INVITATIONS

# Idea 8

## Event or Pop-Up

Invite top shoppers or local customers to store openings, VIP sales, in-person activations, or exclusive online experiences with a premium printed invitation. Physical invites drive 25 to 40 percent higher attendance than does digital-only.



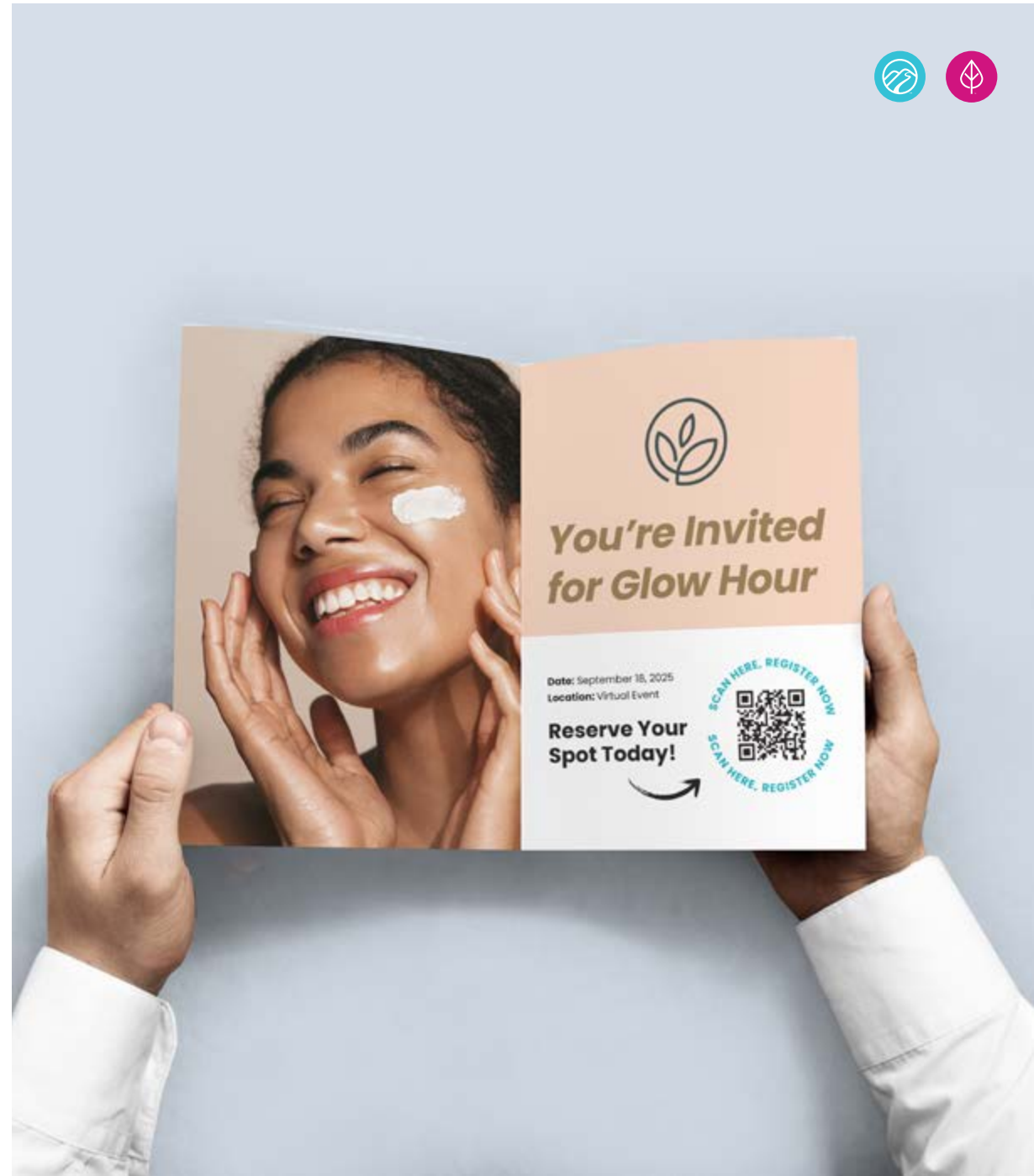
### WHY IT WORKS

Physical invites are displayed 73 percent of the time (fridges, desks, bulletin boards), creating ongoing reminders. They signal exclusivity and value, with recipients two and a half times more likely to share the event with friends.



### PRO TIPS

- Mail two to three weeks before events (local) or four to six weeks (requiring travel/planning).
- Use premium touches that match event prestige—from foil stamping and letterpress to unique shapes or wax seals.
- Include all details clearly, including date, time, location/URL, dress code, parking, and what to expect.
- Create easy RSVP with a QR code to registration page, text-to-RSVP number, or included reply card.
- Highlight exclusives such as limited-edition products, meet-the-founder/CEO opportunities, gift-with-purchase, first access, etc.
- Follow up post-event to thank attendees and non-attendees with special offers to maintain momentum.



## ECOFRIENDLY MAIL

# Idea 9

## Sustainability & Mission Message

Showcase your brand's values with a mailer devoted to sustainability initiatives, ethical sourcing, or community impact. Values-driven marketing increases purchase intent by 73 percent among millennials and Gen Z.



### WHY IT WORKS

A values-led physical message builds authenticity and trust more effectively than do digital claims. Including tangible proof of impact creates emotional connection—sustainable brands see 28 percent higher customer retention.



### PRO TIPS

- Walk the talk and use 100 percent recycled paper, vegetable inks, or plantable seed paper.
- Visualize impact with infographics showing “2,000 trees saved” or “500 pounds of ocean plastic removed.”
- Create action by inviting recipients to join sustainability challenges or return packaging for rewards.
- Share authentic “green” stories from suppliers, employees, or community partners (with photos).
- Create collectability via a series of eco-tips cards, seasonal sustainability guides, or progress updates.
- Partner strategically and co-mail with complementary sustainable brands to share costs and expand reach.
- Measure beyond sales by tracking email sign-ups, social follows, and program participation for the full ROI picture.





## GIFT GUIDES

# Idea 10

## Seasonal Gifts

Send a visually striking gift guide ahead of key shopping periods—holidays, Mother’s Day, back-to-school, etc.—featuring curated product selections and exclusive mail-only offers. Physical gift guides drive 45 percent higher average order values than do digital versions.



### WHY IT WORKS

Physical catalogs have an average lifespan of 20-plus days in homes, providing ongoing inspiration. Exclusive offers create urgency, while curation reduces decision fatigue—both key during busy shopping seasons.



### PRO TIPS

- Mail four to six weeks before peak shopping (earlier for international customers).
- Segment deeply to create versions for different personas, price points, or regions.
- Curate thoughtfully and organize by recipient (“For the Home Chef”), occasion, or price range.
- Include gift services such as wrapping options, gift messages, or direct shipping to recipients.
- Feature urgency drivers that include shipping deadlines, “while supplies last” callouts, early-bird specials.
- Create exclusive value with mail-only bundles, free gift-wrap codes, or bonus loyalty points.
- Design for “keeping” by including recipes, styling tips, or seasonal content that extends guide lifespan.
- Enable easy ordering with prominent phone number, QR codes to mobile-optimized landing pages, quick-order forms.



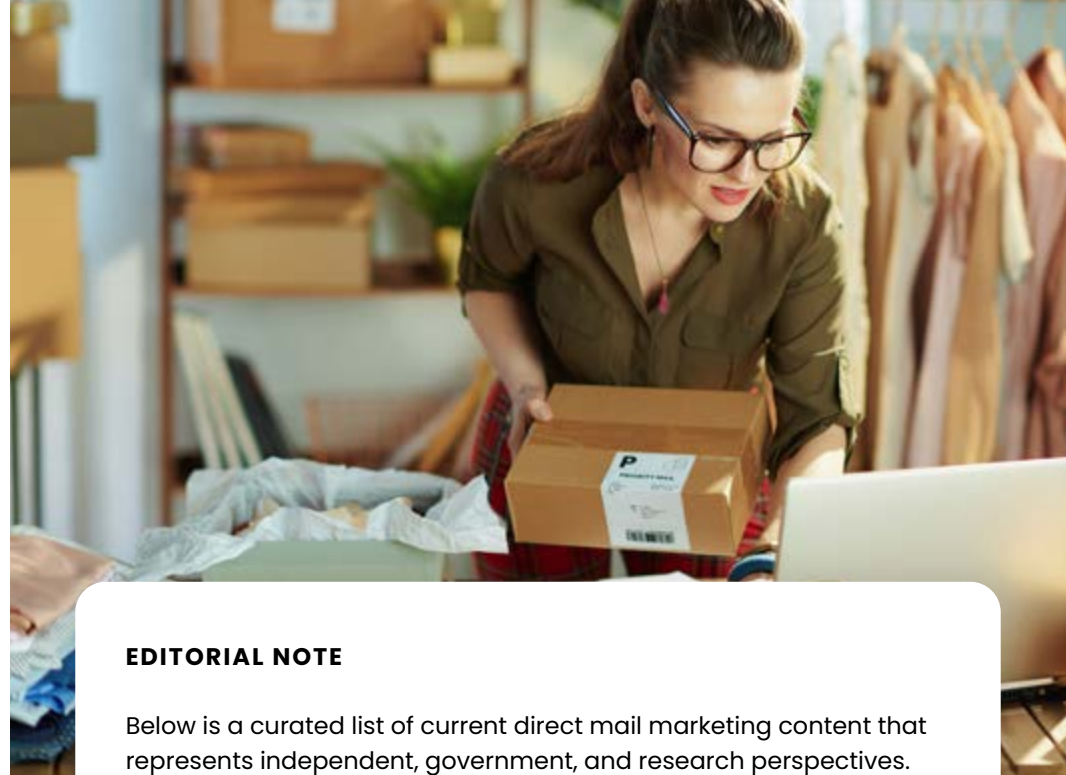
# Conclusion

Direct mail delivers what digital never quite can: a sense of substance and surprise, a moment of delight in the everyday, and, above all, a genuine connection between your brand and your customer. Retailers that integrate direct mail into the marketing mix can transform ordinary touchpoints into memorable experiences that drive action and loyalty.

But it's not about sending the most mail; it's about sending the right piece at the right moment. In an age where digital communications are skimmed and forgotten, physical mail is opened, noticed, and kept—creating opportunities to inspire, inform, and activate every segment of your audience. Direct mail's tangible presence cuts through digital fatigue, sparks emotional engagement, and reinforces your value proposition in a crowded marketplace.

So, embrace the unique strengths of direct mail. The retail and ecommerce brands that do will find not just higher response rates and greater ROI, but enduring customer loyalty and buzz that digital channels alone rarely achieve. Choose your campaign, define your goal, and begin—you'll soon see how the mailbox can become a launchpad for brand growth, loyalty, and meaningful customer engagement.

***“The retail and ecommerce brands that embrace direct mail will find higher response rates, greater ROI, and enduring customer loyalty beyond what digital-only channels achieve.”***



## EDITORIAL NOTE

Below is a curated list of current direct mail marketing content that represents independent, government, and research perspectives. Many of the statistics that appear in this e-book have been culled from these industry sources.

<https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/direct-mail-advertising-global-market-report>

<https://www.uspsdelivers.com/best-ways-industries-use-mail-infographic/>

<https://www.uspsdelivers.com/2020-2021-generational-research-report/>

[https://www.pb.com/docs/US/pdf/Microsite/Nonprofit/ed\\_np\\_getyourmailopened\\_05MailMoment.pdf](https://www.pb.com/docs/US/pdf/Microsite/Nonprofit/ed_np_getyourmailopened_05MailMoment.pdf)

<https://www.uspsdelivers.com/direct-mail-report-by-industry-infographic/>

<https://www.usps.com/business/pdf/informed-delivery-year-review.pdf>

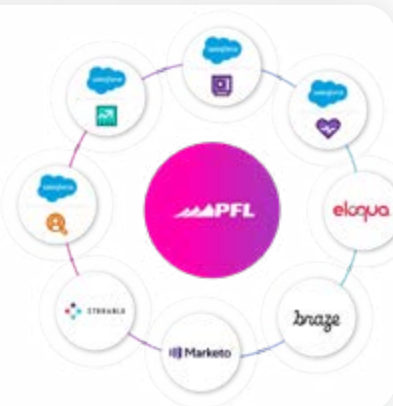
<https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/advertising/direct-messaging-advertising/direct-mail-advertising/united-states>

# Maximize Your Impact

For maximum effectiveness, consider these key principles as you implement your direct mail strategy:

- **Integration is essential.** The most successful campaigns don't exist in isolation but, instead, create seamless connections between your physical mail and digital channels. QR codes, personalized URLs, and clear online calls-to-action can transform a simple mailer into the starting point of a comprehensive donor journey.
- **Measurement drives improvement.** Track response rates, donation amounts, and engagement metrics for each campaign to understand what resonates most with your audience. Organizations that consistently measure results can refine their approach over time, leading to increasingly effective campaigns.
- **Real stories create real impact.** Throughout this guide, we've emphasized the power of storytelling. The brands that achieve the greatest success with direct mail are those that share authentic stories of transformation and impact, creating emotional connections that inspire action.
- **Testing reveals opportunity.** Even small changes in messaging, design elements, or timing can significantly affect your results. Consider testing different approaches—perhaps comparing two versions of a mailing or experimenting with various seasonal themes—to discover what works best for your unique audience.
- **Budgets need not be barriers.** While some formats might require greater investment than others, effective direct mail campaigns can be designed for organizations of all sizes and budgets. Start with simpler formats, such as postcards or letters, then expand your approach as you demonstrate positive returns.

PFL's technology seamlessly integrates with your CRM/MAP, allowing you to easily incorporate direct mail into customer journeys and other engagement programs for personalized and communication. If you are not ready for such automation, we can help you build personalized direct mail experiences without the use of technology across the customer journey that create interest and engagement to support your mission.



This in-depth guide will be your go-to resource for mastering direct mail in 2025 and beyond.

[Download Now](#)



Direct mail remains a powerful marketing tool because it creates a tangible connection. Here's a look at how to harness its power and integrate it into broader marketing strategies for optimal results.

[Download Now](#)

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# Who We Are

## About PFL

PFL, a leading direct mail technology company, increases engagement for brands with their key audiences, using data to automate direct mail and create more authentic human experiences at infinite scale. PFL delivers personalized direct mail programs that are measurable and relevant so organizations can earn attention and amplify growth.

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## About Vomela

The Vomela Companies is a full-service, specialty graphics provider comprised of printing specialists across North America. We create visual solutions. A St. Paul, Minnesota, company since 1947, The Vomela Companies moved into a new 300,000 square foot headquarters on St. Paul's Eastside in 2019. What began as a small die-cutting business has grown to a nationwide visual communications powerhouse – offering services from design, prototyping, project management, production, fabricating, installation, and kitting and packaging.

READY TO GIVE YOUR ENGAGEMENT A BOOST?

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