



The Mail Moment – Circa 2026

Our Hour Together

- **Why mail matters**
 - Proof points from MIT, USPS, and users
- **What matters in mail**
 - The UX experience
 - Case studies





Digital Detox

Digital natives becoming expats for mail

- **Cuts through digital clutter** with a quieter mailbox
- **Feels less intrusive**
- **Higher open/read rates** than digital
- **More memorable & longer-lasting** –tangible “shelf life”
- **More trusted AND drives digital action**



USPS Household Survey – Effectiveness of Advertising Mail

- **Very likely** to respond to
 - to **19% of Nonprofit Marketing Mail**
 - **15% of First-Class Mail**
 - **12% of Commercial Marketing Mail**
- **Very likely** to respond to **14%** of all advertising
 - **Somewhat likely** to respond to **15%**
 - **Unlikely** to respond to **71%**





MIT Sloan – Digital fatigue exhausting consumers

- Tactile experiences break through noise
- Less cognitive effort to process physical objects but stronger emotional responses
- New attribution technologies

Direct mail can achieve impressive engagement and persist for days on a kitchen counter . . . a banner ad disappears as a user scrolls past it



**Mail is less a step backward than a carefully
orchestrated leap toward a more holistic,
human-centered marketing ecosystem**

THE UX EXPERIENCE OF MAIL

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UX isn't the last mile. It's the whole road.

“Our sport is a data-driven sport, but data doesn't make decisions, people do.”

Toto Wolff, Mercedes F1 Team Principal and CEO

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE BEYOND BIG DATA

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Demographics vs. Psychographics

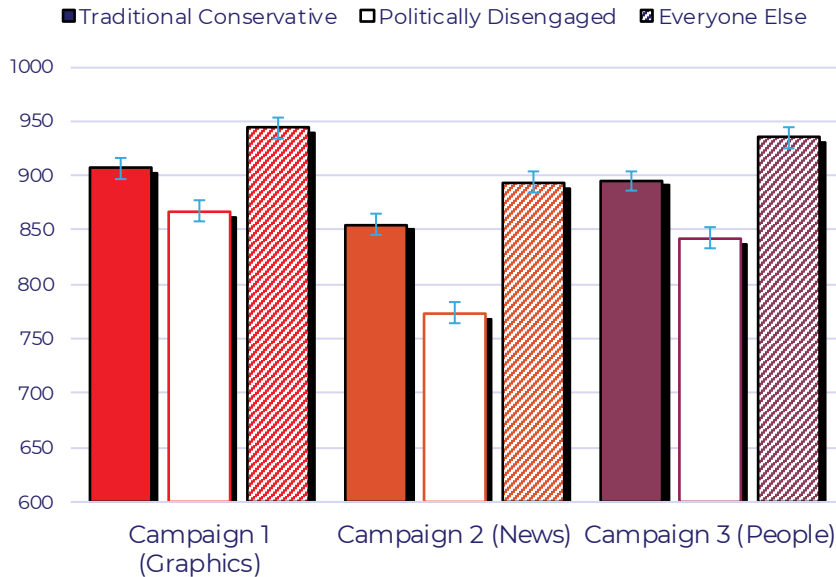
- Demographics describe **who**
- Psychographics describe **why**
- Real segmentation **drives strategy** — not just description



Case Study: Bridging Political Divides

- *Project:* Tested three campaign concepts across the political spectrum
- N = 3,600
- **Three psychographic segments:** instrument adapted from published research
 - Defining the “Exhausted Majority”
- Six billboards, six print ads, eleven attributes, max-diff comparison

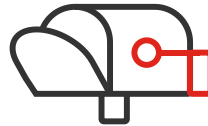
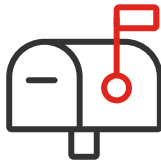
Findings: Demographics Silent, Psychographics Loud



- Demographics: no significant effects detected
- Psychographics: 81-point gap on News campaign
- People-focused executions performed well across all groups, but performed especially well with the Politically Disengaged audience who were especially turned off by News-focused executions.

Findings: Demographics Silent, Psychographics Loud

- The hardest-to-reach audience loses to the wrong execution entirely
- The right execution closes the gap





STORYTELLING THAT RESONATES – AND TESTED



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Storytelling Principles

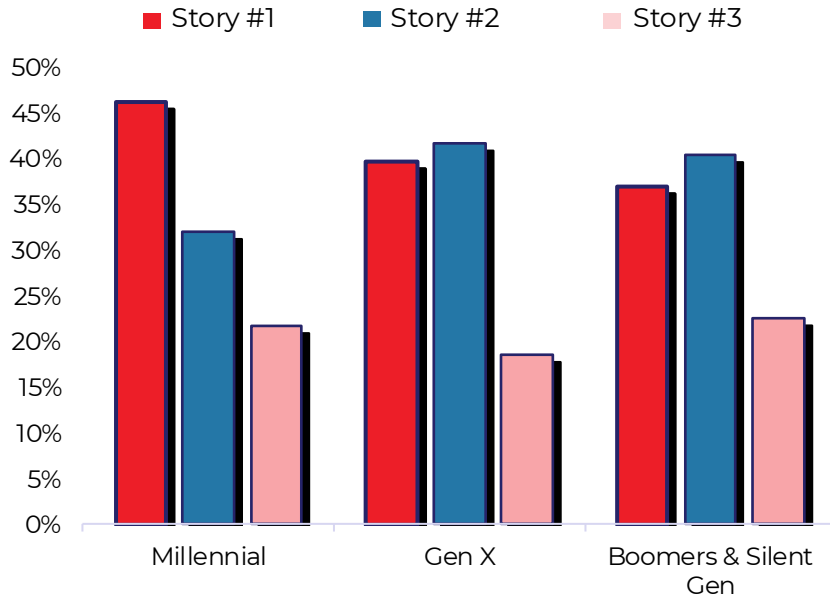
- **Narrative transportation:** I get pulled into the story (deeply)
- **Identification** – I see myself in the stories told
 - One face beats a number
- Identity over action: "be a voter" > "vote"
- A/B is the floor, not the ceiling



Case Study: Heart-Health Stories

- *Project:* Three survivor stories — which one should the client move forward with in an upcoming campaign
 - New story from a recent connection
 - Story that executive leadership really liked due to strong social media presence
- N = 1,506
- 13 storytelling attributes
- Forced-choice comparisons across all three

Findings: No Population Winner/Demographic Splits



- Population-level: no statistically significant difference
- Story 1 (African American man, family loss): 62% relatable, driven by African American respondents and Millennial women
- Story 2 (white father, valve surgery): won urgency and clarity with Boomers and Silent Generation
- Story 3 (Influencer for Client): lost across nearly every segment

Takeaway: Which Story to Whom

- The right question isn't which story we send, it's which story we send to which individuals.

A man with a beard is shown from the chest up, wearing a light-colored sweater over a collared shirt. He is holding and reading a document. The background is dark and features a futuristic digital overlay with glowing red and white lines, graphs, and data points. The overall mood is professional and forward-looking.

THE UX OF MAIL ITSELF

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Physical Channel Principles

- **Mail is the only physical channel**
- **Touching** = ownership (haptics, endowment effect)
- **Easy to read** = trusted (processing fluency)
- **Peak-end memory**: design for moments



Case Study: Asset Testing

- *Project:* A 7-year control package no challenger had beaten
- **New approach:** stop redesigning the package, evaluate the imagery
- 60+ images tested against neurophysiological measures
- **New creative premise:** "45 Minutes to Change a Life"

Findings: A New Control to Beat



Component	Long-Standing Control	Lab Driven Package
Outer Envelope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relied on one child image to compel donors to open the envelope Entire back of envelope focused on celebrity endorsement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverages multiple strong images that demonstrate clear need and includes clear and compelling facts Removed celebrity
Letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Storytelling focused more on a factual recap of the organization Impact focused on one country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centered storytelling on emotional co-founder story Demonstrated international need and gift impact Removed celebrity
Label Form & Reply Device	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveraged direct mail tactics to secure gift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased personalization to strengthen donor relationship

+23%
Response Rate

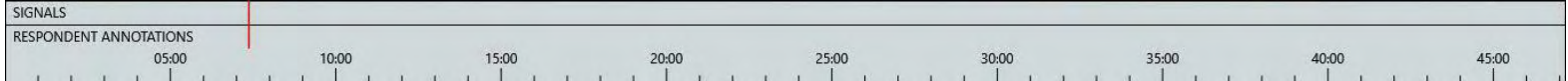
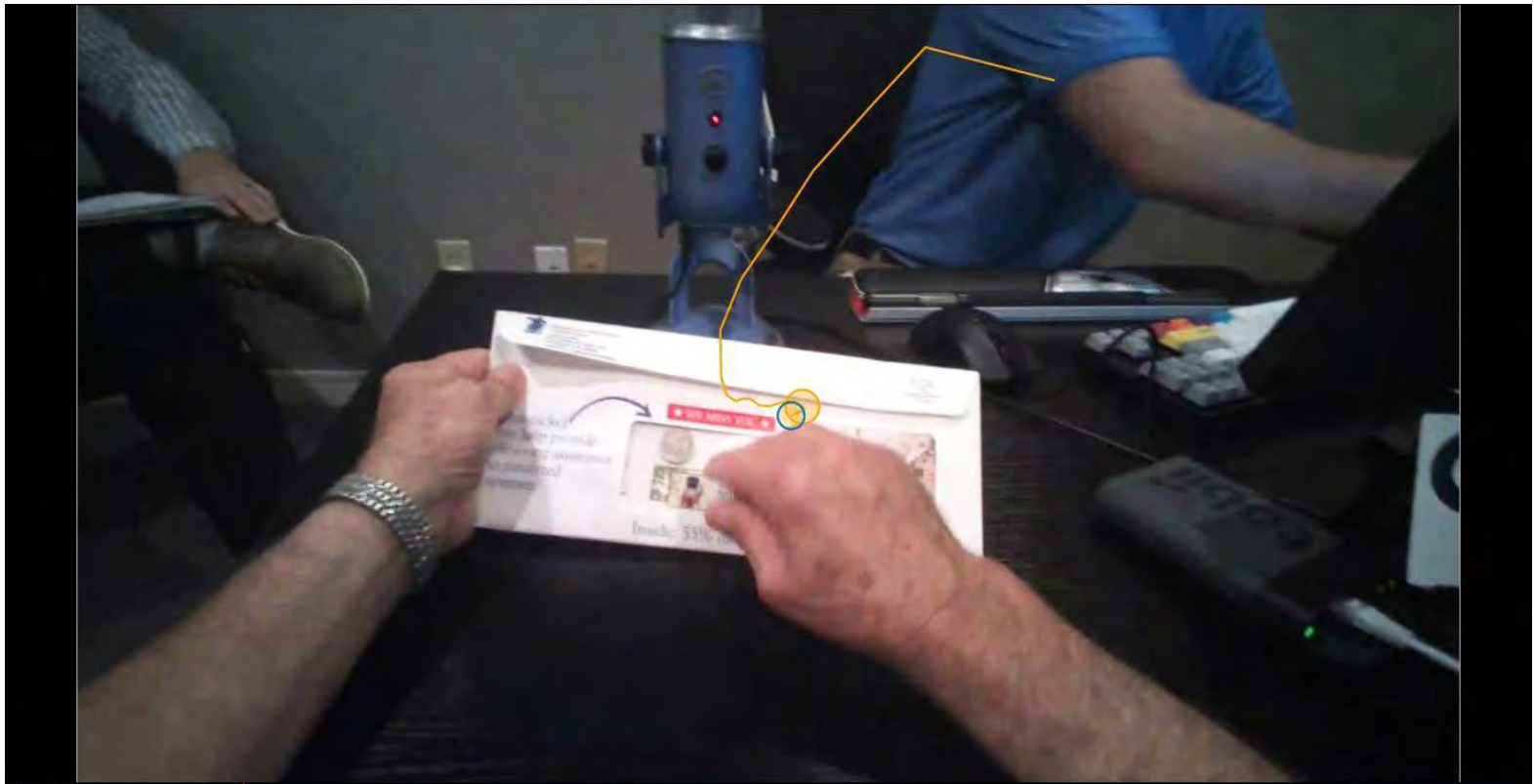
+21%
Average Gift

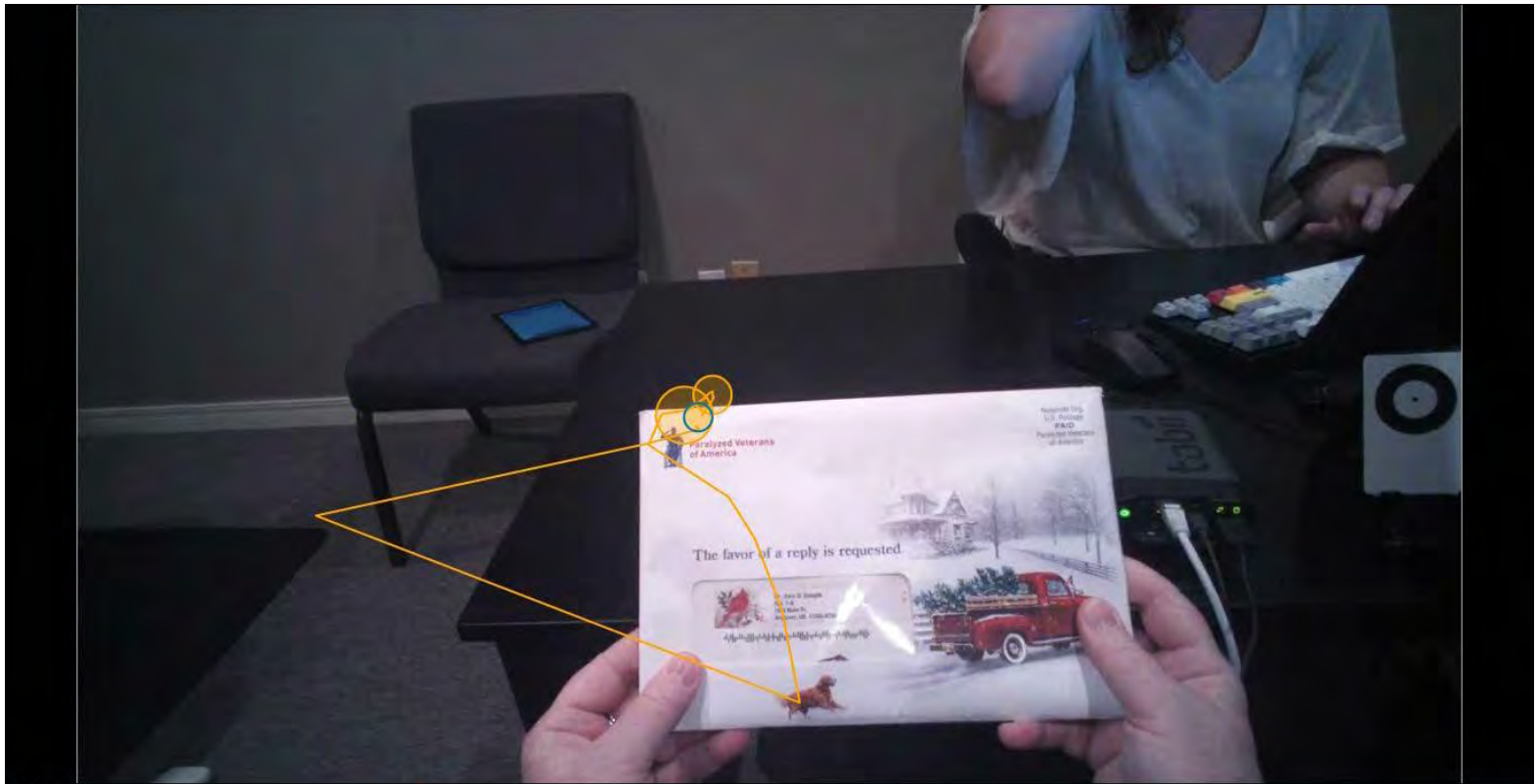
-18%
Cost to Acquire



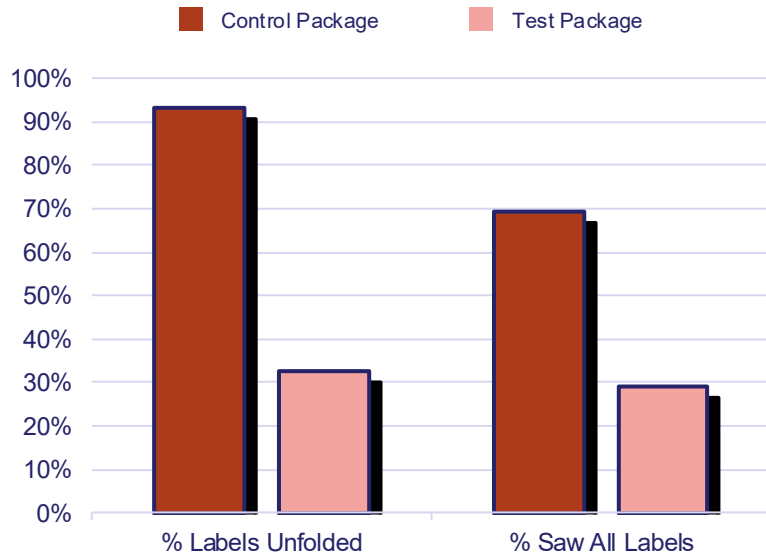
Case Study: Package UX Testing

- *Project:* Control package vs. elevated execution with double-sided unfold labels
- Real-world Tobii eye-tracking, in-home, unguided
- Structured follow-up after open
- The real question: what is the recipient actually doing?





Case Study: Package UX Testing



- **Test condition:** significantly less likely to unfold the labels at all
- Among those who did: significantly lower engagement
- Effect spilled over: weaker overall impression of the whole package
- Takeaway: "Premium" is not a UX strategy

The Mail Moment is a Made Moment

- Mail still works — and the research tells us why
- Audience: segment on what drives behavior, not what's on the file
- Story: the right story to the right person, not the best story to everyone
- Package: design the experience, not just the asset
- The moment in someone's hands is engineered weeks before it happens





Thank You!

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