

A buyer's guide for ecommerce marketing teams

How Online Retailers Choose Direct Mail Partners

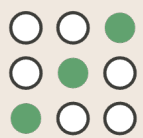
What separates a direct mail partner who can prove their results from one who's just asking you to trust the process.

Every online retailer running direct mail says it's working. Fewer can prove it.

That gap usually comes down to the partner, not the medium. A strong direct mail vendor shows their work – transparent 1:1 attribution, custom targeting, and a campaign to campaign strategy that optimizes over time. A weak one just asks you to trust the process.

Here's what to check before you sign.

Three questions worth asking any direct mail companies you're evaluating



Attribution

Can they prove their campaign results through clear campaign measurement?



Targeting

Are they building truly custom targeting or using a one-size-fits all approach?



Strategy

Do they have a custom, personalized strategy for your brand to keep optimizing over time?

The next three pages cover what a strong answer looks like.



Attribution

Direct mail attribution is where most vendor pitches fall apart under pressure. You want accurate, 1:1 measurement of your campaign results. Look for:

- Matchback reporting that ties purchases back to the mail file — not just promo codes
- A clearly defined attribution window.
- A real, randomized holdout group, so you can see what the incremental value of the campaign is.
- Live Reporting with metrics past response rate: conversion rate, average order value, cost per acquisition, ROAS

Ask directly:

“Do you offer free holdout testing and matchback reporting, and is it a truly fair methodology?”



Audience targeting

Direct mail is only as good as who receives it. This is where vendors cut corners. Look for:

- Audiences built from your first-party data - past purchasers, cart abandoners, best customers - not a rented generic list
- Lookalike modeling based on your actual buyers, not a generic ecommerce persona
- Suppression and hygiene before every drop: recent purchasers, do-not-mail requests, bad addresses
- House file and prospecting file reported separately, so you know which is earning its budget

Ask directly:

“Can I see a sample audience brief for a campaign like mine?”



Campaign Strategy

Don't trust a partner who says they have a single playbook for direct mail that always works. Your brand is unique and needs a custom approach.

- Clearly defined creative & targeting tests, so you can always be optimizing for the future.
- Industry knowledge on what's worked for brands in your vertical specifically.
- Transparent analysis of performance, not just surface level hype.
- Benchmarks against comparable ecommerce and digital brands, not just your own history

Ask directly:

“What did you take into account to build this proposal, and how will we continue optimizing over time?”

Before you sign

Red flags

Signs a vendor won't hold up once the contract's signed.

- ✗ “We'll talk about attribution once we're live.”
- ✗ We don't do holdout groups - every report reads as a win with nothing to compare it to
- ✗ Pure response rate is the only metric on the report
- ✗ One generic playbook, regardless of your category
- ✗ A long-term contract before you've seen a single test result

Save this

The quick-scan checklist

Run through this before your next vendor call.

- ☐ Matchback reporting with a defined attribution window

- ☐ A real holdout group for incrementality testing

- ☐ Audiences built from your first-party data

- ☐ Suppression and hygiene before every drop

- ☐ Live reporting with CPA, ROAS, and AOV - not just response rate

- ☐ A sample dashboard and audience brief before you sign

We built Share Local Media around data and measurement.

Every campaign we run is built on matchback reporting and real incrementality testing - for ecommerce and digital brands who want a direct mail vendor that shows its work. No long-term contract required to find out how we'd report on your first campaign.

[Let's talk direct mail](#)

