How Important is Direct Mail in Attracting New Patients?

by Dr. Dustin S. Burleson
I ask my orthodontic partners in crime – Do you want your business to succeed? Do you market your orthodontic practice by using email or text only? Do you think this is the way the world works now and are following suit? Well, I’m here to tell you that couldn’t be farther from the truth. In today’s generation of millennials, we are consumed by digital media. In essence, this means that using direct mail to send a unique and engaging message could be one of the most powerful things you can do for your business. Because of the steady and growing decline in direct mail marketing campaigns, there is now a strong indication that using this strategy could put your business that much farther ahead. Not to mention, research has shown that direct mail marketing is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to go. You want to reach your customers not only this way, but across multiple channels, for the best effect. Let’s discuss the benefits of direct mailing and combining it with those other channels.

**Reaching your Customers**

The capability of really reaching your customers is one of the hardest things you will encounter in marketing. Think about how much spam mail is deleted on a daily basis. The U.S. Postal Services says that “98% of their customers collect their mail every single day, and 77% of them go through it immediately.” Therefore, they are much more likely to see your direct mail as opposed to email or text, which gets deleted or ignored on a daily basis. Having said that, use this chance to showcase a “special” you are conducting, or a sale or event – then direct the customer to your website for more information. Two birds, one stone.

**Reminding your Customers of your Solid Relationship with Them**

Direct mail is essential to reminding the customer that they already have a great relationship with you and have no need to go elsewhere. Every now and again, send them a coupon or an informational report or packet to keep their interest and remind them that “it may be time to make an appointment”. This is one of the most effective ways to keep a long-term relationship. You could use different forms of mailings such as: birthday
cards, holiday greetings, and a monthly newsletter informing them of anything new and upcoming within the practice. Clients love to see interest, motivation and innovation. Keep them informed and curious about what your practice is up to. Make it interesting and something worth passing along.

**Gaining Information**

This is also a highly effective way to gain useful information from your clients, whether they are new or long-standing. Send out a questionnaire. Ask for opinions and suggestions. Also update your records with their email, phone and other useful information that could be outdated. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope whenever possible. It is more likely to be returned and can give you a world of insight on your business, it’s service strengths and opportunities for growth.

**Statistics**

Listen, statistics speak for themselves. Let’s take a look at the most recent direct mail stats:

- 79% of consumers acted on direct mail immediately after receiving
- 40% of clients said they tried a new business as a result of receiving direct mail
- 70% of clients renewed previously-ended relationships after receiving direct mail

And, I’m confident that these numbers are growing every day, and as the world becomes more and more stricken with digital everything, personalization and showing up as a category of one, via direct mail, becomes more and more effective. For clients who are currently so consumed with this digital world, it has become a known fact that receiving something via direct mail stands out much more than its digital counterpart.

**Important – Don’t Forget Quality Control**

I can’t say this enough. It is extremely important not to disappoint your customers or embarrass your company with poorly written or poorly designed content. Prior to sending out any mailings, and this goes for digital also, be sure to check that it is 100% correct and factual and proofread for grammar and spelling. Then, send it to yourself in the mail and see how it shows up in your mailbox. Are the edges torn? Did the post office put a barcode label directly over your website or phone number? Does the piece travel well and how is it received on the other end? These are all critical questions to answer before you send a large mail campaign.

**The Bottom Line – People love to get mail!**

No kidding. Nowadays, people love to get tangible mail in their mailboxes. Even the younger generations love it. They have grown up in an age where they are constantly on social media and mobile sites and apps, but according to recent research, they actually like and prefer old-fashioned direct mail. It is said that the experience of “touching” the physical mail, as opposed to reading the digital, gives the customer a better chance at remembering what they read. This is simply because it produces more emotion, has a personal effect, and hence aids in motivation to respond. Not to mention, when the physical mail is put down – it often remains with a physical presence in the house to remind the consumer of the message and why it resonated with them.
4 Great Tips for Creating Your Direct Mail Campaign

1. **Understand Your Target Customers** – You want to begin by knowing your basic customer demographics, such as – male/female/age/ consumer spending category, etc. This is key in your direct marketing target audience. However, having a more complete understanding of your target customers profile will enhance your effectiveness in both your lead selection and the message you send to those leads. For instance, you should learn as much as you can about your target customers shopping and purchase style, their lifestyle habits, and attitudes towards trends, products, media and marketing. We recommend building a “lookalike audience” by having a professional list broker evaluate at list of your 200 or 300 best patients (pay in full, referral, multiple kids in treatment) and run their addresses against a national database where you can find a list of 10,000 or 20,000 or more consumers in your market that have similar demographics.

2. **Targeting Your Ideal Customers** – Okay, great! Now that you have a good understanding of your target audience, let’s move on to targeting them. Building a targeted direct mailing list can be extremely beneficial. Although it can be expensive, it will prove to give you the best response rate and produce future loyal customers. In the past, the idea behind this was to mail to as many people as possible, hoping to reach your target audience in masses (this was called “mass marketing”). However, businesses are now changing that way of thinking. Why waste paper and postage on people who are not even potential customers? Instead of mass marketing, we want to “target market” by targeting just the leads who will buy through effective headlines, offers and images that resonate with that group only. For example, its far better to send a campaign with a single message to moms of young children than it is to send one that has this feature or benefit listed as one of many features your practice offers. Results are...
significantly higher when the message resonates so well with the target audience that they feel the piece was written specifically to them, for them, about them. Compare this to the general message you see in most advertising that the business or product does “everything under the sun” and offers a whole bunch of services, so “call now.” Far more effective to show someone interested in gardening the features and benefits your product or service has as it relates to making a gardener’s life easier than it is to list “gardening” amongst a list of many areas where your product or service can be used. Don’t say, “Invisalign and braces for teens, children and adults.” Instead, make a campaign specifically for adult Invisalign and another specifically for teen braces. Your results will be dramatic, compared to using the “shotgun” approach of trying to hit everyone with one message and one campaign.

**Picking a Mailing List Type** – I cannot emphasize enough the importance of direct mailing lists to the success of your direct mail campaign. Your most valued prospects will be contained within this list. There are different categories of mailing lists that you can choose from, which differ according to cost and the appropriateness of your market. Be sure to do your research and analyze which type is best for your business. The three types to consider are as follows:

- **Specialty List** – This list allows you to identify your target audience.
- **Custom Mailing List** – This list allows you to select the customer criteria that meets your needs.
- **Cloned List** – This list allows you to find customers similar to your best current customers.

**Create Your Mailing Message** – Now comes the time to create your direct mailing message. Keep in mind that this message will speak volumes about who you are and what you are all about. Be sure that your message is consistent with what you are selling. You want to make sure that your mailing is high quality, otherwise you cannot push a high quality professional service.

**Direct Marketing Mail Secrets You Need to Try**

*Give Your Direct Mail Another Use* – This means, put your message on a calendar, or a shopping list notepad, something to this effect. If the customer can reuse your mailing, it will not only spark their attention, but it will also be on hand at all times. Smart!

*Open Up With Your Proposition* – Basically, millennials do not trust brands or years of experience in a business or service category. They listen to how things benefit them and their goals. Get right to the point in your opening sentence, and catch their attention easily.

*Throw Something In With It* – It is a known fact that people are more likely to open a “lumpy” envelope, even just out of curiosity alone. Add something into your direct mailing which is relevant to your business, and the likelihood of getting your mail opened is much higher. Note: This would include product samples, pens, etc.

*Be Creative* – Be as creative as possible, even if it means hiring someone to create your message. We often mail our “message in a bottle”. Imagine the surprise on the patient’s face when they get a bottle in the mail with a message rolled up inside. Remember, quality before quantity. Spend more on the product and send to less people if necessary, but getting your message across by being creative will almost always get you a huge return.

*Use a Stamp/Handwriting Font* – Make your direct mailing look more personal by using a stamp and a font which appears to be personal handwriting, or hire a marketing team to actually hand-write and address your envelopes. People like to think you are personally directing your message to them.
Using a Map – Maps are becoming more and more popular with direct mail marketing when it comes to a company move or a grand opening. Create a map with a “you are here” point (where the customer is located) and “we are here” point (where you will be located). A customer is much more likely to see that as a personalization and want to visit you.

Testimonials – Make your testimonials real, written by real patients. Use their picture, full name with address and occupation, and place it smack dab in the middle of the mailing as opposed to the end. People love to see that you have happy clients, and happy clients love to write great testimonials!

Social Media and Icons – In our digital age, social media symbols are everywhere. Calls to action such as visiting a URL, calling a telephone number, mailing to a specific address, following on Twitter or Facebook, etc. are becoming increasingly more common. Just be careful not to overuse symbols and to be aware that taking consumers from an off-line media like direct mail to an on-line media like Twitter or Facebook risks losing the attention span of the consumer you worked so hard to establish. We recommend pushing to on-line media that continues the conversation but in a controlled environment until the desired action is taken and then giving the consumer the option to share information or news with a friend or family member via social

Let’s take a look at some direct mail marketing stats for 2016 that may surprise you:

- People are not opening emails, but do sort through physical mail
- 98% of Americans check their mail every day
- Approximately 66% of people have bought something because of direct mail
- People still feel that direct mail is more personal than the internet
- Physical mail leaves an imprint in the brain
- People spend at least 30 minutes per day reading their physical mail
- People enjoy receiving direct mail
Below are 18 Statistics You Should Probably Know About Direct Mail Marketing:

The Benefits of Direct Mail Marketing and Print:

1. Fifty-Six Percent (56%) of customers think that direct mail marketing is the most dependable of the marketing networks.
2. In the category of 18 to 24-year-olds, sixty-nine percent (69%) state that they definitely favor direct mailing & paper communications as opposed to reading it off of a screen.

Mail Habits/Preference:

3. Ninety-Eight Percent (98%) of customers state they bring the mail in the day it is delivered and Seventy-Seven Percent (77%) sort through it instantly.
4. Customers spend an average of thirty (30) minutes reading their mail at any given time.
5. Seventy Percent (70%) of Americans state that printed mail is much more personal as opposed to the internet
6. Seventy-Three Percent (73%) of United States patrons state that they would prefer direct mail for brand communications since they can read it at their own convenience.
7. Fifty-Nine Percent (59%) of United States patrons agreed with the following statement, “I enjoy getting postal mail from brands about new products.”
8. Fifty-Six Percent (56%) of postcards are read by their direct mail recipients. This makes postcards the most read direct mail.
9. Forty-Eight Percent (48%) of individuals keep their direct mail for future reference.

Direct Mail Response:

10. Seventy-Nine Percent (79%) of customers will act accordingly on direct mail instantly, which is compared to a mere Forty-Five Percent (45%) who state that they deal with email instantly.
11. Seventy-Six Percent (76%) of Americans state that they have been swayed to buy something by direct mail.
12. Direct mail response rates are still currently topping those of other means, and, in fact, the typical direct mail response rate is 1.1-1.4% compared to .03% for email,.04% for internet display and .22% for a paid search.
13. Targeted B2B direct mail marketing has a response rate of 4.4% which is practically 37 times more than that of email (12%).
14. Fifty-Six Percent (56%) of customers state that they have tried a new business after getting direct mail from them, while Seventy Percent (70%) have reintroduced former relationships with businesses
15. Forty-Four Percent (44%) of individuals stated that they visited a brand’s website after receiving direct mail from them; Thirty-Four Percent (34%) searched online.
16. Between the years 2004 & 2014, direct mail response rates amplified by Fourteen Percent (14%), while email response rates dropped by Fifty-Seven Percent (57%).
17. Cost-Per-Acquisition for direct mail is extremely competitive. Direct mail stands at $19.00, which is favorable with mobile and social (at $16.00-18.00), paid search ($21.00-30.00), internet display ($41.00-50.00) and email ($11.00-15.00).
18. Approximately 1 in 5 people will throw away unopened direct mailings. Some of the top reasons stated are: Fifty-Five Percent (55%) are not interested in the product, Forty-Nine Percent (49%) were not interested in the company, & Forty-Four Percent (44%) do not like being marketed to.
The numbers show it but no one talks about it – Millennials love direct mail. Please read the following testimonial from Hannah Cupples, a high school student.

"I’m going into my senior year of high school which means I’m approaching a pretty significant part of my life: applying to college. I cannot even express how many emails, brochures, packages, booklets, and letters I have received trying to get me to look at the respective school. I know I’m not the only one, millions of students nationwide have been or are in my shoes. I am overwhelmed by the amount of colleges that have been trying to reach me, and to be honest, it gets kind of annoying sometimes, especially the emails. The truth is that I am more likely to look at a school if they send me something in the mail. Unless it is a school I was already highly interested in, I usually move the emails to the trash bin without even opening them.

The mail is a different story though. I like getting letters and pamphlets filled with pictures of the campus and explaining what the school has to offer. Even if I’m not interested in the school, I usually take time to open them and read what they have to say before I tear them up and throw them in the trash.

There you have it, a personal example of how direct mail was more effective in reaching a Millennial as opposed to email. But wait, there’s more!

That’s just college though, I do the same thing when it comes to receiving offers from my favorite stores. If I get a coupon in the mail, I’ll use it. If it comes in an email, I probably wouldn’t even know it existed because I already deleted it. I’m just one in millions though: 73% of Millennials are like me and use direct mail coupons when making purchases.

Unfortunately, this generation is often stereotyped as self-centered and always seeking out attention and approval. I personally am not a fan of this stereotype as there are plenty of people out there who are far from it, but at the same time, I can see the reasoning behind it. I feel it can be seen in our social media
obsession. It’s undeniable that we’re kind of screaming for attention when we are constantly posting pictures of ourselves and posting about our personal lives multiple times a day. Looking at this, I can completely see how older generations see us as self-centered.

Yet, when I stopped and thought about it, I can see how direct mail’s success among Millennials is partially a result of our self-obsession. It’s as if mail channels our conceit. So in a sense, our self-obsession works to the advantage of direct mail marketers. Millennials are so consumed in the digital world that getting something in the mail stands out. While we’re probably one in thousands receiving the exact same thing, it’s so uncommon to get a tangible piece of mail that it kind of makes us feel special and like the sender is personally trying to reach us.

Back to my college example, when I saw that mail item sitting on my counter with my name on it and customized to what I’m interested it, it made me feel like the college really wanted to reach out to me. For some reason with the emails, even though it had my name in it and such, I still didn’t feel as special reading it. It was just one of twenty more emails I had to sift through. Overall, direct mail, at least to me, somehow channels our supposed self-centeredness and reaches us more effectively simply because it’s not as common in our digitally-consumed world.

I know I can’t speak for all of the 80 million of my generation, but that’s where the statistics come in. Regardless, I can completely attest to those numbers that define us. Direct mail is so much more effective at getting a message across to a Millennial than other digital mediums. We live in such a digitalized society where we see thousands of social media posts and receive dozens of emails a day. It’s commonplace to a Millennial, but seeing that piece of mail sitting in the mailbox, that’s different. Its unique, it’s physically there, and it’s “not the norm” so to speak. Direct mail stands out in the digital world, and it stands out in a good way.

When thinking about how to reach the generation of social media and technology, don’t rule out direct mail. It could very well be the key to reaching us Millennials.

How about that? You won’t see any digital media agencies promoting these stories and data. I do honestly believe that direct mail marketing will never go out of style, no matter how much digital technology advances. People like the personal touch. However, in this day and age, not everyone believes that, so be ahead of the game! Go the distance. Give it a try and reap the benefits.
Enjoy Some Direct Mail Marketing Quotes and Go Get ‘Em!

“Direct Mail Marketing is a quick way to both annoy people and get them to call you to find out more.”
- Jared Braverman

“Direct Marketing is evolving every day; in some cases, it seems that we have come full circle. A few years ago, there was the rush to telemarketing, and then came the rush to the Internet. Now marketers are starting to understand that all of these – telephone, mail, internet, e-mail, and so-called ‘new media’ – are simply alternative channels that enable direct contact with a customer.”
- Dale Carnegie

“Never forget that you only have one opportunity to make a first impression – with investors, with customers, with PR, and with marketing.”
- Natalie Massenet

“In marketing I’ve seen only one strategy that cannot miss - and that is to market to your best customers first, your best prospects second, and the rest of the world last.”
- Jared Braverman
This is a study which was designed to investigate how the brain processes physical marketing materials, such as direct mail, compared to virtual materials which are presented on a screen. Working in collaboration with the Centre for Experimental Consumer Psychology at Bangor University, the UK’s Royal Mail used functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery (fMRI) scanning in order to understand how our brains react to physical and virtual stimuli.

“This research strongly suggests that greater emotional processing is facilitated by the physical material than the virtual.”

See below some of the resounding results of this study:

- Material shown on cards generated more activity within the area of the brain associated with the integration of visual and spatial information (the left and right parietal).

- This suggests that physical material is more “real” to the brain. It has a meaning, and a place. It is better connected to memory because it engages with its spatial memory networks.

- More processing is taking place in the right retrosplenial cortex when physical material is presented. This is involved in the processing of emotionally powerful stimuli and memory, which would suggest that the physical presentation may be generating more emotionally vivid memories.

- The medial PFC and cingulate are the parts of the brain associated with emotional engagement. They are activated more by physical materials.

- The brain’s “default network” appeared to remain more active when viewing direct mail. Activity in this brain network has been associated with a greater focus on a person’s internal emotional response to outside stimuli. This suggests that the individuals were relating information to their own thoughts and feelings.
To discover how direct mail can boost your practice instantly, join Dustin’s monthly marketing program, *Look Over My Shoulder*, where you can gain access to new campaigns every month that have been tested and proven to earn a 5:1 return on investment or greater in Dustin’s practices and in the practices of his private coaching clients.

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Dr. Dustin S. Burleson is a speaker, teacher, author and business strategist for thousands of doctors located in 24 countries throughout the world. He writes and edits four newsletters monthly, is the director of the Rheam Foundation for Cleft & Craniofacial Orthodontics and operates a large multi-doctor, multi-clinic orthodontic and pediatric dental practice in Kansas City, Missouri. He is a champion of the private practitioner and has a long track record of helping orthodontists transform their practices and increase their impact on their families, employees, communities and the profession of orthodontics. His orthodontic marketing campaigns have generated over $300 million in revenue for his clients and privately-held practices. When he is not working, you can find him on his sailboat, jumping out of airplanes, or racing exotic cars through the desert. In a tightly-contested vote, he was recently named Best Dad in the World by two-thirds of his children.