

Offline Marketing Strategies For Online Businesses

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How to Leverage the Off-Line World to Improve Your Online Results

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Optimize Online First – Then Go Off! Literally

Website success is a complex art and science, as regular readers of our reports know all too well. To ensure that you get the kind of traffic, attention, ratings, and commercial results you want you need to invest in and manage a wide array of different strategies and tactics.

Something many even seemingly savvy Internet entrepreneurs don't even think about is the huge opportunity out there to leverage all the traditional media that has always been used for marketing and advertising.

All the Old Marketing Ways Work for the Web Too

Consider it. Forget about banners and links and search engines for a second.

Is your Website a marketing tool or a destination in itself? In most cases the answer is both. So if you think of your Website as your online “storefront,” which it may very well be literally, think for a minute of all the ways businesses have always advertised and marketed themselves, before the Internet even came along:

- Print ads
- TV
- Radio
- Inserts
- Magazine and newspaper articles
- Classifieds
- Direct mail
- Direct response
- Local “distribution” channels

In this report we'll explore each of these, and how you can use them right now to improve the performance and results for your online business.

Before we go “back to the future” of advertising and marketing, first you want to be sure you optimize your site itself.

Then you want to optimize your so-called “offsite” strategies, the combination of links, ads, banners, possibly articles, other content and shared space that ‘extends’ your online presence beyond your site.

We’ll only touch on these briefly, but before you head offline, take a quick check to make sure you’ve got your online basics lined up first:

On-site Optimization Review

While this report is primarily about not only offsite but offline marketing of your Web properties, we believe strongly that offline methods will do you very little good if your “house is not in order” online first.

First review what you need to do on your own site.

- Is all of your content up to date?
- Do all of your internal and outgoing links work?
- If you have an e-commerce function is it working fully?
- If you had planned to do content or Search Engine Optimization, have you done it?

Good. We assume so. Now think for a minute about your online, but offsite avenues.

Off-Site Optimization Review

With your own site up to snuff, you still need to be sure that...

- Your ad campaigns, banner placements and other clickable distributions are working, point to good pages, and so forth...
- Have you arranged for the link placements you planned for?
- Do all of your incoming/referrer links work?
- If you are using an RSS or other syndication strategy, is it functioning fully?

Getting Started the “Old-Fashioned” Way

Whether the Web is more analogous to TV or reading, or to store experience or a catalog experience, are interesting questions – for another time.

For now, we assume that your optimized sites need only one thing – which is more people coming to them, to do whatever it is your site wants them to do (buy something, read something, register for something, provide some information, whatever it is).

Regardless of what your exact Web business strategy might be, the old methods of marketing will all offer you some benefits in terms of driving traffic to your pages. Let's take a look at each one and how it might apply to your own online/offline marketing needs!

A Paperless World. Ha! Not now. Not likely.

When computers became ubiquitous and people started communicating more frequently with email than with any combination of live meetings, telephone conversations or the now (truly) lost art of the written letter, many prognosticators, influenced by environmentalists, declared there would soon be “paperless” offices and indeed, a paperless world.

In fact, of course, the emergence of technology, if anything, has increased the amount of paper that flies around, both in the office and in the consumer world. There are more books published, more magazines printed, et cetera, by a massive amount than there were in 1980. And we think office filing cabinets are getting bigger, not smaller, even if a lot of that stuff is also being scanned into databases.

While the newspaper companies themselves may be worried about becoming irrelevant, that has to do with their timing and the freshness and completeness of their information, not the fact that the information is distributed on pieces of inky paper – which still are more functionally reliable than most technology (and certainly easier to carry into the executive john). Newspapers are fundamentally not going anywhere.

What the continuing ubiquity of print publications means to the Internet entrepreneur is that all of the available print outlets for branding, marketing, and advertising are still readily available, somewhat comparatively cheaper than they used to be, and can be used very effectively to supplement and in some cases perhaps replace parts of, any online marketing strategy.

The most traditional advertisement of all, is the print ad. It is alive and well in 2006.

Print Ads Worked Then, And Now

By “print ad” we mean two things:

- A placed, purchased (or bartered) professionally designed advertisement in a newspaper, magazine or other periodical publication, including column ads, partial and full page ads, cover ads, etc

Or

- A classified ad, which can be found in the back of all newspapers and many magazines and trade journals

These are quite different animals, with quite different likely strategies and outcomes, and of course, investment requirements.

Let’s take a quick look at how you can drive Web traffic with a print ad or classified, who is likely to see them, and what kind of businesses will benefit the most.

How Magazine and Newspaper Ads Work, How to Buy, How to Use

Even if you have been buying online ad placements for a long time, the offline world of advertising can be daunting and confusing, but unless you are competing for space on the inside back cover of the *Fortune 500* issue or the Super Bowl commemorative edition of *Sports Illustrated* it’s not that scary.

The magazines – all but the most exclusive/prominent ones – will be happy to hear from you, and you don’t need outside help like an agency to get started placing print ads.

There are hundreds – possibly thousands – of magazines published in the US alone, and many more hundreds published around the world. How to choose where to put your ad?

- **Demographic relevance.** If you are appealing to a special audience, go where they go. If you are appealing to a general audience, do the same.
- **Region** – local, regional, national, international, industry specific. Again, this is a demographic question but also one relating to your business. If you're selling products on CD or books a global reach may make sense. If your Website is promoting in-person consulting or home improvement services or a dental practice, you may only work in a limited geography, etc.
- **Price.** You probably have a budget in mind, or you will. Print ad prices vary widely, from small fortunes for color pages in national magazines to almost nothing for classifieds in local papers. Do a little research and see what your preferred budget will buy in the markets you want to reach.

Magazines and newspapers make their money from a combination of ad sales, subscriptions and retail sales.

But they don't all make them the same way. First, realize that there are three kinds of magazines. We don't mean by content type, we mean by business model.

Subscription Revenue + Ads

One kind makes money mostly from its own subscription and newsstand sales, and supplements this from advertising. Academic journals with a business bent like *Harvard Business Review* would be in this group, as would certain high-end collector magazines on watches, cars, and yachts and some magazines like *Forbes* which charges around \$80-100 per year for a typical subscription.

Ads + Subscription Revenue

Another kind makes money almost completely from ads but also profits to some degree from subscriptions and newsstand sales, which would be almost anything you would see in a typical consumer newsstand, supermarket checkout line, dentists office or hotel gift shop like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *People*, *Us*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vogue* and most general-interest magazines and all fashion rags.

Command Subscriptions

The third kind is what is called “command subscription” publishing, which represents a huge percentage of all specialized industry publications, among others. Also many prominent executive-oriented magazines like *CIO* have both a pricey subscription base and a command subscription base.

What makes “command subscription” magazines different is that few of their subscribers pay to get the magazine, but are a very valuable audience.

The subscribers are highly targeted and highly qualified as being relevant to the subject matter of the magazine. Which of course means the entire subscriber list is very valuable from a direct marketing standpoint. So these magazines make their money from a combination of ad space sales, and, especially, from renting their subscriber list for direct mail. (More about direct mail below)

Understanding these three types of magazines is just as important as understanding how to align what you’re selling subject-matter wise to the likely audience of a given magazine.

Clearly if you sell underwater basket-weaving equipment, *Underwater Basket World* is probably a more attractive placement than *US News* since it’s a good bet almost everyone reading the former would be interested, and virtually no-one reading the latter, even though with a tiny circulation the price may be comparable.

Buying Ads

Buying ads, for most businesses in most situations, is very easy, since magazines and newspapers want to sell them!

Pick up any magazine you might be interested in buying ads in, and look inside the first few pages. You will come across a “masthead” or a listing of the executives and publishers of the magazine and the company that publishes it and other information, which is all required by law in the United States. Nine times out of ten, this page will have names and phone numbers of the exact people you need to call to place ads.

Unlike content submissions (which we cover a little later) people will be very happy to take your call.

Agencies: Yes or No?

You can use agencies. We sometimes do. You can use them both help design the ads and to place them. There are plusses and minuses to doing this, and if you have any in-house writing and design skills, and your initial ad placements are simple designs (or classifieds) and are fairly inexpensive, you can try without them.

If you are competing for high-profile space in major publications agencies can help because they have relationships with the publishing companies.

On the other hand if you are buying quarter-page classifieds in a trade publication, whether it appears on page 62 or 64 may well not matter to you.

Where EXACTLY Do I Want The Ads To Run?

The complexity of choosing print ad space is really a book-length subject unto itself, but here are some basic ideas:

- Choose magazines likely to have a lot of readers interested in your ad. You probably think in terms of demographics to some degree in your online marketing and this is more important offline. Bear in mind also that if you sell a controversial products – such as adult materials or drugs – magazines are not obligated to accept your ad, so think in terms of the cultural fit with the publisher as well as that with the audience. You can buy hydroponics from the back of *Rolling Stone* but not *Fortune*.
- Consider whether national, regional, or specialty distribution of your ad makes the most the sense and spend the least possible to reach the biggest audience.
- Always run print ads for a period of time (not once) before deciding if its working for you.
- We can't give you advice on how to make great print ads, but we can say *make the URL prominent* in all of them. Include a phone number if you want to accept calls, but make the Web page easy to see, find, and key in for interested parties.
- Create a special URL or Web page that you use in the print ads. This is a very inexpensive and very effective method of tracking the traffic being

generated. If you ever actually look at the drop cards that fall out of magazines, every one has a code, which simply tells the publisher what issue of what magazine generated that specific response. If your website top level domain is www.reallyawesomedeals.com you might have something like www.reallyawesomedeals.com/radical or whatever makes sense for your business. Everyone who enters through that page saw, or heard about, your ad.

What about Newspapers?

Newspaper ads (not classified but column or page ads) used to be different primarily in that newsprint was black and white. This is not true any longer, as there are color ads throughout almost every daily newspaper in the *USA today* (starting with, USA Today!).

The main difference remaining is that the impression duration and frequency is very different.

Every week in *The New York Times* are prominent ads for sales at stores like Macy's and Bloomingdale's, yet the magazine ads they run in *New York Magazine* never discuss sales, but product lines.

The reason is probably obvious since sales may only last a day or two, and you can use newsprint ads versus magazines the same way. Newsprint ads will each be seen one time, with a short window, and benefit from a short term call to action, like a limited special offer.

Magazine ads will be seen multiple times in most cases, and have greater "pass along" readership (the main reader gives the publication to a friend, colleague or spouse to read), so you may want to advertise more "stable" concepts, like a permanent introductory offer or trial, there.

Newspaper ads are generally cheaper, but you have to buy more of them - run the ad for a week or two every day. Newspapers also generally have much less demographic control. *The New York Post* is probably read by equal numbers of factory workers, Wall Street big shots, and hobos.

It all depends on who you're trying to reach!

Classifieds

Classified ads are by far the cheapest form of print advertising, and they are used not only by businesses but by the sublime (such as personals, people giving away puppies, and people looking for lost friends) to the ridiculous (such as escort services and questionable massage parlors).

Classifieds are not always text only, they can include images, and they can also be in color. The main difference between regular print ads and classifieds is that print ads appear throughout a publication and classifieds appear only in a special advertising section and in select categories of that section.

Classifieds can however offer tremendous bang for the buck for certain online businesses, because:

- Classified pricing is based largely on length of the ad, which for a Web business could be a few words and the URL, keeping it cheap
- Classified ads are just what they are called – classified – so the only people likely to read your ads are those likely to be interested in the general subject (assuming you put the ads in the right categories)

To find out about classified pricing, look at the beginning of the classified section of the publications that interest you. There will almost always be a very straightforward price list, how you have to submit the ad, forms of payment accepted, and the deadline for publication by a certain time.

For example, the largest classified section in most newspapers is on Sundays, and the deadline will usually be Wednesday for the following Sunday.

Classified hints:

- Be creative in thinking about who is likely to be interested in your product or service. If it's about making money, you might put an ad in the help wanted section somewhere as well as others, for example.
- If you place multiple classifieds in the same paper, be sure to track which one(s) are working, either with distinct URLs or some other method.
- Carefully review each ad the first time it runs. Papers often make typos, and if they do, they will usually credit you another ad for free.

For a lot of businesses, running a classified ad more or less forever is a very good investment in a “passive” revenue stream. Take a look in the same area of the

same paper for a few days or weeks – you’ll see a few of the same ads over and over and over.

In addition to all of the local and some regional newspapers (for some businesses, national newspapers as well) we’d suggest taking a good look at the “independent” and usually free “guide” style newspapers like the [City Name Here] *Phoenix* and the *Advocate*. The classified listings in these papers often can include color graphics and the distribution is enormous, often on every corner and in every train station and movie theater in some cities. A great option if your business is local and geared towards individual buyers.

In addition to ads, there are a couple of other ways to drive traffic to your Websites in print. Primary among these are inserts and articles.

Inserts and Articles: Ads in Disguise

Anyone who has ever had a Sunday paper knows all about inserts – it’s all that “stuff” that falls out in your lap, with the fliers from all the local markets, usually some kind of magazine, a bunch of ads, coupon packets and so forth.

Inserts

These inserts are available for sale the same way that ads are, though they are much more expensive to place and also you will require outside help to produce them.

Inserts are expensive, annoying, and will be ignored by most recipients.

For some businesses seasonal inserts are the best thing going though. We know of one lawn chemicals business owner who does two inserts per year for his spring and fall services.

The insert is disguised as informational material about lawn health, but with a prominent discussion about his services on the other side, and a very easy to find phone number, Web site, and offer of a FREE consultation.

Since 1974 these inserts have generated almost all of his considerable business, along with a little word of mouth. With the advent of the Internet, he added a

site and put the URL on the insert and his cards and flyers (we'll come back to cards and flyers for *your* business in few moments). And that's generated more, since some people would rather click than call - exactly what you're counting on.

While most people recognize these inserts as ads - and many find them annoying - they are a good place to advertise for the right kind of business.

Articles

Anyone who has worked in an industrial or professional services business is very aware that a huge percentage of the articles written for trade publications (and some for mainstream publications) are basically just ads in disguise.

In your case all you need is to name-check or name drop the URL you want people to go to.

How each publication's editorial process works is different, and the best opportunity for each business in terms of article placement will vary - while you're on the masthead for a magazine to look up who their ad sales guy is, get the editor's name and call her too.

What you can do here depends on a lot of things. For example we know a consulting company in the paper industry that sells databases. Every year the president barbers for some article space in a few trade journals, writes a little puff piece about how everyone in the paper industry needs better databases, and mentions oh, by the way, visit our website to learn more. The articles are quasi-informative, but they're really just ads.

Some magazines - like *Esquire* and *Scientific American* to name two prominent mags with completely different directions - have more content submissions than they could ever possibly use.

But regional magazines, specialty magazines, and local newspapers are often hungry for content. They might even pay you a few bucks for your ad-disguised-as-article on top of it.

New Media, Meet Old Media: TV and Radio

While both TV and radio execs worry that broadband will change or destroy their markets, the fact is that TV viewership and radio listenership is higher than it's ever been, which you can leverage to drive Web traffic – and no, you don't need to produce and place a whole infomercial.

We'll say one thing before we suggest you invest a nickel in traditional media ads: *Have a very memorable URL.*

Actually we'll say another: *Your product or service should make sense for TV or Radio placements.*

Assuming you do and it does, you'll find that while national and major market TV and radio spots will be too expensive for most businesses, local ads can be surprisingly affordable.

Now in most cases you'll want to use some outside help such as production people or a voice professional to help develop and produce this material, but placing it can be done easily by yourself – most cable carriers and all radio stations have sales people even more eager to talk to you than the magazine people will be.

Cable Changed Many Things

Once upon a time before cable you needed to deal with a slew of network stations, network affiliates and the collection of companies that owned and managed them. You would also generally need an agency that had a relationship to be able to negotiate for and place your commercials.

Today, with more than 300 channels available in many cable markets, most of the local ad placement – outside of the networks but sometimes including them during non-prime time – is handled by the Cable Company itself.

With 300 channels running 24 hrs per day, that is a lot of ad time to fill up.

Watch your local cable stations for an hour or two tonight. An ad about placing ads with them is almost certain to come up, especially later in the evening (when they can afford to use the time to promote their own need to fill up time).

No Experience Needed

They want to make it easy for local businesses who may never have thought much about TV spots to start thinking about it. In the NY metro market for example both of the major cable companies (Time Warner/Roadrunner and Cablevision) offer fairly inexpensive production help in actually developing and producing your ads, which is usually done in the same building as the local cable news channel (since all the producers and production and post-production facilities are there anyway and everybody likes a little overtime).

You may not get Madison Avenue results this way, but you won't pay Madison Avenue pricing either.

You may have noticed if you watch TV yourself, that very small businesses like print shops, pizza places, and family-owned shoe stores run commercials right alongside car dealerships and national brands.

This is how. If they can afford it, so can you – the question is whether a TV spot makes sense for your particular businesses.

You can also do very good demographic targeting these days both in terms of the channels you choose to run on and the times. Obviously since you are doing a drive to Web campaign mainly, make the URL the focus of the commercial! But tell the people at the cable company who you're trying to target – they'll have good data and good ideas about how and when and where to put your commercial.

Radio Ga Ga

While radio's imminent demise has been predicted for some time, it's really just been an ongoing format change; the audiences are fairly stable and in some markets still growing.

The satellite networks offer a major challenge on the music front, something of a challenge on the syndicated talk front, but don't really challenge local talk and

local news at all, and that is where we'd recommend considering placing radio spots if you want to place them all.

Local talk and local news will almost always give the most bang for the radio buck because the audience is already listening to people speaking – on purpose – which means both that your ad can be simple (meaning low production costs) and will be heard more carefully.

There are basically four ways to place and produce radio spots:

- Produce them yourself. Literally, yourself. If you can do a podcast (see our report on podcasting) you can edit one to a 30 second radio spot.
- Have them produced professionally by a third party – this may include voice artists or actors, production studios, an agency, and so on. In most situations this will not be money well spent.
- Have them produced professionally by the radio station itself – like the cable people these guys figured out they are sitting on untapped revenue and in many places will be happy to work with you on a production/placement package.
- A script that is read by the news anchor on air between stories.

For most businesses, especially where the point is a drive to Web, we like the fourth one best.

Why? It's usually cheapest, it's high impact, and it comes with an inherent and powerful appearance – and we say *appearance* – of endorsement by the news anchor.

“Oh, Harley Carnes uses Brand X Itch Cream? I will too!”

The complexities of the scripted ads will vary with each market but we do recommend discussing how those programs work if you are considering radio.

Radio can be used to sell anything, but we know it is especially good for certain kinds of products and services:

- Legal products and services
- Financial products and services
- Medical products and services
- Health, fitness and lifestyle products
- Personal services (like matchmaking services)

- “Tony Robbins” style products and services – personal coaching, consulting, anxiety or stress management, speaking skills etc

If you think about it, a radio spot can be a neat way to introduce a wider audience to a podcast you produce for example – though make sure the radio station is OK with that, since they may view you as “competition!”

Let's Get Direct.

After you've considered all your online options, and have thought about print and newsprint ads, local TV and radio spots, you still have two great categories of offline options left.

The first and much bigger of them is direct mail. Before we dig too far into this, let's agree on what direct mail is.

According to answers.com and Houghton Mifflin:

Direct mail (*n*). - Advertising circulars or other printed matter sent directly through the mail to prospective customers or contributors.

Of course “junk mail” is a derisive term for the same thing, so the trick is to make certain that a reasonable percentage of your recipient group will be pleased – or at least not hostile – to be receiving what you send.

Chances are very high you have done the email equivalent of direct mail – sending the same marketing piece to a large list – and in the offline world the opportunity is the same but comes in a variety of formats, methods, and approaches.

“DM” can be used to mean both direct mail, and direct marketing, of which direct mail is the biggest traditional component.

DIY DM

One option is to send your own direct mail pieces to your own (or a rented) list of recipients.

Mailing lists are very easy to find online, there are dozens of list brokers and prices and packages change so often – sometimes within one day – that we can't suggest anything more specific than doing a Google search on mailing lists, direct mail or direct marketing, and perusing the results.

Who to send to?

You can always create a “list pull” that is very specific by up to 20 or 30 different criteria.

If for example you want to target medical practices, with revenues above \$1 million but below \$3 million, with employees more than 5 and less than 10, within 2 miles of a particular block in Chicago, that can easily be done today.

Also as we mentioned with magazines, magazine subscription lists are often “for rent” for direct mail, so if a magazine has a subscriber base you want to reach but you'd rather send something than do an ad, call and talk to their list person (who is probably in the same department that sells ad space).

What to send?

Direct mail can be as simple as a one-page letter or as complex as a multi-page full color glossy brochure with inserts inside.

You want to tailor the piece to your audience, of course.

Think about an extension of your page itself. If you offer informational products, include testimonials and excerpts. If you sell a product that needs to be visually appealing, include some graphics. Always include either a business card for yourself, the business or the Web site itself.

As a funny example, we know an exotic dancer (bachelor parties and the like) named Lexxi. Her marketing campaign other than word of mouth (no pun) is very simple. She has a business card that says:

FEELING SEXY? FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT CALL LEXXI!!

With her phone number and Web URL underneath. The Web page of course is just a few photos, a submission/request form and the phone number again. Most nights Lexxi is busy.

On the other hand we know law firm that handles certain negligence cases, and while the legal ethics rules on marketing are complex and vague, there is nothing stopping a law firm from advertising a book – so their direct mail is all about the book and the Web site, which is of course all an ancillary revenue stream to drive business to the practice itself.

Like any printed marketing piece, whether to develop it yourself or use outside help depends on you. We find using a ghostwriter can be extremely helpful in speeding up the completion and upping the quality of any DM item in terms of copy. Whether you need additional production or development partners will depend on you – and for printing, we have seen good results from copy shops and bad results from expensive printers and vice versa.

As always our advice is shop around!

How often to send?

That depends but the answer is definitely “more than once.”

First, a lot of unsolicited mail simply gets ignored or thrown out. Second, whether someone responds to an offer depends on many factors:

- Their mood
- The time of the day they read it
- The day of the week they read it
- What they’re thinking about when they read it
- How compelling the offer is
- And many other factors

The best way to judge whether a DM piece is working is to use it a few times to the same people, over a period of weeks or months.

Try to balance frequency with not being overly annoying! We wouldn’t for example send the same piece three times per week.

In addition to doing your list mailings, there are two other good options.

Meet Me at the Mail House

So-called “mail houses” are one-stop direct mail shops. They can usually help you develop, design, print, and send your direct mail pieces.

The main difference between using a list broker and using a mail house is that mail houses may either rent lists for you (which you will never see, other than when people respond) or may rent their own lists (which you likely will also not see).

Some list brokers, especially higher-end magazines, will actually require you to use a mail house with which they have agreements in place, because list “rental” is not the same as list purchasing.

If you use a large list broker – you’ll find a dozen of them online – you will usually “own” the list and the assumption is they will continually update the data and you will buy it again.

In the case of magazine and some other lists like trade associations, they won’t send you the actual names, but send them to a third party to use on your behalf, a form of mailing escrow if you will.

Direct Response

Direct “response” is a variation on direct mail but it is different enough to talk about for a moment.

Direct mail can serve many purposes:

- Branding
- Marketing
- Advertising
- Drive to Web
- Drive to Event
- Announcement of an upcoming sale
- Announcement of a new product or service
- A catalog people are meant to keep and refer to later
- And many more

Direct “response” is a form of direct mail that has a more specific “call to action” and a more specific goal:

You want people to do something now and the direct response piece equips them to do it.

Classic examples are the offers that come in your credit card statement envelopes for specialty items, magazine subscriptions, credit reports and so on. You simply say “yes” to what you want and send it back.

If you don’t do it, you don’t do it. Another offer will show up later.

That is direct *response* marketing.

Many businesses can benefit from this more immediate, more aggressive form of direct mail. Think about whether yours can and decide whether this form of communication makes sense. If you are driving traffic to a Web site that is not really direct response, but if you are driving traffic to a Web site to buy something right now that’s closer.

The email equivalent would be opt-in email solicitations or email offers that include a clickable link to an ecommerce Web site. If you have ever subscribed to the offer emails from a major online retailer, we’re sure you know exactly what we’re talking about!

Packaged Mailers

A very popular version of direct mail – usually also qualifying as direct response – are the packaged mailers everyone gets every few weeks.

These come in the recognizable blue or striped envelopes, and they usually contain about 25 coupon-sized ads for businesses ranging from podiatry to limo services, restaurants and caterers to steam cleaners, resume services to horse rental, doctors, dentists, butchers, bakers and candlestick makers.

A lot of those mailers go right in the recycling bin or trash, but a lot of them get opened and lot of the coupons or ads get used, especially the more generous restaurant discounts.

For this kind of mailing a discount coupon of some kind is basically essential since that's what every other item in the package will offer and that's what the recipient will expect.

ValPak <http://www.valpak.com> remains the #1 leader in this space, and they organize their offerings by category:

- dining & restaurants
- entertainment & travel
- fitness & beauty
- general services
- grocery
- health & medical
- home & garden
- professional services
- shops & retail
- transportation & auto

You can also buy a package that includes downloadable coupons, so the old DM paper people are not entirely clueless about our online world either!

What Kind of Results to Expect?

Direct mail and direct response come in so many forms for so many business purposes that real standards are hard to pin down, but here are some basic guidelines:

Response Rate

This is the number of people – usually expressed as a percentage – who respond in some positive way to the direct mail item.

If the primary goal of the DM is to get people to visit a certain Web page, simply take the number of letters sent and the number of resulting visits and you will get the response rate.

A “good” response rate will vary but as a rule of thumb, anything over 2% is reasonable, 5% is good, 10% is exceptional, and higher than that is fairly rare

unless the offer is too good to pass by and sent to very highly qualified people only.

But not everyone who responds will buy anything.

Conversion Rate

The second and ultimately more important measurement of DM impact is conversion rate. Conversion refers to those you “convert” from prospects to buyers – the number of people you sell something to.

There are two ways to talk about conversion rates:

- As a percentage of recipients
- As a percentage of respondents

Both matter in most cases. If you have a response rate of 6% that means 6 people out of 100 responded. If, of those six people three go on to buy something, you have two conversion rates:

- The conversion rate of respondents is a very high 50%
- The conversion rate of recipients is a decent 3%

Like in most areas of marketing, it comes down to what you measure and how!

If the costs associated with DM and the likely outcome seems discouraging, our last suggestion for offline marketing of your online properties has the advantages of being virtually free to produce, and completely free to place!

Go Local

When we say local, we mean it. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of places to advertise your Website locally that will cost you absolutely nothing to place.

We’re not saying these are outrageously effective. We are saying that they are great ways to get some traffic, particularly if your business has a local aspect to it.

Supermarkets, Chain Stores, Laundromats and More

All of these places have “community bulletin boards” where people advertise cars for sale, babysitting services, lost dogs, piano lessons and things like that.

There is no reason why your Web business can’t leverage this opportunity.

You can either tack a stack of business cards on each of these bulletin boards, or print a page up with those “tear off” pieces at the bottom. These usually have a phone number. In your case, make them the URL. Easy!

Convenience Stores, Dry Cleaners, Delis and More

While these stores almost never have bulletin boards, they almost always have a variety of business cards displayed at the checkout area.

The other day we went for a newspaper and a soda at the local variety and were stuck behind someone buying Powerball tickets, so had a chance to look at the businesses advertising right there on the counter. There were readily available business cards for:

- A garage
- A lawn guy
- A custom woodworker
- A plastic surgeon (!)
- A massage therapist

We’re pretty sure these people don’t get most of their business this way, but we’re also pretty sure they probably get some, and the cost is nothing more than asking the owner of the store if you can put your cards there. (Shopping at the store for a while is a good idea of course!)

Inexpensive Non-Mail Non-Periodical Ads

The above ideas will cost nothing. These will cost something but they might make sense for your business:

- Placemat placements. The next time you go to a diner style restaurant, take a look at the placemat. If it’s not a map of the country where the

owners are from, chances are very good it's filled with ads. These can be a cost-effective choice for some businesses.

- Local school publications and items. Depending on your business, there are "sponsorship" opportunities for the local yearbooks, sports programs, book covers, and other items where you can get some good brand visibility usually for fairly low cost.
- Local sports team publications and items. A spot in the Yankees program might both be too expensive and a questionable investment, but local sports teams have their own printed items which can be a great opportunity for certain kinds of businesses.

And we're probably forgetting a couple of dozen more in this category.

Summary

The online world is an extension of the offline world, and many of the techniques and ideas used to market before the Internet have been adopted for the Internet.

Still and all, that does not mean that the old methods themselves - from print to TV to radio to direct mail - can't have significant benefits in driving offline prospects to your Websites!

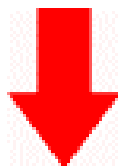
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