

The Four R's of Green Direct Mail

*Demonstrate your Commitment
to the Environment*





Introduction

Direct mail has historically received a bad rap as “junk mail”; a waste of paper and natural resources. However, the Environmental Protection Agency reports that “direct mail represents just 2.4% of municipal solid waste and the recycling recovery rate of direct mail has grown nearly 700% since 1990.”¹

Despite the negative public perception, marketers know that direct mail works and is a valuable part of many marketing campaigns: in 2009 direct mail returned \$15.22 for every dollar invested.² Is there a way to balance the demonstrated benefits of direct mail while addressing your customers’ perception that direct mail isn’t environmentally friendly? Absolutely! This paper will introduce the “Four R’s of Green Direct Mail” and give you strategies that you can use to make your direct mail greener. The Four R’s of Green Direct Mail are:

- ✓ **Reduce**
- ✓ **Reuse**
- ✓ **Recycle**
- ✓ **Respond**

By implementing the Four R’s of Green Direct Mail into your own campaigns, you’ll demonstrate your commitment to the environment, and in many ways your company will save money too. Read on to learn how to turn your direct mail campaigns green.

The First R – Reduce

The easiest way to go green in your direct mail is through the action of “Reduce”. By reducing the materials used to create your direct mail media, you’re reducing your consumption of paper and other resources. There are many ways to reduce what you use, including:

- **Use More Press-Efficient Mailers** – Mailers that don’t fit well on press waste paper. As a result, work with your creative and print vendor to create press-efficient formats.
- **Link to Online Content** – Move some of the content you’d usually include on a mailer online, and direct your customers to that content via links on your mailer. This not only reduces the size of your mailer (and the paper and resources required to print it), but also gives you a second interaction with your customer when they visit your web site.

¹ <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw2008rpt.pdf>

² <http://directmag.com/magilla/1020-e-mail-roi-still-slipping/>

REDUCE

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- **Prune and Target Your List** – Regularly review your mailing list and remove bad addresses so that you aren't wasting mailings (and postage). Also, take a look at your specific audience for each campaign. Would a more targeted mailing (i.e. fewer mailings to more qualified prospects) be more cost effective? Companies that send catalogs can really benefit from this, since their mailers use a lot of paper.
- **Let Customers Choose how to be Contacted** – Give the people on your mailing list the option to choose how they want to be contacted: mail, email, or both. By giving people a choice, they'll see your message in the format they are most receptive to, and you'll reduce the number of mailings you'll need to send.
- **Supplement with Email** – Today, any direct mail campaign should include email as part of the overall strategy, and email makes a great partner to direct mail. When sending a mailer to a customer, follow up with an email rather than a postcard. This will save you paper and postage.
- **Print on Demand** – Look into print on demand technologies, which allow you to print what you need when you need it, rather than relying on large print jobs that sit in storage and run the risk of becoming obsolete before they are used.³

The Second R – Reuse

The action of “reuse” might be the most difficult to envision when considering a direct mail strategy, since mailings generally contain time-sensitive information or offers. However, if you dig deeper, there's a lot you can actually do.

First, look into using recycled papers and natural inks. Recycled papers, particularly papers made from post-consumer waste, significantly reduce your consumption of virgin pulp paper. Natural inks, such as soy inks, are biodegradable, and do not negatively impact the environment when the mailers decompose. Recycled papers and natural inks are generally more expensive than standard materials, so this action won't save your company money, but it will certainly reduce your impact on the environment.

Second, see what you can reuse in your marketing department. Reuse cardboard boxes and packing materials, such as polystyrene peanuts. If applicable, look into reusable plastic totes for transporting print jobs from department to department. Reusable containers and packaging may cost more up front, but will have a much longer life than their disposable counterparts, saving you money in the long run.

³ <https://www.usps.com/business/pdf/GreenWP1.pdf>

Finally, if you do have components from previous mailers that are still relevant, see if you can use those before printing new ones.

The Third R – Recycle

There are two ways to approach the action of “Recycle”: things you and your company can do, and things that your customers can do. You can encourage your customers to recycle mailings that you send them, so that those mailings don't end up in landfills.



Tap into the Direct Marketing Association's [“Please Recycle” campaign](#) to get your customers recycling.⁴ People are actively recycling: The annual volume of paper trashed in U.S. landfills decreased by 16 million tons from 2005 to a new total of 26 million tons in 2009⁵, but as the statistic states, 26 million tons of paper⁶ are still making it to the landfill. Recycling paper requires only 40% of the energy required to create virgin paper, so it's significant in both saving trees and energy.

Actively recycling the paper that you use provides a tremendous impact on the environment by reducing the number of trees that have to be cut down and processed into virgin pulp paper. You can recycle samples from old direct mail campaigns as well as previous mailing components that are outdated.

The Fourth R – Respond

Once you're implementing the first three R's, it's time to look at the fourth R: “Respond”. This is where you show your responsibility to the environment to your industry and your customer base. Become more aware of what you can do to make your direct mail efforts greener. This white paper is a great place to start, but there's a lot more you can do.

Let your customers know what actions you are taking to make your marketing campaigns greener. Have a page on your company website dedicated to your recycling activities. If you're not sure what to say, check out the DMA's [Environmental Planning Tool](#) as well as their Policy and Statement Generator.⁷ Take part in community recycling campaigns, or better yet, organize one!

Look at what the marketing industry as a whole is doing to improve the environment, and pass that information on to your customers. Did you know that the forest industry plants over 1.7 million trees every day in the United States? The U.S. is now more forested than it was in 1900, despite population increases.⁸

⁴ <http://www.dmaresponsibility.org/Recycle/>

⁵ <http://www.environmentalpaper.org/top-ten-indicators.php>

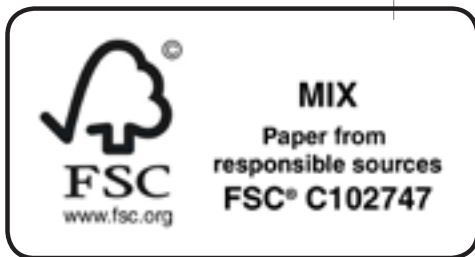
⁶ http://www.economist.com/node/9302727?story_id=9302727

⁷ <http://www.the-dma.org/envgen/>

⁸ <http://www.dmaresponsibility.org/Environment/DirectMailandEnvironment.pdf>

Here are some additional resources that you can put to use:

- **Direct Marketing Association [Environmental Resource Center](#)** – This website contains many tips and resources for marketing businesses to reduce their consumption of materials such as paper.⁹
- **Pitney Bowes report – [The Environmental Impact of Direct Mail](#)** – This comprehensive report is full of facts and figures on the specifics of how direct mail impact the environment, from paper to energy.¹⁰



- **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification** – The FSC certifies forests that use sustainable practices, and paper companies that use wood from those forests can use FSC logos on their packaging to show that their paper comes from a sustainable source. As of July 2011, over 13 million hectares of forest in the U.S. has been certified by FSC. Look for paper products that carry the FSC logo to ensure that what you're using comes from certified forests.

- **Recommendations to American Express** – This [master's thesis by Sarika Sangawan](#) of Duke University provides a comprehensive assessment on how one of the U.S.'s largest direct marketers can reduce their environmental impact.¹¹ Targeted areas include list management, paper procurement, production, and recycling practices. If American Express can do it, so can you.



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⁹ <http://www.dmaresponsibility.org/Environment/>

¹⁰ http://www.pb.com/bv70/en_US/extranet/landingpages/Environ_Impact_Mail_Web.pdf

¹¹ http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/294/MP_css9_a_52007.pdf?sequence=1