

# Adding Dimension to Create Stand-out Direct Mail Pieces

When the client asks about developing something stand-out that pops-up, slides-out stands-up, or unfurls, it's time to get their production partners involved.

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irect Mail has always been a medium that vies for the recipient's attention. In the beginning, simply your name and address were enough to gain attention. Then, as more companies used the medium, different methods of generating attention came into play. Lasered letters, lasered applications, the buck-slip—we have all at some time or another worked with and still work with these staples that continue to have value. After these components came involvement devices, (such as those in publishers' sweepstakes style mailings) engaging recipients. Stickers, stamps, pens, letter openers, and labels all created "work" for the person responding but they also created an added dimension to the mail message. These could be felt through the package; there was something more inside, something hidden.

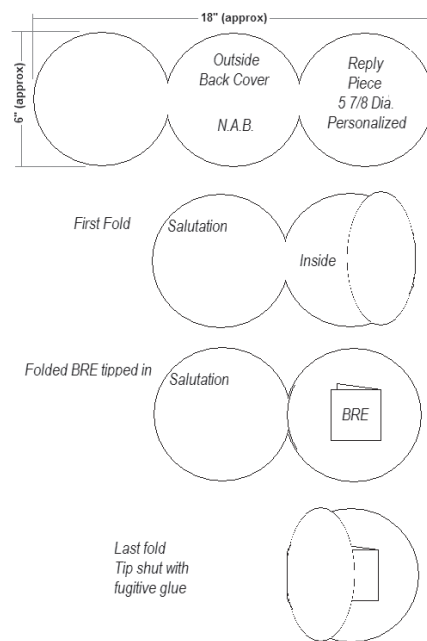
In today's world we've moved beyond some of these pieces and a more discerning consumer. Even more discerning creative directors look for more in a mail piece. With LCD screens everywhere, flashing, speaking and spinning, today's mail, in some ways has to compete with the ever increasing messages received on our TVs, PCs, handhelds and phones, let alone the other pieces in the mail box. Now, before the die-hards get all over me—I agree there is still a great deal of value in letters and envelopes. Heck, they are a large part of our business and

since they've been around for so long there are great economies of scale. The fact remains: consumers' perceptions are changing based upon so many factors that mail packages beyond envelopes are a growing trend.

## Historical dimensions

Initially, many of these off the trodden path dimension creators and attention grabbers were based on manual operations. Subsequently, as quantities increased and response rates began to be spread out over many mailers, new methods were sought to create unique pieces at affordable price points. There have been many packaged solutions—such as the label applications, special inserting stations that can flip a pen or pencil onto the insertion track—and so on. There have also been various applications that were created by service providers to yield unique solutions to production challenges. For about six years, the demand for shrink-wrapping CDs exceeded what suppliers could produce. Initially, this was a unique and very different feeling package that a few service providers approached differently, but successfully.

A handful of key industry players goes beyond packaged production solutions and can not only



tip a sample on to a backer but can actually help create a very different physical piece. Beyond the basic letter shop, glue application, pocket forming, folder scores, and timed perforations, are processes that when combined, can be instrumental in creating unique pieces. In 1989, a past president of one of our companies used the term: "Specialty Department at Bindery Services" and from that phrase, I've adopted:

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"Specialty Finishing" to describe a unique process or set of processes that enables creative flexibility.

Today, the market is looking for a variety of dimensional pieces. There are "sliders" that, when pulled, cause an object to appear to move across a background. 'Peel and Reveal' pieces still cycle through periodically and the ever "pop"ular pop-up always draws attention to a mail piece. Personalized pads add heft to a package as well as value and real-estate. This process adds more than just dimension to a mail piece. Personalized pads can be created where every page of the pad contains a personalized message, with the option of a call to action on the last page.

#### **Cart before the Horse**

Whenever I've been asked to help "engineer" pieces with some sort of dimension to them, it's been my experience that the creative team is looking for ways to do "something different." As soon as a client asks the question about developing something stand-out that pops-up, slides-out stands-up, or unfurls, I ask them to stop developing mock-ups and get their production partners involved at that point.

All too often, an enthusiastic group takes a great idea and fully develops it without running the concepts by their production partners. I've used the term "reverse-engineer" to describe the process a production partner will go through to create the physical properties of a piece. Basically, it means that the piece should be created from the bindery, the finished piece, backwards to a press sheet. Anyone intimately involved with print production already knows that the bindery will drive the format and layout of a printed piece and in the specialty game this becomes even more relevant. This process

has been mastered by some of the skilled production folks at DM agencies and a few large clients, but for the most part, this ever important process will help you develop a piece that will be sure to impress the end client, (be it a marketing department, agency client, or whatever), can be done for a reasonable budget, and generates attention or increased response.

#### **Depth of Knowledge**

Often this skill set of forming paper resides in the bindery, where skilled trades people have for years worked on ways to fold, glue, flip, perf and attach paper; whereas the techniques to marry data and variable imaging come from the lettershop side of the industry. There are those individuals and organizations that have the combined experience to be able to develop these unique pieces, one or two of them even focus on developing only unique pieces. If you are considering creating one, be sure to involve an organization with the proper credentials and use them as a resource. Most will be excited to help develop your ideas. Get them to show you some of their previous work; many firms retain a catalogue of different specialty pieces and you might be able to draw from it for ideas. You'll be able to assess what kind of end result you'll get by looking through these pieces. A good organization will also have at least one or two people whose job is to consult, create and engineer these different pieces for you.

Pieces that stand out and the experience to create them is a growing topic. Even the CMA sees mail that is out of the box as a valuable segment—so much so that in July, it is hosting a creative round table called "Tissues to Triumphs." Three top creative directors discuss their approach to creative direct mail challenges.

Beyond this roundtable, the CMA offers education on creative and production. Too often, I see great ideas go sour due to a lack of production skill and experience on the specialty side. Understanding, conceptualization and experience are paramount in this segment.

Many are wary of entering into the specialty arena as they think it can't be done cost effectively. But with the right talent and experience in a supplier, you can take your next direct mail piece to a higher level. Magnets, pop-ups, tipped on cards, peel n reveals, labels and all kinds of variations and combinations of these elements are possible and can yield amazing results. Let your imagination raise the bar and get your pieces noticed in the mail box. Explore the possibilities that some simple brain-storming might do for you.

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