

MARKETING

## Why direct mail never deserved to go out of fashion

February 25, 2021



*Jay Dunn is president of U.S. marketing and operations for City Chic Collective USA*

By **Jay Dunn**

The new generation of marketers in fashion ecommerce has an irresistible urge especially with pure ecommerce players to equate marketing with digital marketing.

It is understandable that the generational shift that happened in the marketing departments would come with more emphasis being placed on digital marketing, but the shift has been so sudden that valuable opportunities for revenue growth are being missed.

Run for new shiny objects

Marketers in fashion ecommerce truly have a blind spot for what non-digital marketing can provide.

Once these marketers have maxed out whatever can be accomplished through paid social, pay-per-click (PPC), affiliate marketing and the like, and start to look for new catalysts for growth, they are more likely to fall for new shiny objects in digital marketing than consider anything that is offline.

But will the latest new tool in conversion optimization, to give just one example, really help create substantial new growth?

Yes, online retail marketers have been right to turn back the dial on print magazine advertising, television commercials and billboard advertising. However, not all non-digital marketing deserved to be jettisoned all at once.

Direct marketing was one of those offline channels that were never adopted or went out of fashion with online retailers too early and too fast.

One particular tool, direct mail print catalogs, saw a very **steep decline** in the last decade, according to the former Data & Marketing Association.

In 2016, less than 9.8 billion catalogs were sent to U.S. consumers. In 2007 this number still amounted to 19.6 billion. In the last few years, that number has continued to dwindle.

Four marketing goals

Meanwhile, marketers understand that their ecommerce efforts should ferociously attempt to succeed at four things: retain existing customers, reactivate dormant customers who have not shopped in a while, bring back customers

retain existing customers, reactivate dormant customers who have not shopped in a while, bring back customers who have churned, and capture new customers.

The aforementioned digital marketing tools are very helpful in achieving some of these goals. Take email marketing, which is very useful in nurturing existing customers, while pay-per-click is great at acquiring new customers.

That said, email marketing will not help acquire new customers, unless the business buys email lists. However, that approach is poised to come with its own set of problems concerning quality and cost. But direct mail will help accomplish all four goals.

#### Consumer in love with print mail

U.S. consumers love their print mail. **Ninety-eight percent** of U.S. consumers check their mail daily, reports U.S. Postal Service. This important moment of the day for many people is called the Mail Moment. Have you ever heard of the Email Moment? Exactly.

U.S. consumers do not only rush to check their mail, they actually take great care of the mail they receive once it enters the household.

The lifespan of a piece of direct mail is on average 17 days, according to **research** by U.K.-based Go Inspire Group. Compare that to the few seconds people are willing to dedicate to an email.

Of course, keeping track of direct mail is not as hard as it is with email, since people simply receive a whole lot less of it. U.S. consumers receive, on average, **17 pieces** of direct mail per week, compared to 600 emails.

But does direct mail not cost a lot of money, some detractors will say? It is true that a letter in the mail compares unfavorably in terms of cost mostly because of postage to an email which costs about pennies.

Any marketer will, of course, understand that the ROI of a marketing tool is as much determined by the return variable as it is by the investment made and those return numbers are impressive.

Recipients of direct mail spend no less than 28 percent more with a company from which they receive direct mail than those who do not receive the same piece of direct mail at the same time, according to the **DMA**.

#### Impact through aspirational marketing

It is ironic that of all businesses, online fashion retailers have so quickly forgotten what potential benefits direct mail can bring them since their product is so suitable for the medium.

Beautiful photographs of great models showing off apparel in extraordinary poses can have a high impact because of the aspirational nature of the medium.

Visual information is processed more quickly and elicits more emotion regardless of generation than any text, no matter how great a job the copywriter did.

Direct mail and print catalogs can bring the apparel store into the hands of buyers when they are offline and let us not forget that while buyers are ever more online, they are still offline most of the time.

Because of the easy trackability that is inherent to direct mail "matchback" techniques, measurement of a direct mail campaign's results will not be any more difficult than measurement of a digital marketing campaign.

Businesses simply give customers a code and then track how that code is used or matchback sales to customers known to have received a print piece.

ANY ONLINE FASHION retail marketer who takes a step back and assesses the data that exists on the ROI of different online and offline channels will be able to come to the conclusion that direct mail is very worthy of getting back into fashion in the marketing department.

*Jay Dunn is president of U.S. marketing and operations for **City Chic Collective USA**, managing **Avenue.com** and other branded Web sites. Reach him at [jay.dunn@citychic.com](mailto:jay.dunn@citychic.com).*

---

#### MOST POPULAR

1. **Brands should incentivize consumers to go green**
2. **Retailers expanding pickup options, facing staff shortages this holiday season: report**
3. **Owning the customer experience in an Amazon-disrupted market**

4. Shifts in retail sales of women's designer bags
5. Macy's trademark decision confirms importance of surveys
6. Year of the Rooster luxury items: Hit or miss with Chinese consumers?
7. How luxury is the millennial's unlikely weapon to fight social inequality
8. Luxury brands need to change their marketing strategy for India
9. Green is the new black: Backing the Fashion Pact
10. How resale, rental and flex payments can put luxury within reach – especially now

© 2021 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

American Marketer is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.