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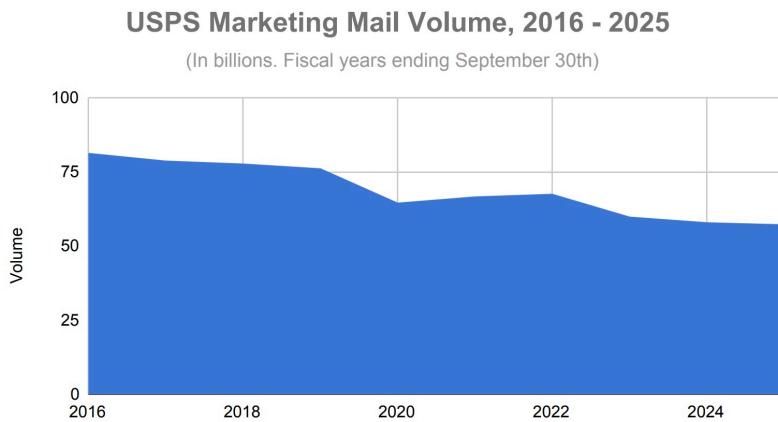
January 2026

Will 2026 be a "breakout year" for physical mail?

It could be. No, **it should be!**

Even Millennials and Gen Z — two generations of the Internet Age — are reading and responding to physical mail.

In our August 2025 issue, we presented findings from Lob's ***State of Direct Mail 2025***. In it, **Ryan Ferrier**, Lob's CEO, stated that "*85% of Gen Z and Millennials engage with direct mail, a sharp contrast to older generations. But they are not responding to the same old postcards.*"



While USPS marketing mail volume declined slightly in 2025 compared to 2024, the rate of decline was negligible and may be explained by the trend towards low-volume, more focused mail campaigns.

Programmatic direct mail illustrates this trend: It describes small-volume campaigns based on customer or prospect behavior. (A postcard sent to people who abandoned their

online shopping cart is one example of this type of campaign.)

Ironically, some of these campaigns are mailed as first-class mail, because they do not have sufficient volume to qualify for marketing mail rates. Also, some direct mail campaigns deliberately mail at first-class rates to gain greater control over when recipients will receive them. Consequently, it is not possible to know precisely how many pieces of marketing mail

were sent during the year. The actual number is higher than the above chart suggests.

However, we do know that more entities are turning to physical mail for their marketing.

According to **Jacob Downing**, VP of Operations at Who's Mailing What!, the platform welcomed 5,192 new mailers over the

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"Breakout Year..."
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12 months ended November 2025.

Similarly, in the previous 12-month period, WMW! added 4,436 new advertisers, for a 2-year total of 9,628 new mail users. (Some of these advertisers will be new to WMW!, but not to direct mail. Most will be new to both.)

Direct mail is easily tested.

Direct mail costs money and sometimes, that's the reason why it is not used for marketing. Companies use email instead, because it is "free."

Anyone skeptical about direct mail should conduct a test — run the identical promotion to a set of customers. 40% of the customers receive the promotion by mail, 40% by email, and 20% receive neither. (The latter is a "hold out" group. Its results allow for the incremental gain to be calculated for both the mail and email groups.)

Most of the time, in a head-to-head test like this, the physical mail group will generate more incremental sales revenue after deducting the mailing costs.

Frequently, customer lifetime value is higher for those who respond to physical mail campaigns, although this metric should be determined by each business individually.



Rory Sutherland
Vice Chairman, Ogilvy UK

Famous advertising man **Rory Sutherland**, who started his career in the direct response division of Ogilvy, has much to say about direct mail today. Here's an excerpt from a Printweek article, dated January 24, 2025, on why direct mail is 'uniquely effective.'

Direct mail "makes no sense purely from an efficiency standpoint because it's a very expensive way of reaching a single person. But from an effectiveness standpoint, direct mail is often cited as one of the most successful forms of acquisition whenever I

Continues on the right

speak to a business.

"One reason is simply that it's much rarer than it was. My own children, who are in their 20s, find receiving a piece of direct mail wildly exciting. It's not like the late 90s, which was probably the high point of direct mail volume, where in the run-up to Christmas you found it difficult to open your front door. Quite the opposite, in fact.

"One of the reasons I always recommend to clients that they test direct mail is that, because it's so counter-cultural, most of their competitors will be reluctant to copy them."

Veteran direct marketer **Brian Kurtz**, who in the words of a top copywriter sold \$1billion in



Brian Kurtz
Owner, Titans Marketing

newsletter subscriptions, \$39 at a time, and now runs a direct response mastermind, believes that "the 'market' for direct mail is smaller than it has ever been... and it's also nuanced."

Enter "THE BOGEY MAN"

Because Brian was selling a low-priced product, he often lost money on acquisition campaigns.

This is not unusual, and if you are considering adding direct mail to your marketing mix in 2026, you should plan on the same outcome.

Here's great advice from Brian, from his book, **Overdeliver**:

*"We (meaning direct mail consultant, the late **Dick Benson** and Brian) calculated on a list-by-list basis how much we were willing to lose on the initial*

subscription. (This number is called "the bogey.") That calculation took into account the average renewal rates of the initial subscribers, list rental income we could derive from those subscribers for as long as they were on file as active, and what the average new subscriber would buy from us after the first sale (such as subscriptions to other newsletters and books in similar subject areas)..."

"The end result was that we got rich slowly... This process started with a one-year bogey (making a new subscriber profitable a year after we sold it), then we moved to a two-year bogey, and eventually a three-year bogey. Who would have believed when we launched the publication that we would be willing to wait until year three to break even on a new subscriber?"

For the record, the company's flagship consumer newsletter, **Bottom Line/Personal**, reached a million paid subscribers at its height.

Ask yourself: What bogey are you prepared to accept for your new customer acquisition campaigns?

Calculate it, as Brian describes above.

Direct mail builds relationships.

Not all direct mail campaigns strive to find new customers... or donors, subscribers, patients, or advocates for a cause.

Some campaigns aim to strengthen the relationship between a business and its customers. A \$1,000 customer should not receive the same communications as a \$100 customer.

A customer who purchases regularly should not receive the same communications as someone who bought once.

A lapsed customer should not receive the same communications as a current customer.

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"Breakout Year..."

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View your customer data through the lens of Recency, Frequency and Monetary Value Analysis (RFM).

You will invariably find a handful of raving fans, many solid repeat customers, a large group who only purchased once and another group who have not bought in some time.

Send different physical packages to these four customer groups, each with different needs.

The raving fans might receive a gift... the solid buyers a special offer... the one-timers a pitch for that second sale... the lapsed customers incentives to come back.

The fundamental strategy behind relationship-building campaigns is to make your customers immune to competitive offers.

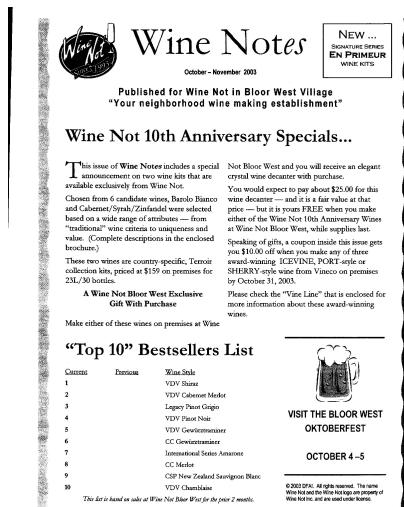
The Humble Customer Newsletter

If you are still skeptical about using physical mail, consider testing a customer newsletter, which is a hybrid product that combines relationship-building content with sales-building offers.

The newsletter does not need to be fancy, but it does need to be consistent, in both content and publication frequency.

Judy McFarlane, David Foley's wife, built

her winemaking business primarily on her customer newsletters.



This is page one of her first newsletter: two 8 1/2" x 11" sheets printed on both sides in black ink, and stapled in the upper-left corner. (Not fancy at all!)

In time, the newsletter

morphed into an 11" x 17" format, in full color.

Regardless of the format, Judy's customers would bring their newsletters into the store and use them to decide on their next purchase. (There are countless other stories on the value of customer newsletters.)

Will 2026 be a "breakout year" for physical mail? It will be, if you make it so!

(Don't say we ever said this, but it is possible to test a physical newsletter versus a digital version. It just takes time and patience for the results to be known.)

MEMBERS-ONLY LIVE DIRECT MAIL INSIDERS' CALLS ON ZOOM

(All 90-minute calls start at NOON Eastern/11 AM Central/9 AM Pacific)

ALL Members

January 13th

February 10th

March 10th

FULL Members

January 27th

February 24th

March 24th

These calls will be recorded and posted on the Private Members' Site for future reference.

Call Notes

I meant to discuss this on our November 11th call, but ran into trouble connecting to the Internet from a cruise ship. (Yup, talk about first-world problems!)

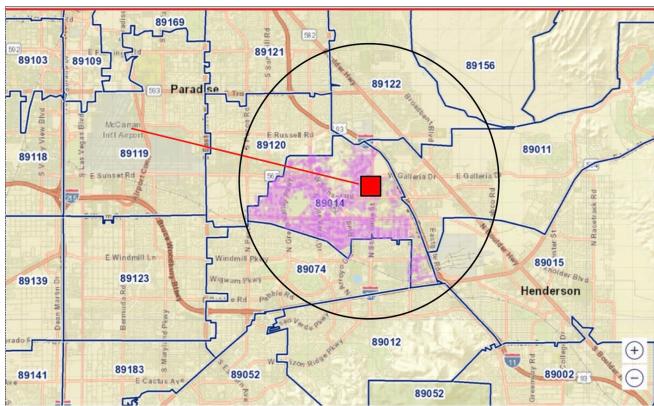
A colleague and friend said he had two direct

mail projects for me, which is always good news.

The first project was a postcard sent to businesses within a 3-mile radius of a certain shopping center, delivered via USPS's Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) service.

The potential client described the offer as a "free upgrade" on a local business directory, which lists for \$1,000, although none have been sold at that, or any, price.

The campaign was to be mailed as quickly as possible; however, such urgency is no excuse for poor planning.



The planning process was easy. Start with the zip code map (above), locate the shopping center (red square), and set the radius (black circle). The red line represents the "expanded radius" which may have been used, budget permitting.)

Then, get a count of businesses in each zip

code, and that's where the doubts formed.

Since EDDM is literally every address in a zip code, it became apparent there would be significant waste with this campaign. Taking the zip codes with the highest percentage of businesses would reach 3,593 businesses, from a distribution of 4,623 postcards.

Postal Routes around Galleria at Sunset mall, Henderson, NV (89104)					
Count by Zip - All	Count by Zip - Bus	Postal Route	Number of Addresses		
			Res.	Bus	Total
585	451	89014 - C075	134	451	585
275	275	89011 - C030	0	275	275
		89119 - C006	269	213	482
		89119 - C007	10	178	188
		89119 - C018	155	201	356
		89119 - C050	203	315	518
		89119 - C053	3	255	258
2088	1396	89119 - C063	52	234	286
		89120 - C032	181	297	478
		89120 - C041	2	777	779
1675	1471	89120 - C038	21	397	418
4623	3593		1030	3593	4623
		Percentage:	22%	78%	
E&OE					

Since I knew the cost to produce and mail the campaign, I could turn those quantities into dollars — \$2.39 for each postcard delivered to a business address.

While a smaller, simpler postcard would have saved some money, that was not the main issue in my mind.

Tumbling the numbers, I concluded that there was no way that this campaign would "pay off" in terms of upgrades. (Even though there was no revenue from the upgrades, there was the expectation that some businesses would accept the offer. But, how many?)

I emailed a 7-page report to my potential client, making this point, and recommending that he not proceed with this campaign.

It would be an understatement to say that he was surprised; he has never spoken to me again about direct mail!

Sometimes, doing the right thing does not produce the best outcome. DF

Mailing of the Month:

ZipRecruiter, Inc.

Santa Monica, CA

About ZipRecruiter

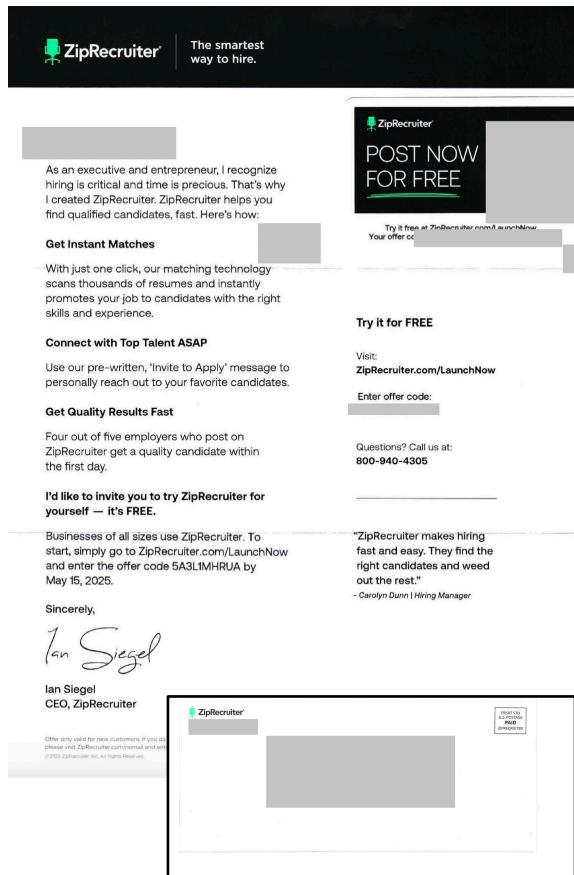
Founded in 2010 by current CEO Ian Siegel and three others, ZipRecruiter claims to be "the fastest growing online employment marketplace, the #1 rated hiring site in America and the #1 rated job search app on IOS and Android. (These claims are from its website, ziprecruiter.com.)

The online employment marketplace is very competitive, with hundreds of firms competing for space (including 64 that, like ZipRecruiter, received funding from VC firms). The best-known brands in America are (listed alphabetically) CareerBuilder, Glassdoor, Indeed, LinkedIn Jobs, and Monster.

Among this group, ZipRecruiter and Indeed are the largest users of direct mail.

About these Campaigns

These are long-running acquisition campaigns for ZipRecruiter. At present, there are 409 campaigns on WMW! We studied a random selection and the offer — employers get a free job listing — has been used consistently over the years.



Comments on these Campaigns

As well as being consistent with its offer, ZipRecruiter has been consistent in the presentation of this offer to its prospects, employers who might post jobs on its platform.

Generally, they have used two different formats.

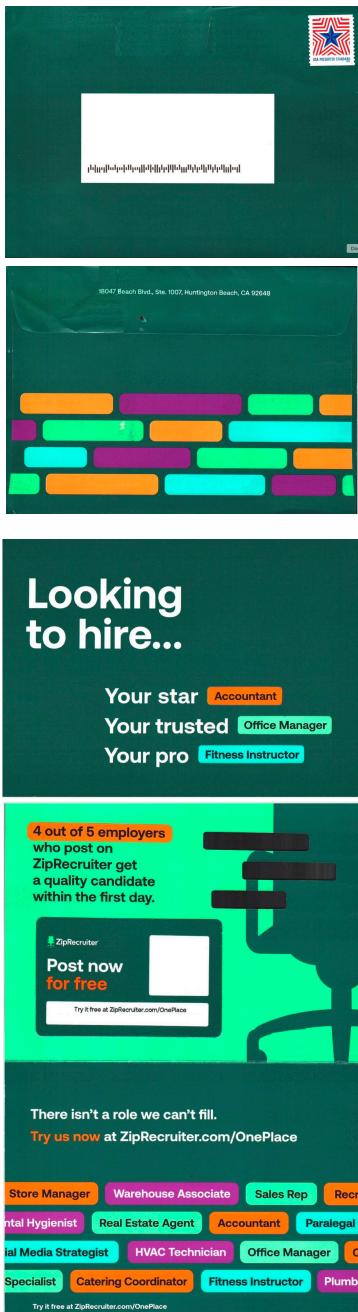
On the left, you see a basic business pitch. This campaign is mailed in a #10 envelope with the company logo and return address in the cornercard, and the recipient's delivery information where one would expect it, but without any promotional copy.

Inside is a single-page letter that makes the offer in three ways.

First, that's presumably a QR code in the upper right. Second, and below the QR code graphic, you'll find the URL (ZipRecruiter.com/LaunchNow) and offer code. Third, this information is repeated in the final paragraph of the letter.

This format is relatively easy and inexpensive, and is

used by many different industries.



The second format uses a larger envelope (6" x 9", we believe) and more color. Obviously, this is a more expensive package.

At the left, you see both sides of the envelope and below the inside piece: the outside front cover is shown first, then the inside spread. The back cover, not shown, includes the company's logo, phone number, and opt-out instructions. We expect that this piece to have been printed on cardstock.

As of December 1, 2025, ZipRecruiter has 61 campaigns on WMW! 21 are the letter mailing and 40 are the larger format. What do these numbers tell us?

While both of these packages are "controls" in WMW!, the larger, more colorful package probably achieves a higher response rate than the black-and-white #10 envelope package.

But at a higher cost.

We were particularly interested in knowing if ZipRecruiter had tested both packages with so-called logical or rational thinkers (engineers, for example) and learning what the results were.

Our second question: Which format had the better conversion rate? In both cases, the offer is for a corporate job listing without charge. Which of the responders placed a second or subsequent paid job listing? Isn't that the real question?

Unfortunately, we do not have the answers to these questions or other insights from ZipRecruiter's direct mail campaigns.

(We contacted ZipRecruiter's press office requesting an interview with a senior person on its direct mail team but (10 days later) have not received a response.)

The bottom line is that when making a "free" offer record both the number of responses to the mailing as well as the number of conversions over time. The latter number is much more important. And, if you are using different formats against the same list, record these same metrics for each campaign.

Stats from Who's Mailing What! for these mailings.

Left: WMW!'s "score" for this campaign (0 to 100)

Center: This campaign's most recent mailing date

Right: One star indicates a "control mailing; 3 stars, a "grand control."



Images courtesy of Who's Mailing What!

Beyond The Mailbox

How to Build Endless Word-of-Mouth

by David Baer

I spend most of my time working (or networking) with small business owners.

Many proudly tell me their businesses are built on referrals. And yet, when I ask what kind of system they use to get referrals, their answers almost always disappoint.

They say that they earn those referrals by doing good work. Or by treating their customers well. Sometimes, someone tells a friend about them and... maybe they get a new customer from it.

But most of the time, their referrals are actually rather random, they eventually admit.

They cannot count on them. They cannot plan for them. They hope people talk, but they don't know when — or if — it will happen.

This is a problem. Word-of-mouth is powerful. It's trusted. It's free. But if you can't control it, it's not much help.

Fortunately, you don't have to leave it to chance, because there are ways to make word-of-mouth steady and reliable regardless of what type of business you're in.

Why a System Matters

Think about your best customers.

Most of them probably came from a referral. Maybe a friend told them about you. Maybe they saw a post online. Maybe someone shared a story about your business.

These are the customers who stay longer, spend more, and trust you from the start.

But if you only get these customers by luck, you're not leveraging your assets.

The best businesses don't wait for referrals. They build a process that makes them happen. They make it easy for people to talk about them. They give people a reason to share.

And they track what works, so they can do more of it.

Five Steps to Create Endless Word-of-Mouth

1. Ask for Referrals—Every Time

Most people won't give you a referral unless you ask. Even happy customers forget. They get busy. They move on. But if you ask, many will help. The key is to make it part of your routine.

For example, some businesses train their staff to ask for referrals after every sale. Others send a follow-up email with a simple request. Some even give a small reward for every new customer sent their way.

These tactics are not pushy. They are simple reminders. They work.

How to do it:

- Write a short script for your team.
- Use it after a sale, or when a customer says they're happy.
- Thank people who refer others. (TIP: For best results, send a handwritten note in the mail. Keep a stack of "thank you" cards and

Continues on the right

matching envelopes ready.)

- Keep track of who sends you new business.

Why it works:

People like to help, but they need a nudge. When you ask, you get more referrals. When you thank people, they feel good and want to help again.

2. Give People Something to Talk About

People don't talk about average businesses. They talk about things that surprise them. Maybe it's a funny sign in your store. Maybe it's a special event. Maybe it's a small gift with their order. These things don't have to cost much. They just have to be different.

One business held a "crazy tie day" and invited customers to wear their wildest ties. Another sent handwritten thank-you notes. Another gave out free samples at local events. These small touches got people talking. They shared photos. They told friends. And new customers showed up.

How to do it:

- Look for ways to stand out.
- Try something new each month.
- Ask your team for ideas.
- Watch what gets people talking, and do more of it.

Why it works:

People like to share stories. When you give them a story, they spread the word for you.

3. Use What You Already Have

You don't need a big budget to get people talking. Start with what you have. Maybe you have a list of loyal customers. Maybe you have a website or a social media page. Maybe you have a spot in your store where people gather.

Some businesses use their email list to ask for referrals. Others post customer stories on their website. Some create a "wall of fame" for customers who refer others. These simple steps make people feel special. They also remind others to join in.

How to do it:

- Make a list of your assets — email, website, social media, mailing lists, in-store space.
- Use these to share stories, ask for referrals, or thank people.
- Keep it simple. You don't need fancy tools.

Why it works:

People notice when you use what you have. It feels real. It feels personal. And it gets results.

4. Build Trust Before You Sell

People only refer businesses they trust. If you focus on helping, not just selling, people notice. They remember you. They tell others.

Some businesses send helpful tips to their customers. Others check in after a sale to make sure everything is okay. Some offer free advice, even if it doesn't lead to a sale right away. These actions build trust. And trust leads to referrals.

How to do it:

- Share useful information, not just sales pitches.
- Follow up after the sale.
- Ask if your customer is happy.
- Fix problems fast.

Why it works:

When people trust you, they want to help you. They feel good about sending friends your way.

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5. Track What Works and Keep Improving

You can't improve what you don't measure. The best businesses track every referral. They know who sent them. They know what made it happen. They look for patterns. Then they do more of what works.

Some use a simple spreadsheet. Others use a notebook. The tool doesn't matter. What matters is paying attention.

How to do it:

- Write down every referral you get.
- Note who sent it and how it happened.
- Review your list each month.
- Try new ideas, and see what works best.

Why it works:

When you track results, you see what's working. You can stop what doesn't work and do more of what does.

How To Start Taking Control of Your Referrals Now

You don't need to change everything at once. Start small. Pick one step and try it this week. Maybe you ask for a referral after your next sale.

Maybe you send a thank-you note. (But, make this a genuine thank you note, not a request for a referral!)

Maybe you try a small event or share a customer story online.

Here's a simple checklist to get started:

- Ask for a referral after every sale.
- Try one new idea to get people talking.

- Use your email or website to share stories.
- Follow up with customers to build trust.
- Track every referral you get.

If you do these things, you'll see results. Maybe not overnight. But over time, you'll get more referrals. You'll build stronger relationships. And you'll grow your business in a way that feels steady and real.

Word-of-mouth is not just about getting new customers. It's about building a business people care about. It's about making your customers feel good about helping you. It's about creating a community around your business.

When you make word-of-mouth a system, you take control. You stop waiting for luck. You start building something that lasts.

Do you know someone who would like to receive a sample issue of this report?

If so, please complete this form, and we will mail them a copy.

We appreciate your referral and will mention your name in the accompanying letter, or you can choose to be anonymous.

Thank you for helping to grow interest in Direct Mail Insiders.



www.directmailinsiders.com/referral

Outrageously Successful!

Well before the Glazer-Kennedy Insider Circle was a concept, **Bill Glazer** owned a menswear business, Gage World Class Men's Stores.

Stuck with excess inventory, he sent a handwritten, 5-page letter to his preferred customers.

The letter is difficult to read, with numerous strikeouts and notes in the margins. But in many ways, the format only adds to the appeal; it's like one is reading someone's thoughts before they are fully formed.

The letter might be long, but the copy is focused. The first page explains why he is writing the letter and to whom.

Glazer explains: "Reason why copy is critical for results. Response goes way up when you give the recipient a reason why you are making them an offer, and it is best relayed in the form of a story."

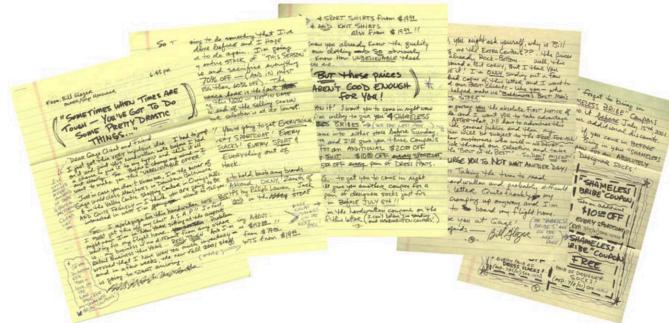
The second page offers details of the offer – all the pertinent information.

Glazer elaborates: "Pertinent information is another key element when you are developing advertising. Just think about it. If you left out just one piece of pertinent information, it could make the difference (and often does) as to whether someone responds to you or not."

By the third page, the readers know why he is

having a sale, but now he declares in huge bold handwritten print surrounded by big parentheses –

(BUT THESE PRICES AREN'T GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU!)



So, he gives the specifics of what they are about and how much can be saved. One coupon offers a free pair of designer socks just for coming into the store. No purchase necessary.

Making the letter personal is incredibly effective, but the third page offers one more essential element – a deadline!

The fourth page is a personal message again, reminding the readers that Gage is Baltimore's Best Men's Clothing Store and that the recipients of this letter are his preferred customers. Not just any Joe gets these deals!

And, the final page offers four hand-drawn coupons, calling them "Shameless Bribes."

While the letter appears to have been written in a rush, it was actually carefully planned and executed.

Should you try the same thing?

Excerpted from Bill Glazer's book, ***Outrageous Advertising That's Outrageously Successful.***

You can purchase this book from Amazon, BookFinder, ThriftBooks and possibly elsewhere.



SEND-OFF

EMBRACING THE CHAOS: WHY UNCERTAINTY IS YOUR BEST ALLY

Uncertainty is an unavoidable part of business.

Market conditions shift, customer preferences evolve, and unexpected challenges can arise without warning. While many leaders view uncertainty as a threat, it can be one of your most significant advantages if you know how to harness it.

Here's how embracing uncertainty can strengthen your business and open new opportunities:

1. Uncertainty Drives Innovation

When the path forward isn't clear, businesses must think creatively. Uncertainty pushes teams to question old methods and explore new solutions. This environment encourages fresh ideas that might not emerge in more predictable circumstances.

Start small — give your team permission to experiment with new approaches during times of uncertainty.

2. It Keeps You Agile

Flexibility is one of the most valuable traits a business can have. Companies that adapt quickly to changing conditions often gain an edge over competitors. Build agility into your operations by planning for multiple scenarios and empowering your team to make decisions without waiting for lengthy approvals.

Agility isn't just a survival mechanism; it's a

competitive advantage.

3. Uncertainty Highlights Your Strengths

When external conditions shift, you learn what your business is truly capable of. Tough decisions reveal core strengths and force you to focus on what matters most. Use uncertainty as an opportunity to identify and invest in the areas where your business excels.

A clear understanding of your strengths helps you weather the storm and come out stronger.

4. It Helps You Build Resilience

Uncertainty tests the resilience of your team and processes. Facing challenges head-on helps you develop strategies for staying focused under pressure. Create a culture where setbacks are learning opportunities rather than failures.

Resilience isn't built overnight, but every uncertain moment gives you another chance to practice and improve.

5. Uncertainty Creates New Opportunities

The unpredictable nature of business means that opportunities often arise where you least expect them. Businesses willing to embrace the unknown are more likely to notice these opportunities and act on them.

Stay open to unexpected partnerships, markets, or innovations that could help your business grow in new directions.

Uncertainty may feel uncomfortable, but it is a natural part of growth. By shifting your perspective and seeing it as an ally rather than an enemy, you can unlock its potential to drive innovation, agility, and long-term success.