



A collaboration with:



June 2026

Is Direct Mail at a Crossroads?

Some say that direct mail marketing in the USA is at a crossroads in 2026.

While overall industry revenue and mail volume are declining somewhat, **the channel's effectiveness, ROI, and capacity for innovation remain unmatched.** Marketers who embrace advanced personalization, omnichannel integration, and sustainable practices are achieving superior results — even as they navigate rising costs and regulatory complexity.

Direct mail's tactile, targeted approach continues to cut through digital noise, delivering high engagement and ROI.

But, many marketers continue to plow more and more money into digital campaigns, apparently believing that emails can replace paper-based campaigns that land in the mailboxes of the nation's consumers and which are opened, read, and acted upon.

Let's look at a few facts.

1. The decline in direct mail volume is very modest.

US Marketing Mail Volume and % Change

Year	Volume (millions)	% Change
2019	75.7	
2020	64.2	-15.2%
2021	66.2	3.12%
2022	67.1	1.35%
2023	59.4	-11.48%
2024	57.5	-3.20%
2025	56.8	-1.22%

Source: USPS

The table on the left shows marketing mail volume from 2019 through 2025, from USPS. The significant decline in 2020 can be attributed primarily to the pandemic, while the 2023 decline reflects a growing enthusiasm for digital channels.

Is that enthusiasm slowing? It's early, but the results from 2024 and 2025 may indicate that. Digital fatigue, maybe.

Long-term direct mail advertisers such as AMEX, Capital One, and Progressive Insurance continue to use direct mail because of its proven results.

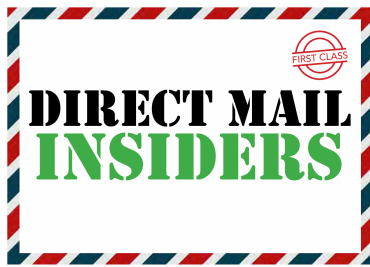
Despite rising postage costs and the growth of digital marketing, direct mail remains a vital, ROI-positive component of their marketing mix.

And, new advertisers are joining the direct mail

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community.

Anastasiia Volkova, product manager at Direct Mail 2.0 (which owns Who's Mailing What!), says that 547 new advertisers were added to the WMW! database in the last 90 days (ending May 4, 2026).

Something to remember: The marketing teams at each of these new direct mail advertisers will have considered, and answered, this question: ***What can physical mail campaigns do that digital campaigns can not?***

It's a fair question, and veteran industry consultant **John Miglautsch** has the answer. If you are dissatisfied with the performance of your digital campaigns, pause them and use the savings to fund a well-designed direct mail test.

(By "well-designed," we mean a campaign that adheres to the 40% list, 40% offer, and 20% creative formula.)

Testing physical versus digital

Here's another testing hypothesis. Make the identical offer to customers -- half by email and the other half by physical mail. In most cases, the physical mail group will outperform the email group, even after deducting the cost of the physical mail campaign from the sales results.

The much higher open rate of the physical mail offer leads to more engagement, which leads to higher response and meaning more money in the bank.

2. Some industries benefit from direct mail more than others.

While every organization could (and should) use physical mail to build relationships with key customer segments, some industries benefit more than others when it comes to acquiring new customers or increasing the profitability of current customers.

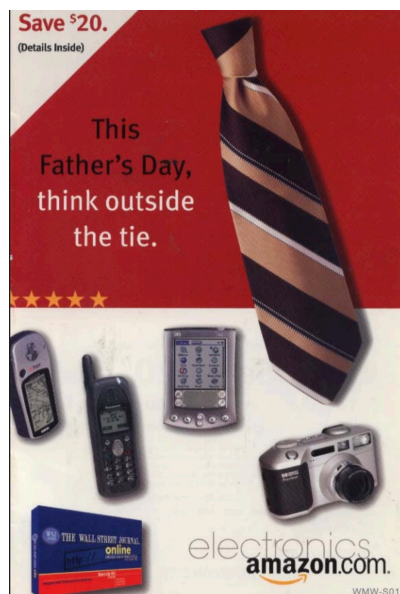
These industries are (in alphabetical order): Automotive, E-commerce, Financial Services, Insurance, and Nonprofits.

Continues on the right

It's fair to say that if you are in one of these industries and not using direct mail, you are probably losing out to your competitors.

Amazon sets an example.

We think of Amazon as an e-commerce business, and it is. But it is also a large user of direct mail to support its growth and profits.



The first Amazon direct mail campaign on WMW! was a 2001 Father's Day promotion for anything but ties.

visitors who abandoned their shopping carts without purchasing. An offer is mailed to those people, usually within 24 hours. ,

3. Certain demographic and psychographic groups respond better to direct mail.

These buyer groups are (in alphabetical order): Baby Boomers, College Educated, Financial Services audiences, Gen X, Gen Z and Millennials, Healthcare audiences, High-value/Loyalty customers, Homeowners, Middle-to-upper income households (Suburbs), Recent

Movers, Renters, Rural Households, and Women.

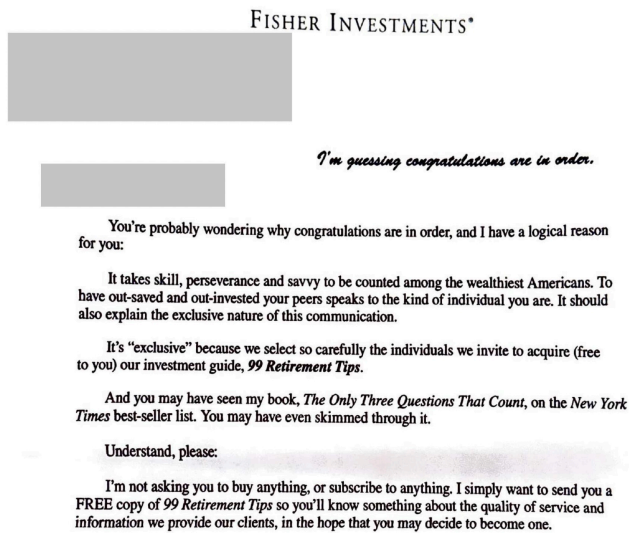
"Show Me The Money"

When crafting a direct mail strategy for your business, a great place to start is to think about who can afford your product or service.

"Affordability" can mean many things, but it often means "money." In that case, middle-to-high-income households, college graduates, homeowners, and Baby Boomers may describe your audience.

Fisher Investments has built its entire business focused on those with \$500,000 to invest.

Here's the lede of a customer acquisition mailing that they have mailed since 2020, and which is, understandably, a grand control.



It's a simple offer (a free investment guide) that may interest potential clients, even those who are satisfied with their present investment advisor(s). Investors always want to do better!

Affordability can also mean "necessity." Consider the plight of a family that have just moved to a new city in a new state. They need everything!

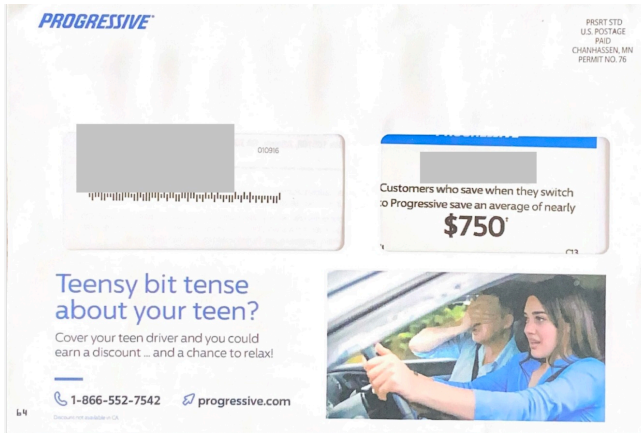
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The same can be said for new parents, which (And, so on.) is why P&G launched Pampers Club (in 2017), a program that allows parents to earn rewards for purchasing Pampers products, such as diapers and wipes.

Buying often requires a specific circumstance, such as this outer envelope from Progressive Insurance, which perfectly describes this situation. (Especially, the photograph!)



Circumstance also explains...

Renters' interest in moving offers,

Rural households' interest in catalogs and other convenience-driven retail offers,

Some Nikon SLR camera owners and their interest in Nikkor lenses.

Women as the Chief Purchasing Officer

Several studies show that women control the vast majority of household buying decisions.

This raises the question: ***How is direct mail targeting women different than direct mail addressed to men?***

And, this: ***Should you have two different versions of your campaigns?***

In 2003, **Marti Barletta** published *Marketing to Women: How to Increase Your Share of the World's Largest Market*, a foundational text on marketing to women (regardless of medium).

To help us, here are five key insights from this book.

1. Women as the Ultimate Consumers.

Women influence or directly control 85% of consumer purchases across almost all product categories.

They are more likely than men to consider the needs of their families and communities when making purchasing decisions.

Continues on the right

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

June 9th

July 14th

August 11th

FULL Members

June 23rd

July 28th

August 25th

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

2. The Gender Differences in Decision-Making

Women tend to be detail-oriented, spending more time researching and evaluating their options.

Men prioritize efficiency and are more likely to make quick, goal-oriented decisions.

3. Relationship-Driven Marketing

Women value brands that build trust and long-term relationships. (Barletta advises marketers to focus less on transactional selling and more on building loyalty through genuine engagement.)

4. The Importance of Storytelling

Women respond well to stories that connect with their emotions and values.

Successful campaigns often highlight how a product can improve a woman's daily life or solve a problem.

5. Tailoring Marketing to Women

Marketing to women isn't about making products pink — it's about understanding their priorities.

Consequently, businesses should design products, services, and messaging that reflect women's lifestyles and aspirations.

Dove's "Real Beauty" Campaign is often cited as the game changer in marketing to women in the new millennium. (Remember Virginia Slims, the cigarette brand that exclusively targeted women in the 70s and 80s.)

Launched in 2004 and still ongoing and evolving, this campaign redefined beauty standards and empowered women to feel confident in their natural beauty.

More recently, the campaign initiated conversations about body positivity, self-esteem, and inclusivity.

Other female-focused campaigns have also been successful. Here are three examples.

Nike's "Dream Crazy" Campaign (2019) struck a chord with women around the world, earning widespread praise for its raw, emotional storytelling.

Nonprofit Girls Who Code, MIT Media Lab, the Ad Council and for-profit businesses partnered with the "She Can STEM" campaign."

Created (in 2018) to address the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields, it featured diverse female role models in STEM careers and highlighted their achievements.

Libresse's "Womb Stories" Campaign (2020) addressed diverse and often taboo topics, such as miscarriage, infertility, menopause, painful periods, and childbirth.

The campaign won multiple awards, including a Grand Prix at Cannes Lions, and was praised for its honesty and creativity.

(We should point out that these campaigns achieved their commercial goals, boosting sales and strengthening respective positions as bold and progressive brands that support women.)

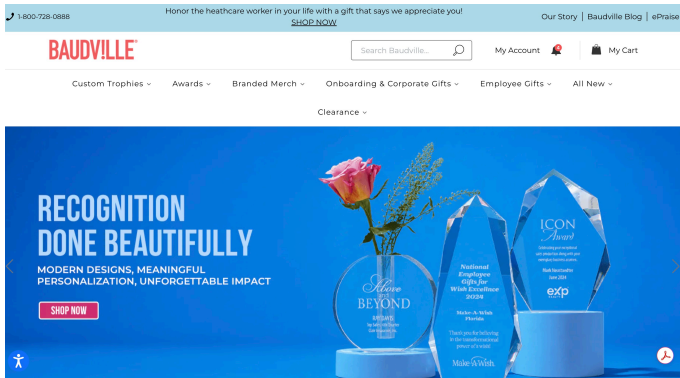
Back then, to our question: **Is Direct Mail at a Crossroads?**

Not for brands that bold concepts and present them to their audience — women in particular — using proven long-form direct mail.

For everyone else, yes. And a crossroads requires that a decision is made.

Mailing of the Month: **Baudville Inc.** Grand Rapids, MI

About Baudville Inc.



Bill Darooge started Baudville Inc. in 1983 as a computer game company, but transitioned into the awards and recognition business.

The company has been an integral part of recognition programs and practices in organizations across the country.

Its employee recognition solutions and expertise have helped millions motivate, engage, and retain those who are essential to

their businesses, schools, healthcare facilities, and non-profit organizations.

About this Campaign

This catalog mailing shows the extensive range of award and recognition products that the company offers.

Comments on this Campaign



Baudville has 84 different campaigns on the Who's Mailing What! database, from 2007 through today.

The company uses a mix of postcards, self-mailers, and catalogs.

First, let's compare the back cover messages from two different catalogs.

The top image is from a 2025 promotion that implores people to "stop sending boring gifts," and illustrates the point with some less-than-inspirational products. Probably not its best effort.

The second image is from this month's featured promotion. Its theme — "Tenure. Commitment. Growth." — is illustrated by an award that grows higher over time.

Of these two approaches, we prefer the second one, if only because positive messages attract while negative messages repel.





Fundamentally, Baudville offers organizations many different ways to express appreciation to their people.

Presumably, once a design is chosen for a recurring award, the same design is reused over and over again, which is great from a customer lifetime value point of view.

Its latest catalog (shown on the right) does a good job of communicating ideas, starting with the G.O.A.T-themed awards shown on the cover.

Whether the G.O.A.T concept is a flash in the pan or not, you would agree that the award on the right will make a conversation piece on any mantle!

Similarly, the interior pages of the catalog (below, left) show options in themed groupings.

The first spread explores the intersection of "art and accomplishment," with "art glass trophies (that feature) vivid swirls of color encased in clear glass, offering a stunning visual display that honors creativity and achievement."



The second is corporate chest-thumping ("The Nation's Trusted Leader in Awards").

Certainly, the "Shining Star" award shown on the left-hand side of the spread outshines all other awards shown on the spread.

But, that said, an award in the center right is a "Best Seller." From our perspective, a best-selling item deserves more prominence on the page.



From the pages on WMW!, we do not know if engraving the recipient's name is included in the award's price. If it is, that message should be repeated on every panel.

Finally, we do not know if the company mails its catalogs to customers and uses less expensive promotions (postcards and self-mailers) for lead generation. We asked the question, although we did not receive a reply.

This mailing's stats from Who's Mailing What!

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."

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Images courtesy of Who's Mailing What!

Beyond The Mailbox

The Problem With Trying To Be Everywhere With Your Marketing.

by David Baer

Every few years, we see a new “must-use” marketing channel.

Most recently, it’s been TikTok and now AEO (the AI version of SEO). But this has also been the case with email... Instagram... short-form video, or whatever platform everyone seems to be talking about this year.

At first, a few businesses start using the new channel. Then people start talking about it.

Consultants recommend it.

Software companies build tools around it.

And before long, the advice gets flattened into something much less useful:

"You should probably be there too."

That's how a useful tool becomes an expectation. And that expectation, in turn, makes business owners think: "My business needs to be everywhere."

You have probably heard some version of this. Be on LinkedIn. Be on Instagram. Start a podcast. Send email. Send direct mail. Run ads. Post short-form video. Show up in AI search. Stay visible.

And if you run a small business, you're supposed to do all of this while also hiring, selling, delivering the work, answering the phone, and trying to remember whether anyone followed up with the prospect who asked for pricing last Tuesday.

I'd like to offer less conventional advice: You don't need to be everywhere. What's needed is

to know why you are anywhere.

The Attention Problem Has Changed

Sprout Social published its 2026 State of Social Media report earlier this year (<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/the-state-of-social-media/>), based on a survey of more than 2,000 social media users in the U.S., U.K., and Australia.

Two of the report's findings are important here:

Social media is now one of the most common sources of news for almost half the population.

At the same time, people are becoming more selective. According to the report, 66% of people said they feel more selective about the content they engage with compared to a year ago.

And then AI adds another layer of suspicion. Sprout found that 83% of consumers said they see "AI slop" on social media at least sometimes.

Which is to say, people are seeing more content, trusting less of it, and becoming more deliberate about what deserves their attention.

But the answer to fragmented attention is not to create fragmented marketing. And yet, that's exactly what many businesses do.

They take one idea and spread it everywhere they can find. The same announcement goes into an email, a Facebook post, a LinkedIn update, a postcard, and maybe a short video.

Then they call that "multi-channel marketing,"

Continues on the right

when it's often just copying and pasting.

The Channel Is Not The Strategy

Every channel has a job it can do well.

Direct mail can stand out in a physical space at a time when digital messages are easy to ignore. Email can maintain relationships with people who have already agreed to hear from you. Search can catch buyers when they are actively looking. Social media can reveal proof, personality, expertise, and community.

But no channel is automatically better than the others. My point is that no channel belongs in your business unless it has a specific job.

That's where the "be everywhere" advice falls apart. It treats channels as places to occupy instead of tools to use.

That doesn't mean any of those channels are bad. It means the question can't be, "*Should we be there?*"

The question is, "*What job do we expect this channel to do?*"

Assign The Job Before You Judge The Result

This is where a lot of marketing gets muddled.

Business owners often expect every channel to deliver the same results. If a post doesn't create a lead, it failed. If a postcard doesn't produce an immediate sale, it's a failure. If an email doesn't generate clicks, it failed.

Maybe.

Or maybe you gave the channel the wrong job to do.

Some channels introduce your business to people who don't yet know you exist. Some prove you are credible. Some help people compare options. Some move people back into

a conversation after they have gone quiet.

Direct mail is a useful example because it forces discipline. Printing and postage cost money... and you only have so much space for your message.

Who is this for?

What do we want them to do?

What do they need to believe before they will do it?

What happens after they respond?

Those are good questions for any channel. Unfortunately, digital channels often make them easier to avoid because posting on social media, for example, feels free. Of course, it is not free. It costs time, attention, consistency, and focus.

Start With The Business Problem

In tons of small businesses, someone says something along the lines of, "We need to do more marketing." Then the conversation quickly turns into which channels to use.

Should we be posting more?

Should we start a newsletter?

Should we run ads?

All of which may be fair questions. But they should not be the first questions.

The better place to start is with the problem that needs to be solved.

Are too few people hearing about you?

Are the wrong people reaching out?

Are prospects interested but not ready?

Are proposals going quiet?

Each problem points to a different channel job.

If too few people know you exist, you may need

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to improve your reach. If the wrong people keep contacting you, you may need better filtering. If prospects are interested but hesitant, you may need education and proof. If proposals go quiet, you may need to follow-up.

Notice that none of those start with "we need to be on TikTok."

Maybe TikTok belongs in the answer. Or maybe it doesn't. But it shouldn't come up before the problem is clear.

Give Every Channel A Job Description

If you want a practical exercise, make a list of every channel your business currently uses. Website. Email. Direct mail. Facebook. Instagram. LinkedIn. Google Business Profile. Events. Referrals. Whatever applies.

And, don't forget traditional media: Print, Radio, TV, Outdoor, and so on.

Then write a clear and detailed job description for each one.

Not something vague like "brand awareness," a phrase that is sometimes useful but, most of the time, meaningless.

Write the actual job.

For example:

Our website helps qualified prospects understand whether we are a fit before they contact us.

Our email list keeps past customers and interested prospects warm until they are ready.

Our direct mail reactivates people who have bought before but have gone quiet.

Once you do that, it's easier to see the weak spots.

You may find a channel that has no real job.

You may find a channel trying to do three jobs

and doing them all badly.

You may find a channel doing a useful job, but you are judging it by the wrong metric.

You may also find that one channel deserves more attention because it sits closer to the point where revenue is actually won or lost.

And that last part matters because small businesses don't have an unlimited budget.

One problem is that in trying to be "everywhere," your efforts end up being less effective because you are likely to spread your attention and/or budget too thin.

The goal is to move the right people through the right steps with the least amount of waste.

And after all this, you'll realize you probably need to demote something.

I'm not necessarily saying you need to delete it. Just demote it.

In other words, stop pretending it deserves the same energy as channels that are actually doing work.

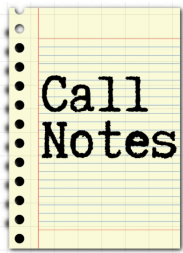
That's how marketing gets cluttered. In part because there are too many options.

But more importantly, because nobody's decided what each option should be responsible for.

So before you add another channel... another content format... another campaign... or another platform to manage, ask a simpler question:

What part of the business is this supposed to help?

If you can't answer that clearly, you probably don't need to be there yet.



The presentation from our May 12th call focused on lessons learned from marketers who use catalogs to promote their businesses.

During the call, we also discussed whether catalog marketers use catalogs or less-expensive formats (postcards, self-mailers) for prospecting. (This is what Baudville, Inc, our mailing-of-the-month appears to be doing.)

One of the central questions was this: *In a two-page spread, which side is more important?*

Catalog marketing expert **John Miglautsch** says that less-expensive formats can be used, but the results won't be the same.

These two spreads from a recent Harry & David catalog say "neither."

"There is a barrier to entry when mailing a catalog. Not everyone can afford to mail them. Therefore, a catalog mailed to prospects has credibility with its recipients, especially if the product category interests them."



(We should point out if a category is not of interest to the prospects, why are they on the mailing list in the first place?)



John also points out that sending catalogs to customers and prospects does not mean that you need to send the same catalog to both.

"You know, I showed that to Cabela's, which sent an 800-page catalog to customers and a 250-page catalog to prospects."

However, experience suggests that the right-hand side is more important than the left, at least in the Western world, because that side is seen first when a reader flips through the catalog.

Further, John would recommend a 48-page catalog as the minimum if you have a run of 100,000 pieces or more.

That rule, **David Foley** asserted, applies to all documents where pages are turned, including the basic 11" x 17" 4-panel newsletter.

At this scale, the prospecting catalog is not that much more expensive than a postcard, and it's "much cheaper in terms of cost per square inch."

With many more "square inches" of selling space, the response rate should increase. Perhaps the average order value will increase as well.



WHAT THE POPULARITY OF NOSTALGIA SAYS ABOUT FUTURE TRENDS.

Nostalgia is more than a passing feeling—it's a force that shapes consumer behavior, brand strategies, and even cultural movements. Its growing popularity across industries reveals key insights about how future trends might evolve.

Why Nostalgia Resonates

In times of uncertainty, people often turn to familiar and comforting memories.

Nostalgia provides a sense of stability and connection, making it a powerful tool for brands and businesses. From retro fashion to reboots of classic TV shows, this yearning for the past influences purchasing decisions and garners attention.

This trend isn't just limited to entertainment or style. It's seen in product design, marketing campaigns, and even technology.

For example, vinyl records and analog cameras are thriving despite advancements in digital technology. They offer consumers not just functionality, but an emotional connection.

How Nostalgia Informs Future Trends

The current popularity of nostalgia suggests that future trends will likely balance the old and the new. Here's what to watch for:

Reimagining the Past

Successful trends often combine nostalgic elements with modern innovations. Products and campaigns that reintroduce familiar concepts while addressing contemporary needs

are likely to thrive. Think hybrid designs, such as modern electric cars styled after classic models.

Long-Term Emotional Marketing

Businesses that tap into nostalgia effectively build deeper emotional connections with their audiences. This trend indicates a growing emphasis on storytelling and cultural references in advertising, with a focus on creating long-term brand loyalty.

Customized Experiences

As nostalgia becomes more prominent, consumers may demand personalized versions of familiar products or services. Limited-edition items and customizable options are likely to rise, allowing customers to reconnect with their past in a way that feels uniquely theirs.

Tech-Augmented Nostalgia

Expect advancements in technology to play a role in enhancing nostalgic experiences. Virtual and augmented reality may bring memories to life in new ways, from immersive retro gaming experiences to virtual tours of past events.

Preparing for What's Next

The popularity of nostalgia isn't a sign of regression—it's a reflection of people's desire for meaning and connection in an increasingly fast-paced world.

Businesses should keep an eye on how this trend evolves, looking for ways to incorporate nostalgia into strategies while staying forward-focused. By understanding the emotional pull of the past, companies can craft innovative products and services that resonate deeply with their audiences.

The key takeaway? Nostalgia is not just a look back—it's a strategic lens for looking ahead.