DIRECT MAIL INSIDERS

A collaboration with: WHO'S MAILING WHAT!

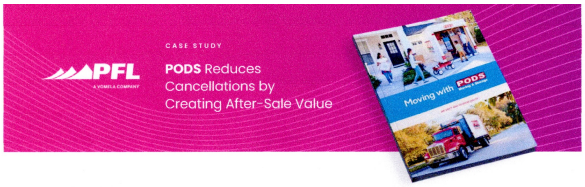
November 2026

Industry Insights from DELIVERED 2026

DELIVERED is an annual online direct mail conference. We attended the 2026 event, and here are our notes from your fellow industry presenters.

First, three stats, especially for those who believe that direct mail is as dead as a doornail. In the USA, direct mail is a **$1.9 trillion industry, that supports over 8 million jobs**. Every day, the USPS processes 361 million pieces of mail, according to **Jay Schwedelson**, president of Boca Raton-based GURU Media Hub, which produces this event. Not dead, and perhaps even experiencing a renaissance in this digital-first world.

Laura Phillips, Director of Demand Generation at PFL, kicked off the industry presentations with "7 Direct Mail Plays to Win Every Stage of the Buyer Journey." The "plays" will be familiar to you: Awareness, Engagement, Consideration, Conversion (2 instances), Customer Retention and Loyalty.



Laura offered a case study from PODS, the portable storage business. Its problem was that 30% of customers cancelled their orders before their storage unit was delivered. Company management recognized this problem and, to minimize cancellations, offered a "Moving Guide," 14 pages of practical advice designed to help customers prepare for container delivery, placement, packing, and logistics. This guide was emailed to new customers and was "performing OK, (but) not great."

Their solution was simple: convert the guide into a physical piece and mail it to customers immediately after their booking. The company continued to send the moving guide by email, but complemented this with the physical guide.

Over seven months, the company mailed physical guides to half of its new customers, while the other half received the guide only by email.

The result blew past the objective of a 1% reduction in cancellations, coming in at 1.73%,

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DIRECT MAIL INSIDERS
2255 SE 37TH AVE
PORTLAND, OR 97214
U.S.A.

Website:
directmailinsiders.com
Email:
info@directmailinsiders.com
Phone:
David Baer
914-522-9363
David Foley
313-285-1204

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"Industry Insights From DELIVERED 2026."
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with the vast majority of saved orders tracked to the direct mail program. (We read the case study and question the math. We contacted Laura via LinkedIn and outlined our concerns but did not hear back from her.)

In the presentation, Laura noted, "(The PODs) direct mail wasn't there to generate the sale; it wasn't there to do the sale all by itself; it was actually there to protect (the sale). And, that's just an entirely different way of thinking about direct mail."
You can find the full case study at PFL's website (pfl.com/successstories).

Our colleagues from Who's Mailing What! (and its sister companies), **Brad** ("the coolest dude in the entire direct mail industry," according to Jay) **Kugler** and **Morgan DiGiorgio** outlined a four-step "repeatable loop" for direct mail campaign planning.

Step 1 uses AI and historical performance data to evaluate a proposed direct mail campaign before it goes to print, helping identify opportunities to strengthen strategy, creative, targeting, and potential performance.

Step 2 focuses on competitive intelligence. By understanding what competitors mail, how often they mail, and what is or isn't changing in their campaigns, marketers can identify opportunities to differentiate their own approach. Resources such as the Who's Mailing What! database provide visibility into this competitive landscape.

Step 3 turns direct mail into an omnichannel campaign. Rather than relying on the physical mailpiece alone, marketers can reinforce the campaign across digital channels, creating additional touchpoints that support the same audience, message, and offer. This extends direct mail's reach and impact while creating more opportunities for engagement and response.

Step 4 measures campaign performance and feeds those results back into the next campaign. As Morgan explained, the goal is to create "a learning system" in which subsequent

Continues on the right

campaigns are dramatically more informed and ultimately better optimized than campaign #1.

The presenters then introduced MarketingTest.ai, a service designed to bring this process together. It analyzes a business's website, prior direct mail campaigns, social media presence, and competitive landscape to produce actionable intelligence before launching the next campaign.

MarketingTest.ai helps marketers predict campaign performance before they print, leverage competitive intelligence to improve strategy, incorporate omnichannel marketing to increase engagement, and continuously measure and optimize results to maximize ROI.

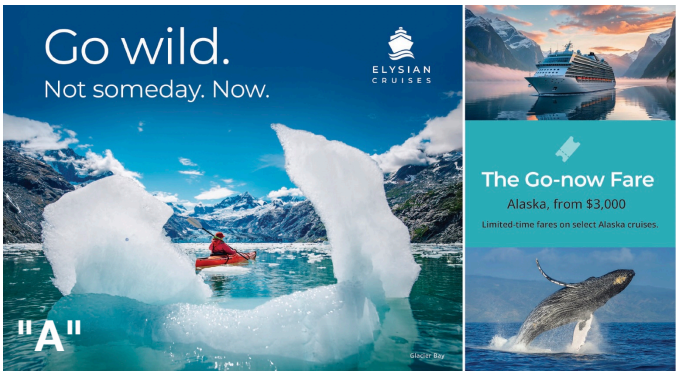
You can start a free trial by scanning the QR code.

Scott Hopkins is Executive Vice President of Anderson Direct & Digital, an agency specializing in customer acquisition campaigns.

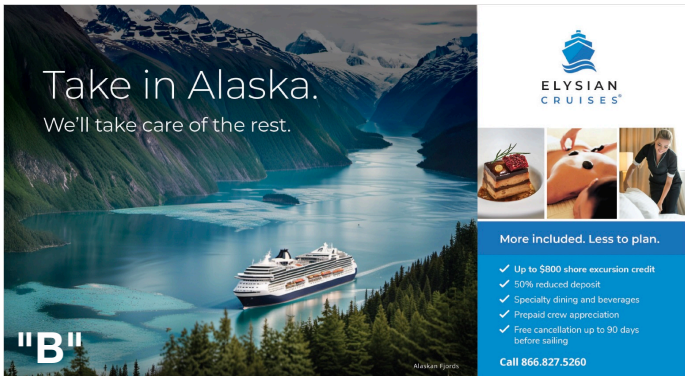
His presentation continued his theme from last year's conference — creative matters — by going beyond demographics and basic psycographics using SmartAcquire, which aggregates data on 250 million American consumers from various sources and updates this massive file every night.

"Meaningful personalization drives performance, but the key is 'meaningful'."

Scott illustrates his point through creative prepared for a mythical cruise line that targeted two completely different potential customer groups for the same cruise. *From these mock-ups, what is the target group for these two postcards?*









These are significantly different audiences, with

Continues on page 4

radically different motivations.

Group A cruises less than Group B, although they represent the future of the cruise industry.

Group A is curious and experience-driven. Financially, this group carefully monitors leisure expenses — 28% have postponed a cruise or long trip, 25% have cut back on leisure spending, and 19% have switched to budget travel.

Group A are very digitally connected and direct mail is a weak media channel. This begs the question: *Should we mail them at all?*

On the postcard, you will notice how the headline ("Go wild. Not someday. Now.") connects with their desire for experiences. This is reinforced by the dominant image on side one of the postcard (a single kayaker among the icebergs) and by other images on both sides. (Look closely enough and you will find an image of a cruise ship!)

Also, the "Go now Fare" Alaska, from $3,000" addresses their financial concerns.

For Group B, you will not find any mention of price on their postcard. This isn't because they are rich, per se. Like Group A, they are dealing with inflation and cutting back on discretionary purchases; 26% travel less often, and 19% take shorter, cheaper trips.

Price is a consideration, of course, but value, low risk, and convenience drive purchase decisions for Group B.

Group B knows and understands direct mail better than most consumers. This group should receive physical mail.

On Group B's postcard, notice how the copy addresses value (The "Experience More Package" saves up to $800 with early booking), low-risk ("More inclusions. Less to plan."), and convenience ("Take in Alaska, We'll take care of the rest.")

Visually, the dominant image on side one is a cruise ship in calm waters. The other images are similarly serene (except for the bear).

Which are the target audiences for these two groups? You will find the answer on page 11.

Scott quickly pointed out that SmartAcquire's massive dataset isn't just for the cruise industry; it works for banks and financial services, home services, retail, healthcare, and more.

To discover who in your audience is ready to act, what motivates them, and what creative will land, use this QR code to order your

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	**November 10th**	**December 8th**	**January 12th**
FULL Members	**November 24th**	**December 22nd**	**January 26th**

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

complimentary Market Opportunity Report. Please note: This offer is limited to the first 20 readers who respond.

Kristina Faragher is another returning speaker. She is the Managing Director of Membership, Acquisition and Monthly Giving at the Sierra Club, a massive non-profit with 3 1/2 million supporters, that mails 15 million pieces each year.

Kristina says that direct mail "is still one of the best ways to raise money as long as you are measuring it correctly." Understandably, her presentation was mostly about measurement.

She tells the story of a test Sierra Club campaign with a QR code that "did raise the response rate even though not many people actually scanned the QR code and went to that page and gave through that page." (What!)

Some people go to Google; others go to sierraclub.org to donate. So, as Kristina says, "<u>if you are not matching back to the mailing, you are undervaluing your mail campaign (by) not counting the full revenue" that the campaign is bringing in</u>. (Underline is our emphasis.)

She also points out that people of all generations are going online, citing her 89-year-old grandmother, who "spends all of her time on DoorDash and Amazon," as an example.

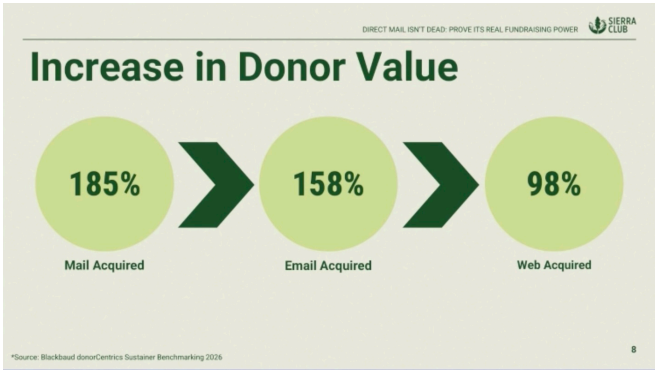
While online giving is always a lively discussion point in the nonprofit community, physical mail remains king for acquiring and cultivating people into high-end donors, defined as those who give $1,000 or more each year.

This is summarized in a donor analysis by Blackbaud (a software vendor to nonprofits), shown on this slide.



Kristina notes that "it may take some years," but the best way to cultivate high-end donors is through a strong direct mail acquisition program.

Physical mail is also critical for those who never reach high-end donor status.



Kristina explains: This slide "shows the increase in donor value by taking the value of a new donor (2025) and comparing it to the four-year value of a donor acquired in 2021. It's not an exact one-to-one, but it is a pretty good comparison."

Similarly, in profit-driven businesses, the lifetime value of mail-acquired customers is (much) higher than the LTV of those acquired from digital advertising or email.

Direct mail works, even in this digitally obsessed age!

Mailing of the Month:

OneBlood

Orlando, FL

About OneBlood

OneBlood was formed by a three-way merger of Orlando, St. Petersburg, and South Florida blood centers in 2012, and later absorbed The Blood Alliance in 2015 to become the organization we know today. It is one of the largest blood donation organizations in the U.S., and distributes over a million blood products annually. (People donate blood, but blood centers sell blood products to hospitals.)



Its signature fleet of close to 200 mobile blood donation buses complements its brick-and-mortar locations, primarily in Florida, but also in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

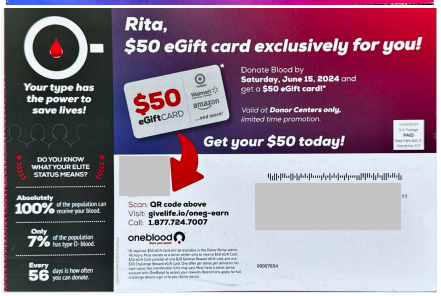
The organization has significantly increased its advertising expense (including direct mail) in recent years, from $286,000 in 2018 to $2.56 million in 2024, both to recruit new donors and to encourage current or past donors to return. Only about 5% of the population donates blood while 39% are eligible.

About these Campaigns

OneBlood has 135 direct mail offers in the Who's Mailing What! database. These campaigns show how the same basic reward offer can be presented in different ways.

Comments on these Campaigns





This postcard campaign from July 2024 targets current or past donors with O- blood type — a type that, as the copy notes, makes up only 7% of the population.

The promotion leverages this fact on the postcard's front side, using strong graphics and a compelling headline: "Rita, you are part of an Elite Group."

The addressed side of the postcard presents the offer: in this case a $50 e-gift card from a national retailer. (Blood centers can't pay donors cash for whole blood, but they can offer nonmonetary incentives like gift cards and merchandise. This is a legal way to thank donors without compromising the volunteer blood supply.)



OneBlood has an equivalent campaign for those with O+, the most common blood type. The offer is identical to the one previously shown.

But there is a subtle difference between these two campaigns. Those with O+ blood are described as being part of a POWERFUL group, while those with O- blood are part of an ELITE group. *What's the difference?* In our view, O+ donors are "powerful" because O+ is the most common blood type, while O- donors are "elite" because their blood can be given to anyone.



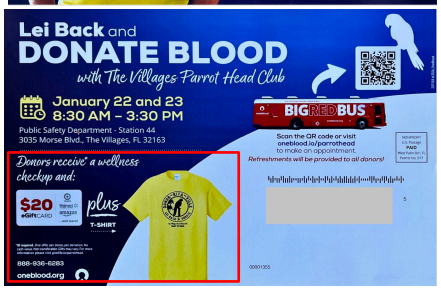


This campaign, from December 2022, directly links OneBlood's rewards to donation frequency, presenting donating blood as a challenge. Here's the deal: Donate blood in January and receive a long-sleeve T-shirt plus a $20 e-gift card.

Donate a second time, within 30 days of eligibility, and receive a $30 e-gift card. A third donation gets a $40 e-gift card. Then the challenge starts all over again. Since a blood donor becomes eligible to donate every 56 days or so, an individual could donate up to 6 times and score $180 in e-gift cards.

You will notice that the front of the postcard features a female model; we presume that this version was mailed only to females on its donor list.





While the donor list is critical to OneBlood's ability to create targeted campaigns like those shown above, growing the list by finding new donors is also important.

This campaign promotes a blood drive at a specific location and features one of its mobile donation buses.

In this case, new donors receive three "gifts" for donating blood (indicated by the red border). The first is a "wellness check," which is actually a prerequisite to donating blood.

The second is a $20 e-gift card — an introduction to OneBlood's rewards program — and the third is a perennial favorite of nonprofits: a special T-shirt.

In this case, The Villages Parrot Head Club, a Jimmy Buffett fan club, is partnering on a blood drive. "Lei Back" is OneBlood's tropical-themed pun for the commemorative shirt.

Lots of ideas here, and not just for nonprofits!

Images courtesy of Who's Mailing What!

Beyond The Mailbox

What Shopping Malls and Drone Delivery Have in Common.

by David Baer

Portland, Oregon's Lloyd Center Mall closed to the public on August 8 of this year.



There are plenty of explanations: The mall had been struggling for years. Its big stores left. Shopping moved online. COVID did not help. All of these are true.

But, as someone who lives here, what has stuck with me is what Lloyd represented when it worked.

You could go there with one errand and come home having done five. Pick up a gift. Eat lunch. Get a watch battery replaced. Watch your kids skate. Maybe walk past a store you hadn't intended to visit and find something you needed.

The trip to the mall was valuable because you could accomplish so many things in one place.

That was the benefit of the shopping mall. Department stores served as anchors, attracting the masses. Smaller stores benefitted from spillover traffic. And if you needed a dozen unrelated things, you could take care of them without driving all over town.

Lloyd Center's owners plan to replace the mall with housing, parks, businesses, and offices. And the former Nordstrom site is already becoming a music venue, expected to open in 2027.

So the site won't be remade as a new mall with new stores. And, as noted, one part of the plan gives people a reason to go there that has nothing to do with finding a shirt or a blender.

Around the same time Lloyd Center closed, the Portland Business Journal reported that Amazon is planning a drone-delivery center at its North Portland fulfillment site, with a 2027 launch in mind. Amazon says Prime Air can deliver eligible small items in as little as 30 minutes.

On the surface, those two things might seem like separate stories… but they're not.

Three decades ago, the first wave of e-commerce gave people a way around many small aggravations. You no longer had to drive somewhere, find parking, hope the store had your size, and then settle for whatever color happened to be left. You could see more choices, read reviews, compare prices, and order at eleven o'clock at night while sitting on your couch.

Amazon didn't invent that expectation, it

Continues on the right

certainly made it a normal part of buying things.

Now take the kind of purchase Amazon hopes drone delivery will handle. Somebody needs a phone charger, allergy medicine, batteries, or a replacement cable. They know what they want. They don't need an afternoon out. They'd rather have the item show up than get in the car and hope the local store has the right one.

There's nothing sinister about that. Sometimes a customer really wants the lowest price and the fastest delivery.

But the problem starts when local entrepreneurs see that kind of purchase and decide their answer is to become a smaller, slower version of the same thing.

That's also why I struggle with the more sentimental version of "shop local." People may want to support local businesses, and plenty do. But that feeling won't carry a business far if the only thing it offers is the same product at a higher price, with less selection and a more inconvenient way to get it.

A business needs a better reason for a customer to come in.

Expertise is a good one. Remember Meg Ryan's character in *You've Got Mail?* She stepped in to save the day when a struggling big-box bookstore employee didn't know Noel Streatfeild's famous "shoe books."

Confidence is another good reason. Picture a salesperson who takes one look at the jacket you're holding, tells you the cut won't work on your shoulders, and hands you the one that does. That's the kind of advice you'll never get from a model photo and a size chart. And sometimes it is the ability to solve a problem right now. Think of the hardware store clerk who looks at the broken part you brought in, walks you to the right aisle, and tells you to come back if it doesn't fit. Ordering online can't promise that, because there's no one there to fix it when the first answer turns out wrong.

And sometimes it is simply that the business is part of a place people want to be. You go to dinner, walk a few blocks, stop in a shop, run into someone you know, and see something you didn't expect. That's not something you can replicate online.

Portland, like many cities, still has fewer shoppers than before the pandemic, but the numbers are slowly coming back. Colliers put downtown foot traffic in 2025 at 89 percent of its 2019 level.

That doesn't fill the empty storefronts or make Lloyd Center's closing any less of a loss. But it does show that people will still go somewhere when there is a reason. Giving them that reason is as much a marketing job as a real-estate one.

If your ads, website, or mail piece asks people to visit, call, or buy, it has to tell them what they will get from you that they won't get from the quickest online search. That might be a better decision, less work, a specific experience, or an offer that makes sense because you know something about their situation.

Direct mail can help with that. A postcard can sit on the kitchen counter long enough for someone to remember the local repair shop, restaurant, event, or store they meant to try. But the mail piece still needs to give them a reason. A lower price often isn't the answer; these days, consumers seek true value in the products and services they buy.

The useful question for a local business isn't whether it can beat Amazon at Amazon's game. It's what a customer would miss if the business were gone.

URGENT ALERT!
USPS will be closed from October 27th to November 6th.

We often talk about times of year when you should avoid mailing anything, or about timing your mail so it arrives on specific dates.

Election Day is one of those days.

At a recent GURU Media Hub event, host **Jay Schwedelson** said that you should avoid sending physical mail to arrive between October 27th and November 6th because of Election Day.

Jay points out that $11.6 billion spent on advertising for mid-term races means election chatter will dominate voters' thoughts and conversations, particularly in states where the races are close.

Interestingly, political advertising spending for these midterms is higher than in the last presidential election.

So, while the postal service will not actually be closed between October 27th and November 6th, you should act as if it is.

The same advice applies to emails and online display advertising during this period. Avoid sending emails and pause digital advertising. Demand for political advertising will increase costs, and the environment will make them less productive. It's better to save the money.

Jay also shares some fascinating information about email campaigns between October 15th and December 15th, compared with any other 60-day period in the year. For instance:

In consumer markets...

Email opt-in rates are **230% higher** than any other 60-day period because people want the deals.

Email open rates are **24% higher** than any other 60-day period.

In B2B markets, content offers related to 2027 **increase conversion by 74%** compared to standard content offers. This is because 2026 is "totally over," and planning for 2027 is already well underway.

In both consumer and business markets, this is the time of year to promote to people who rarely, if ever, open your emails. Email open rates soar if you are truthfully able to use subject lines like these:

For consumer audiences...

VIP Access Ending....
Exclusive Perks Expiring...
Ending PRIORITY ACCESS...

Jay says, "You want to freak them out!"

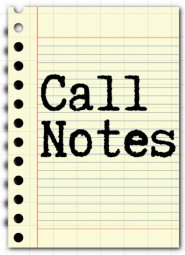
It's more subtle for business markets, with confirmation-based subject lines, like

Are You Still With [Company Name]?
Did You Leave The [Business Sector]?

Also, don't freak out because your unsubscribes will soar. Many people are clearing out their inboxes at this time of year.

Jay closed his session by noting that framing your offer as "cost per use" **boosted open rates by 22%** compared to a price or discount. This applies to both consumer and business markets.

Here are three real-world examples:
"Costs less than your daily latte..." (Hydrow)
"Costs less than Netflix (but makes you money)" (Digital Marketer)
"What costs less than your dinner order? Your next outfit." (Ulla Popken)



On the October 13th call, **David Foley** shared insights from the DELIVERED 2026 event that aren't in this report.

He focused primarily on a presentation by Darcy Hoffmann of Amsive, a New York-based, data-driven marketing services provider, which argues that consumers must earn the right to receive direct mail.

Darcy believes we should treat direct mail as a platform, just like digital.

She describes five categories of "customer intent signals": Hand Raisers, Journey Engagement, Remarketing, Predictive Value, and Market Moments.

An example: A consumer on your website looks at several different cruise vacations over several days. One could reasonably presume that this person may be looking to purchase a cruise vacation.

Based on this activity, the company asks: (1) *Does this activity deserve a response?* and (2) *Is the timing within the "decision window?"*

If the answer to these questions is YES, the company crafts and delivers a response using the chosen channel (email, physical mail, text message, or phone call, for example).

Similarly, responses are crafted for many different customer intent signals, or triggers.

David then asked members to select one trigger in their business that is worth responding to.

Then, he outlined Darcy's approach to developing a triggered-mail pilot. In summary, the steps are:

Week 1: **Pick a Signal**

Week 2: **Write the Rule**

Week 3: **Build The Experience**

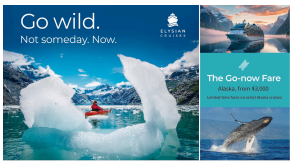
Week 4: **Launch and Learn**

It is not possible to describe each of these steps in detail on this page. However, members can watch the recording of this call for full details on the process.

"Triggered mail" is driving direct mail growth these days. We call Darcy's approach

Triggered DM²

Here is the answer to **Scott Hopkins'** target audience question, from page 4:



Group A: Adults 25 - 44. Cruising seems passive to them.

They buy experiences, not ships.



Group B: Adults 65+. High cruise affinity.

They are motivated by tradition, security and trust.



HOW TO STAY CURIOUS IN A WORLD FULL OF ANSWERS.

Curiosity is key to lifelong learning and innovation, but when answers are just a click away, it can feel like there's little left to explore.

Staying curious takes effort, but the rewards are worth it. Here's how to keep your curiosity alive:

1. Ask Better Questions

Instead of settling for surface-level answers, train yourself to dig deeper. When you encounter something new, ask "Why does this happen?" or "What's the impact of this?" Push past the obvious and explore the implications, connections, and nuances. Curiosity isn't about having all the answers; it's about asking the questions that lead to new insights.

2. Embrace Not Knowing

Many people feel uncomfortable admitting they don't know something, but it's the first step to discovery. Treat moments of uncertainty as opportunities. If you come across a topic you don't understand, resist the urge to skim an explanation. Instead, immerse yourself in the learning process and take the time to explore it fully.

3. Seek Out Different Perspectives

Talking to people with different experiences or views can spark curiosity. Read books or articles by authors outside your usual interests. Attend events or listen to podcasts on topics you've never explored. Exposure to new perspectives opens doors to questions you never thought to ask.

4. Cultivate a Beginner's Mindset

Approach everything as though you're seeing it for the first time. Even in areas where you feel like an expert, pretend you know nothing and look for what you've overlooked. This mindset keeps you open to new ideas and challenges assumptions that might limit your curiosity.

5. Limit Easy Answers

When you have a question, resist the urge to Google it immediately. Take time to think through possible explanations or explore the question in depth. This practice slows you down and creates room for genuine exploration, rather than skimming the surface for quick fixes.

6. Commit to Lifelong Learning

Curiosity thrives in an environment of continuous learning. Make it a habit to pick up new skills, explore unfamiliar topics, or revisit old interests. Formal classes, online resources, or even casual hobbies can all fuel your desire to learn.

7. Be Comfortable with Complexity

Not everything has a neat answer, and some topics raise more questions than they answer. Accepting complexity as a natural part of learning can help you stay engaged instead of feeling frustrated. Curiosity isn't about certainty — it's about exploration.

By fostering habits that encourage deeper thinking and exploration, you can keep your curiosity alive in a world overflowing with quick answers. The more you practice curiosity, the more it becomes a part of your daily life, enriching your understanding and sparking new possibilities.