

MAIL

## Calls-to-action imperative for mail-triggered luxury purchases

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By TRICIA CARR

For luxury brands, direct mail pieces must work to create a call to action to incentivize purchase in-store or online, but must do so in a way that does not dilute the marketer's message.



Data from the Direct Marketing Association reports that 81 percent of households either read or scanned advertising mail in 2011. To keep a brand at the top of affluent consumers' minds, brands should enact a direct mail campaign at least one time each month that contains clear calls to action, but with a focus on imagery as to not dilute the brand with sales-oriented materials.

"Direct mail is personal," said John Schulte, president and chairman of the [National Mail Order Association](#), Washington. "When you send your customer a letter of some type, it is a lot more personal with a greater feeling of importance than, say, an email.

"Because of the high degree of credibility, direct mail can provide immediate interest and action," he said.

Letter opener

Few luxury marketers are using direct mail to reach consumers. Nowadays, many efforts

are devoted to in-store and digital campaigns and almost none of these are rounded out with direct mail pieces.

Retailer Bergdorf Goodman and jeweler Cartier use more direct mail efforts than most luxury brands, likely to maintain the traditions that their consumer base is used to.

Cartier sent a personalized catalog in June detailing the heritage of the iconic Tank watch along with current product offerings for that specific model, a move that adds to its digital efforts to push the collection's history.

The catalog illustrates the history of the Tank and inspiring factors that helped it evolve throughout history in addition to a full product offerings. The catalog was sent to past and current customers ([see story](#)).

Bergdorf Goodman sends maglogs each season to show product ranges and keep up its authority in the New York lifestyle scene.

The latest women's fall preview magazine contains articles detailing the New York social scene, notes from the runway and summer fashion paired with ads and collections from Céline, Yves Saint Laurent, Dolce & Gabbana, Hermès and Chanel ([see story](#)).

"The new reality for all brand marketers is that it is harder for brands to break through," said Karen Creamer, president of [K2 Brand Consulting](#), Overland Park, KS. "Direct mail is still a strong choice for luxury marketers to precisely reach a target audience segment with strong brand imagery and a call to action."

Meanwhile, if brands want to see sales results from direct mail, they need to incorporate calls to action effectively and often.

There is a risk that sales-oriented catalogs can dilute a luxury brand. Many of the mail pieces sent by high-end marketers avoid this by showing imagery instead of pricing and sales, but do not include a clear call-to-action.

Two retailers have tried mobile calls to actions.

Bergdorf used its latest maglog to hit two types of audiences: older affluent consumers who enjoy direct mail and print marketing, and a younger generation whose interest is piqued through social media and QR codes found in the publications.

Also, the Bloomingdale's catalog that was sent in February not only promoted its recently-launched iPad application, but also included QR codes and SMS calls to action throughout ([see story](#)).

The retailer released two catalogs – one specifically for women and one for men – to offer personalized content.

Creative imagery combined with a worthwhile offer should be the focus of brands that want to execute a direct mail campaign with commerce goals. Brands can initiate the offer via mobile or try other channels.

"If direct mail could dilute a brand, it would be mostly from poorly-executed creative

work,” NMOA's Mr. Schulte said. “You usually get this from poorly-planned campaigns that are rushed.

“Hire good people, give plenty of time for strategic planning, creation and execution and do not rush any advertising,” he said. “To trigger any action online or in-store, you must have an offer – a solid call-to-action with a deadline.

“How this is structured is virtually unlimited.”

#### Mail pile

The format of direct mail depends on overall strategy, or whether the goal is an offline or online transaction.

Overall, the most-effective direct mail pieces will immediately engage the recipient through imagery and brand messaging.

“A direct mail offering from a luxury brand needs to withstand the screen-sort-discard process,” K2 Brand’s Ms. Creamer. “Four-color formats like catalogs and brochures are most effective at conveying the richness and exclusivity of luxury brands.

“While unique offers can generate online transactions, luxury marketers must protect the brand image from negative perceptions created by heavy discounts or overhyped promotions,” she said.

“A highly-targeted offer for a VIP customer would be an appropriate strategy for a luxury brand to connect with customers and create online transactions.”

Luxury marketers should use direct mail invitations to raise awareness for events and sales, per NMOA's Mr. Schulte.

A physical invitation in contrast to an email will help direct true affluent consumers into a store because they feel as though they are being invited personally.

Rather, if a brand is looking to build on its image, a coffee table maglog is an effective choice.

Indeed, these types of catalogs might keep a brand top of mind, but if transactions are the goal of a direct mail campaign, brands should stick to smaller mail pieces with a special offer.

“If you are strictly working to drive store or Web traffic and sales, I would work a plan using high-impact, oversized postcards mixed in with a few special letters during the year,” Mr. Schulte said.

“Common offers include some type of special pricing, free delivery or extra bonuses, but offers can also tie into being first to have something in a limited supply of goods,” he said. “If you are offering some kind of pricing incentive, give a reason for the special.”

The less steps there are for consumers to take to get to commerce platforms, the better, per Elizabeth DeMaso, managing partner of [Brenes Co.](#), New York.

QR codes and customized URLs can be used to direct customers right to a point of purchase and complete the transaction.

“The industry has really stepped back to rethink direct mail and get creative with its application,” Ms. DeMaso said. “While mail pieces can still drive purchase with promotion codes and offers, today they can also assist in making a more direct connection through the use of digital tools.”

Final Take

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