

How to Create Successful Direct Mail Envelopes

A white paper for those who create and approve direct mail



TENSION 
Ingenuity at work

The Unsung Hero of Direct Mail:

Your Outer Envelope



Envelope vs. Self-Mailer vs. Postcard

How should you decide whether to use an envelope mailing, self-mailer or postcard for your next direct mail campaign? The answer is simple. Use the format that supports your marketing objective for reaching your audience to generate response.

Keep in mind readers have been conditioned to expect important personal information with high perceived value to arrive in envelopes (e.g. greeting cards, financial statements, official information, IRS refund checks). Envelopes provide privacy, security and confidentiality implying the contents are more personally relevant than messages delivered via other advertising formats.

Did you know the success of your next direct mail package hinges on the outer envelope (OE)?

The purpose of this white paper is to provide direct mail managers, writers, designers, and creative directors with tools for creating more effective OEs. These are envelopes that will help you increase response, beat your control, and generate a positive return on your direct mail investment.

An OE is much more than just a piece of paper with ink on it that's folded and glued to form a carrier for other pieces of paper. Direct mail envelopes have multiple responsibilities – all of them strategically important.

In direct mail, the envelope must:

- **Meet USPS regulations for deliverability,**
- **Deliver its contents with postage attached,**
- **Get past the scrutiny of the person(s) screening the mail,**
- **Catch the eye of the intended recipient,**
- **Get opened so its contents can be read, and**
- **Support your brand and sales proposition to generate action, aka response.**

That's why an outer envelope shouldn't be an afterthought or left to someone who doesn't understand the nuances of creating effective direct mail. Your direct mail's ROI is at stake.

Reorient Your Thinking

This may surprise you but your outer envelope is every bit as important as the letter or 4-color brochure you insert into it. If your envelope doesn't get opened, it doesn't matter what's inside. That's why experienced direct mail writers and designers often create the OE first and use it to jumpstart the rest of their creative efforts.

Think of the OE as a salesperson's handshake or the display window in a store. Your envelope introduces who you are and what you're about while encouraging your reader to want to know more.



When Every Second Counts

Studies show and common sense confirms, your mailing is in a race against time. That's why it's important to familiarize yourself with direct mail's three minute and 33 second (3:33) rule. It's a reminder of the speed with which poorly planned envelopes end up in the recycle bin.

The 3:33 rule suggests you have:

- *3 seconds or less for your envelope to stand out in the mail and stay out of the trash ...*
- *30 seconds to engage the reader enough to get your envelope opened and make the short stack for later reading ...*
- *3 minutes or less for getting the envelope's contents read and response generated.*

The OE is the kick-off for all that happens (or doesn't happen) during that 3:33. Make sure yours is working overtime at doing its job.

Building a Better Envelope:

Take nothing for granted.

Just because a standard #10, closed face, white envelope has worked in the past, doesn't mean it's still a control-beater today. Direct marketers understand the value of testing the elements of outer envelopes such as the size, shape, color, paper stock, texture, teaser copy, images, flap style, even postage. These provide new opportunities for breaking through the clutter. Don't settle for "standard" unless it makes strategic sense.

Size

Outer envelopes don't have to be a standard #10 or 6x9 although these often make strategic sense. A custom envelope can stand out in the daily stack of mail while supporting the creative concept of your package.

But even standard envelopes also offer a wide range of choices. For example, here's a sample list of standard envelope sizes and configurations. All can be automatically/machine inserted in most situations. If you're doing large mailings, this is an important consideration. Size charts for different types of commonly used envelopes can be found in **Addendum A** of this white paper.

As with everything in direct mail, even the smallest detail can make a huge difference in response. Various envelope sizes also mail at different postal rates so check with the USPS as part of your design process.



Popular Envelope Sizes:

Monarch Business 3-7/8" x 7-1/2"
#10 Business..... 4-1/8" x 9-1/2"
A-7 Announcement..... 5-1/4" x 7-1/4"
Booklets..... 6" x 9" letter, 9" x 12" flat

Rule of thumb: Envelope should be 1/2" longer than the largest insert and 1/4" taller. You can allow slightly less for slimmer contents, but allow more for bulky, multiple-page enclosures.

Did you know paper is one of the most recycled materials on the planet—more than glass, metal or plastic? It can also be recycled multiple times, keeping it out of landfills. Direct mail envelopes can be manufactured from a broad range of sustainable papers.



Paper

Paper weight can enhance perceived value. Heavier paper is often associated with higher quality and upscale brands. When selecting paper, ask for envelope samples in varying paper weights to help you decide what's most appropriate. Also factor envelope paper weight into the overall weight of your mailing package when calculating postage costs. The more pieces you're mailing, the more important this becomes.

Printing Techniques

Varnish and embossing add both texture and visual emphasis. Eye-catching metallic inks and 5- or 6-color printing create excitement and add a luxe look. Explore the full range of printing techniques available from your vendors to find those that support your branding and package concept. For more ideas, visit the Envelope Gallery at www.tension.com.

Color

Adding or changing the color of your outer doesn't have to add cost but it can significantly add to your response. Direct marketers frequently test, then change the color of a control envelope to maintain its winning status. Track what you see in your own mail. Marketers often find bright colors such as solid red, yellow or orange outperform white. Basic black, manila, and "paper bag" are other looks worth testing.

Involvement Devices

Use a zip-strip opener, peel-off sticker, or pull-off repositionable note to encourage reader retention and interaction. The longer an envelope remains in the hands of your targeted prospect as she pulls and peels, the more likely it is that she'll also open it. For ideas, look through your mail or talk with an envelope expert.

Windows

Standard window envelopes allow you to use interior components for addressing your mailings. Special windows of unique shapes and sizes on the front or back of an OE also provide the reader with a sneak peek of the envelope's contents. While specifying windows is often left to production or print purchasing, the decision to use them and where to place them should also be part of the creative process.



Create intrigue with a strong teaser that doesn't completely reveal the offer or message inside such as **Important TIME SENSITIVE Offer Inside**. As with images, you can use teaser copy on the back of your envelope as well as the front.

For postage questions and regulations related to envelope design, check with your USPS representative or the Mailpiece Design Analyst serving your Zip Code. For more postal information and lookups visit www.tension.com



Images and Graphics

Graphic design and images attract the eye. Test including them on the front and back of your envelopes--you never know which side of an envelope will be seen first. If you're using inline variable data printing (VDP), test variable images to see which have most appeal to target market segments.

Return Address

The return address, also referred to as the corner card, is more than a housekeeping detail. It identifies the sender of the mailing and begins establishing rapport with the reader. Decisions need to be about what it says and how it looks because the return address is a hot spot. It's one of the places your reader's eye goes in those first 3 seconds to decide whether or not to toss your mailing in the trash.

Postage

Postage in the upper right-hand corner is another hot spot and shouldn't be left to a printer or letter shop to decide. It's a marketing and creative decision because, again, it helps mail recipients and screeners decide whether or not to keep your mailing. Postal decisions include, but are not limited to using First-Class or Standard Mail postage, a printed indicia or live postage stamp, and a proprietary vs. standard indicia.

Where does your reader's eye go first?

The science of eye tracking and understanding hot spots

If your envelope doesn't look convincing, interesting, and compelling enough to get routed to the right person and opened ... it doesn't matter what you put or say inside. It all starts with the envelope.

Yet too often, the outer envelope's design, copy, and postage are non-decisions based on non-strategic factors such as inventory or letter shop capabilities.

Don't let this be the fate of your direct mail.

Whether you're a writer, designer or approving manager you need to understand the science or strategic underpinnings of creating successful direct mail OEs.



Mailing Address



Teaser Copy



Return Address



Postage

Eyeflow and Hot Spots

According to Professor Siegfried Vogele's eye-camera research, Eye Flow Studies Provide Clues for Improving Your Direct Mail, here's how people look at OEs along with tips for maximizing the impact of these four envelope hot spots.



❶ Vogele's study shows the eye goes to the **MAILING ADDRESS** first. People look for their name. They want to know if the mailing is for them or someone else. They also look to see if their name is spelled correctly. And does it include the appropriate prefix. ► **TIPS:** Choose the type face for addressing carefully. Do you want it to appear handwritten? Is a serif or sans serif font more appropriate for the design and more readable for your audience? Should the name and address be in all caps or upper and lower case? The appearance of addressing contributes to an envelope's overall look and perceived value to the reader.

❷ Vogele suggests if you plan to use **TEASER COPY**, it should be placed to the left of the mailing address because the reader's eye shifts here next. ► **TIPS:** If you choose not to use a teaser, don't worry. Having no teaser may actually tease your reader into keeping and opening the envelope. If you use teaser copy, it's important to test both copy and placement.

❸ According to Vogele, the eye then moves to the **RETURN ADDRESS** in the upper left corner. By disclosing the sender, this area helps the reader decide if your mailing is of interest. ► **TIPS:** Depending on the overall look and feel of the envelope, it may be appropriate to have the return address appear handwritten versus typeset. You also have a choice whether or not to include your company name and logo. For customers who already know you, revealing it is probably a plus. For cold prospects, maybe not. To know for sure, test.

❹ Vogele's studies indicate **POSTAGE** is important for more than getting your mailing delivered. The upper right corner is where the eye tracks after checking out the other top three hot spots. People use postage as an indicator of a mailing's importance. ► **TIPS:** Don't assume a pre-printed indicia or metered postage is best because it's cheapest. It may cost you in response. First-class stamps stop the eye ... commemoratives and multiple stamps add intrigue. Whatever you use, make sure it's appropriate for the mailing's appearance whether that's personal, official, or highly promotional.

5 Tips for Envelopes That Get Opened More



- 1 **Know your audience.** Put yourself in your recipient's shoes; understand what motivates this individual. Find out how much mail he or she receives at home or office—wherever you're mailing. What's in the stack? This is your envelope's competition.
- 2 **Stand out.** Consider what you can do to make your envelope stand out in the stack. Size, shape, color and paper texture can all make a difference.
- 3 **Captivate the curious.** Use an intriguing teaser or question to pull your reader inside. Showcase "before" and "after" images or stop the eye with a unique embossed indicia. Disturbing, distracting, captivating – they all work.
- 4 **Invite action.** Use a repositionable sticky note, zip strip, perforation or other involvement device to entice your reader to open. Direct mail is about generating action and it starts with your outer envelope.
- 5 **Ask an expert.** Connect with a direct mail envelope specialist and put his or her experience and know-how to work for you.

For More Information

Thank you for your requesting this white paper and your interest in creating more effective direct mail envelopes. We welcome your comments and questions at whitepaper@tensioncorp.com.

Looking for Ideas?

Direct Marketing Association: www.the-dma.org

Tension Envelope Gallery: www.tension.com

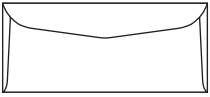
Who's Mailing What! Archive: www.whosmailingwhat.com

Your own mail.

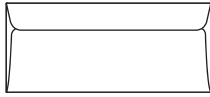
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Business & Communications



V-Flap Style



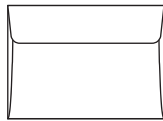
Straight-Flap

Commercial styles are widely used for business, communications, and direct mail. Styles listed below are within USPS size and shape parameters for letter-size mail. Envelopes insert well on mail production equipment.

TYPE	FOLDED SIZE
7	3-3/4" x 6-3/4"
Monarch (7-3/4)	3-7/8" x 7-1/2"
8-5/8	3-5/8" x 8-5/8"
9 (Fits inside #10)	3-7/8" x 8-7/8"
10	4-1/8" x 9-1/2"
10-1/2	4-1/2" x 9-1/2"
12	4-3/4" x 11"

Announcement Styles

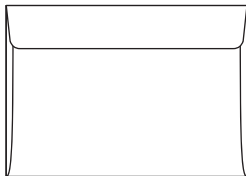
Also called A-style, this contemporary design is used for photos, greeting cards, invitations, small booklets, and various promotional pieces.



TYPE	FOLDED SIZE
A-2	4-3/8" x 5-3/4"
A-6	4-3/4" x 6-1/2"
A-7	5-1/4" x 7-1/4"
A-8	5-1/2" x 8-1/8"

Booklets

This style is ideal for newsletters, sales sheets, brochures, and direct mail packages. Inserts well on automated mailing equipment.



TYPE	FOLDED SIZE	MAIL-SIZE*
6	5-3/4" x 8-7/8"	Letter
6-1/2	6" x 9"	Letter
6-5/8	6" x 9-1/2"	Letter
9	8-3/4" x 11-1/2"	Flat
9-1/2	9" x 12"	Flat
10	9-1/2" x 12-5/8"	Flat

*See Addendum B for USPS size rules.

Addendum A

Types and Sizes of Envelopes Commonly Used in Direct Mail

About Envelope Manufacturing...

Envelope manufacturing equipment is unique in the print communications industry. Although envelope machines are often compared to commercial printing equipment, they are significantly different in both paper handling and printing process. Understanding this helps the designer create engaging envelopes to fit direct mail budgets, often driven by return on investment (ROI).

Envelope converting equipment requires distinct parts for specific sizes, styles, and envelope features – such as seam configuration, gumming, flap shape, window cutting and patching, and special opening strips.

Envelope wove paper, the optimal choice for folding equipment, is engineered for specific strength and runability characteristics. Wove paper weights of 20#, 22#, 24#, and 28# are considered industry standards.

Envelope Kraft papers, used for large-sized carriers with heavy or bulky content, are most often in the 28# and 32# basis weights. The coated papers designed for flexo printing and folding are designated in basis weights equivalent to the litho text standards. If you're interested in using other types of papers, check with an envelope expert to assure you get the best results for your mailing.

Unlike most commercial printing equipment, envelope machines do not "grip" paper. Paper is generally web-fed and transported by a system of friction, belts, and vacuum to transport it through the printing, converting, and finishing processes. Production may be accelerated and decelerated during the manufacturing process, thus design considerations should allow for normal industry tolerances of $\pm 1/16"$.

Envelope equipment prints in-line using the flexographic process. Flexo is direct impression printing using flexible photopolymer plates. For flexo design tips, visit www.tension.com/html/flexo_design_guide.html for a basic printing design guide. Flexographic printing options range from simple spot color to advanced, fine-register, four color process flexo.

Lithography is an available option for envelopes, with the understanding that this usually adds more steps to the production process. Litho paper stock should be chosen carefully to make sure that the material is compatible with the envelope cutting, gumming, and folding processes.

Always design to suit the job, objective, and medium, and you will achieve the best return on your direct mail package investment.

Paper weight equivalents:

Litho Text	Envelope Wove
50#	20#
55#	22#
60#	24#
70#	28#
80#	32#

Paper basis weights are based on 500 sheets of:

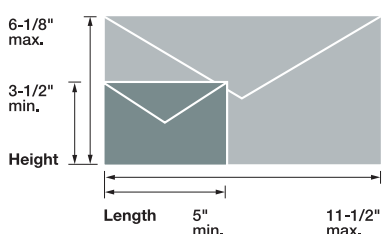
25 x 38 inch sheets of litho stock

17 x 22 inch sheets of envelope wove (and bond grade papers)

Addendum B

USPS Size Rules

Letter Dimensions

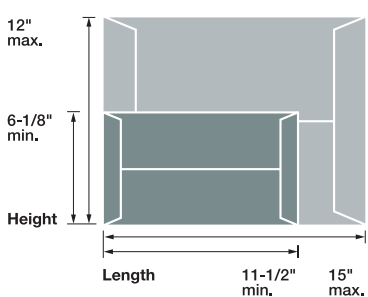


	Minimum	Maximum
Length	5 inches	11-1/2 inches
Height	3-1/2 inches	6-1/8 inches
Thickness	0.009 inch	1/4 inch
	for pieces over 6 inches	

For more complete information on basic mail configuration, see the USPS Quick Service Guides 201 (letters) and 301 (flats).

Mailpieces are classified by shape and by the way they are prepared. These classifications are based on how efficiently mailpieces can be processed on Postal Service equipment. The Postal Service classifies letters and cards into one of three categories: machinable, nonmachinable, and automation. For the purposes of determining mailability or machinability, the length is the dimension parallel to the addressing.

Flat Dimensions



	Minimum*	Maximum
Length	11-1/2 inches	15 inches
Height	6-1/8 inches	12 inches
Thickness	1/4 inch	3/4 inch

* Flats exceed at least one of these dimensions.

For more complete information on basic mail configuration, see the USPS Quick Service Guides 201 (letters) and 301 (flats).

Mail classified as a Flat, is subject to a different, higher set of postal rates in all classes.



Addendum C

Engage Your Envelopes in Multi-Channel Marketing

QR codes and your direct mail envelopes

A QR Code is a type of “Quick Response” 2D barcode that encodes information into a small square that’s quickly and easily scanned by smartphones. Highly popular in Asia and Europe, they’re increasingly used in the U.S. as smartphone ownership grows rapidly.

QR Codes can be added to your outer envelope, reply envelope, and other direct mail components, as well as posters, ads, product packaging, business cards, point-of-purchase signs, and almost anything else that applies ink to a relatively flat surface.

QR Codes give consumers a way to take immediate action that links them to a relevant online experience. It could be a personalized web landing page, a video demonstration, or more in-depth product information.

QR Codes give marketers a unique opportunity to enhance consumer relationships by providing additional content beyond ink-on-paper. The key to using QR Codes is to make the pay-off for scanning both interesting and relevant. Don’t just send consumers to your website home page.

For example, how about including a QR Code on a direct mail outer envelope? Once scanned, it could link the reader to an engaging product video or a special mobile e-commerce page ready with offer details, coupons, or even an instant “add-to-my-wish-list.”

About Mobile Barcodes

The QR Code, an open-source ISO standard, is the most prevalent style.

- Companies have modified them to include logos, images, etc.
- Websites, such as QRConnect.com, provide free encoding with code support services and tracking for scaled monthly fees.
- Other proprietary formats (some are shown below) now offer full-service packages for creative code use.
- Postal promotions have expanded to include mobile code formats beyond QR Codes.
- Visit goo.gl/bvdOQ for a helpful guide to mobile code styles and uses.

Interested in using QR codes? Follow these best practices:

- Always let your audience know what to expect as a result of scanning the code. Give people a relevant incentive for scanning that’s integrated with the rest of your campaign message.
- Because QR codes are still relatively new in the U.S. Market, show or tell the reader how to scan the code (“Scan this QR code with your smart phone”).
- Size your QR Code to at least 1” square for most uses. Don’t go below 3/4” square, in any case.
- If you have a long URL, shorten it. Long URLs create more complex codes that are difficult to scan quickly. There are a number of sites on the web that offer this shortening function, including Google’s goo.gl/
- Codes in black on a white background scan best. High contrast is essential.
- Make sure the destination is mobile friendly. You don’t want to link someone to a web page that doesn’t read well on a mobile device.
- Test, test and retest barcode functionality with various smartphones and scanner apps to make sure everything works as intended.

Mobile Barcode Examples



QR Code



EZcode



Datamatrix Code



JagTag



Microsoft Tag



SnapTag™



Commissioned by Tension Corporation

Authored by Pat Friesen
Pat Friesen & Company LLC
Direct Marketing Writer/Creative Strategist/
Trainer/Columnist

Pat is a highly experienced direct response writer and creative with a proven track record for generating measurable response and beating controls, using digital and traditional media. Pat is particularly skilled at promotions to launch new products or services and in developing and strengthening customer relationships through strong content development.

Additional white paper content developed
by Tension's Marketing Department

About Tension Corporation

Tension is one of the nation's leading producers of envelopes, marketing directly to companies and organizations across the country. Tension makes many of the envelopes you see and handle daily, including financial statement envelopes, direct mail envelopes, and photo finishing packaging.

Tension is a family-owned-and-operated business that has enjoyed stability and growth over the last 126 years. We credit our success to responding to our customers with top manufacturing quality, first-class service, and innovative solutions for their needs and requirements.

Today's Tension Corporation now operates seven envelope manufacturing plants in the U.S. with international facilities in China, Taiwan, and Australia. Tension's Packaging and Automation division develops fulfillment systems for direct-to-consumer sellers/shippers and for mail-order, central-fill, and specialty pharmacies. Tension also operates a fulfillment packaging equipment manufacturing facility in Colorado.