



DIRECT MAIL: THE “KIDS” DIG IT

MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z ARE BECOMING BIG FANS OF DIRECT MAIL MARKETING. HERE’S WHY—AND HOW YOU CAN MAKE IT WORK FOR YOUR BRAND.

Admit it, sometimes you have giggled at the notion of using direct mail to reach a younger target audience—maybe even as you read the title of this article. “We’re trying to talk to YOUNG people,” you’ve thought, “not grandparents.” Well, the data might just be laughing back. Recent studies say that millennial and Gen Z consumers have a soft spot for direct mail.

Lob’s 2025 *State of Direct Mail: Consumer Insights Edition* surveyed 2,000 American adults and found that 85% of Gen Zers and millennials engage with direct mail, often

reading it the same day they receive it. The study also revealed that 67% of recipients take action—such as visiting a website or making a purchase—after receiving a direct mail piece. Not enough to convince

you? Fine. A whopping 72% of millennials say they would be disappointed if they stopped receiving direct mail, according to research from the U.S. Postal Service (an admittedly biased party).

“These generations grew up drowning in digital noise,” says consumer psychology expert Roger Dooley. “Their brains are highly efficient at filtering out anything that looks like a generic ad. A physical piece of mail breaks through that filter because it’s unexpected. In behavioral science terms, it’s a pattern interrupt.”

Put another way: If you grow up getting bombarded with junk email, “click here” CTAs, and cheap YouTube ads, you become numb to it. Direct mail offers something new and different. It engages the senses (touch, for one) and delivers an emotional connection and stronger memory than email might. Psychologically, it also feels less manipulative and more authentic and trustworthy than a digital ad served up because an algorithm said you’d be interested.



"Trust isn't a conscious decision," says Dooley, author of three books—*Brainfluence*, *Friction*, and *The Persuasion Engine*. "When someone encounters your marketing, their brain runs an unconscious assessment in milliseconds: Is this familiar? Is this risky? Is this worth my time? Physical mail has a built-in trust advantage. It signals investment. This company printed something, paid for postage, physically put it in my hands. That's the opposite of a spammy email that costs nothing to send to a million people. Economists call this a 'costly signal,' and it's one foundation of trust."

Jeff Dutremble is Head of Sales for Paper Run, a software development company that leverages automation and AI to help brands deliver personalized direct mail to reach and retain customers who don't open emails. He agrees that digital saturation has led younger consumers to develop an affinity for direct mail.

"There's too much noise," Dutremble says. "It's almost impossible to break through that noise—or pattern interrupt, if you will—on digital channels because everything blends together. So how do we pattern interrupt? We SLOW. IT. DOWN. We turn to a tactile, super personal, old-fashioned means that is the antithesis of everything digital, artificial, saturated, and fast."

Dutremble believes many marketers have been surprised to learn that for Gen Z and millennials, it's appealing to see a physical letter or postcard in the mailbox with their name on it, then sit and open it at the kitchen table and examine it in their hands. While he admits that, compared to a single text or email, direct mail is an expensive channel and unprofitable if done incorrectly, he also argues that the high number of digital touchpoints digested daily by millennial and Gen Z consumers drastically reduces the impact of each one.

"Compare that to a Gen Zer's physical mailbox," he says. "How many pieces of mail per day do they receive? Two? Five? Regardless, that number is astronomically lower, the time per impression

significantly longer, thus making a proportionately higher impact."

Increasingly, more companies seem to agree, using direct mail to establish that trust Dooley alluded to with younger audiences.

Glossier may have started in 2014 as a beauty website and online community, but the company has grown its audience by incorporating distinctive pink, editorial-style mailers and catalogs into its marketing mix. Much of Glossier's direct mail reads like an offline Instagram post—minimal copy, ultra-clean imagery, and a highly curated aesthetic. In many ways, these pieces function less like traditional direct mail and more like brand media, as if Glossier is publishing its own physical content. Designed to be "Instagrammable," the mail often gets passed beyond the original recipient, aligning perfectly with Gen Z and millennial sharing behaviors. After all, if you're selling beauty, your marketing should look the part.

Glossier also doesn't "spray and pray" with its direct mail. Instead, it zeroes in on existing customers, subscribers, and audiences who look a



lot like the people already buying in. Combine that targeting with a quality piece of mail, and you are much closer to earning their attention. From there, Dooley says you'd better reward it.

"These [younger] consumers have been trained by Netflix and Spotify, not to mention chatbots, to expect personalization," Dooley says. "When a piece of mail feels mass-produced, it feels lazy. The 67% action rate (of Gen Zers and millennials) makes sense when you consider that physical objects engage the brain differently than pixels. Research shows physical media produces stronger emotional responses and better memory encoding. When you hold something, your brain assigns it more value. That's the endowment effect. When you combine sensory engagement with personalization that shows you actually know the recipient, you've hit two powerful triggers at once."

One knock against direct mail was always what Dooley refers to as the "friction gap." The principle is simple: Every bit of effort you add to a customer's journey costs you customers. A decade ago, a great offer on a postcard might have required you to type in a URL, call a phone number, or search for a product online. "Each of those steps is a leak in the conversion funnel," Dooley says. "And companies that treat

direct mail as a stand-alone channel, disconnected from digital, are leaving money on the table."

His recommendation is to combine the power of physical (direct mail) and digital tools into a single integrated system where direct mail becomes the trusted trigger and digital removes the friction.

"Smart mailers have largely solved [the friction problem]," Dooley says. "QR codes drop you into a personalized landing page and offers are already tied to your account. Timing is calibrated by data, so the piece arrives when you're in a buying window."

Casper, the direct-to-consumer mattress and sleep company, takes a performance-driven approach to this model. Its mailers use promo codes, landing pages, and store prompts to drive online visits. The idea isn't to close the sale in the physical mailbox, but to start the journey. From there, Casper retargets site visitors with ads, follows up with email, and uses remarketing to convert interest into sales. The playbook works particularly well for a high-consideration purchase such as a mattress, where trust builds over time rather than in a single moment.

For younger consumers, that journey often starts offline but finishes online, a reflection of how seamlessly Gen Zers and millennials move between physical and digital worlds. In the Lob study, 49% of consumers said brands that send direct mail feel more credible than those that don't. For younger audiences—raised on a steady diet of digital ads and influencer content—that physical



signal often feels more authentic and, therefore, more trustworthy.

Still, even proponents of direct mail are quick to point out that it doesn't replace digital. Dutremble believes that if a person is actively engaging with email or SMS, a brand should stick to those more cost-effective channels. If, after a testing phase, the conversion doesn't occur and the audience retracts from digital engagement, that's when direct mail can be a next move, re-engaging lapsed audiences to reach consumers who aren't responding elsewhere.

Direct-to-consumer grooming brand Dr. Squatch, which became well-known for its use of TikTok to reach its younger male audience, is a prime example. In 2023, the company tested the use of postcards to target lapsed customers who were not receiving SMS messages and saw immediate revenue returns. A personalized message offered 20% off the next purchase of at least \$30. According to various reports, the campaign led to a 12.66% conversion rate and a 10x return on ad spend. The company had assumed that customers not replying to SMS or email were less likely to purchase, but they simply needed a more meaningful connection with the brand.

"Brands are using (direct mail) as a complement to email and SMS, not as an entirely separate channel," Dutremble explains. "Email and SMS are still effective, albeit with declining impact. Direct mail has been especially effective when sent to lapsed customers that just aren't engaging otherwise."



5 TIPS FOR REINTRODUCING DIRECT MAIL TO YOUR MARKETING MIX

RUSTY WITH YOUR DIRECT MAIL DOS AND DON'TS? ROGER DOOLEY AND JEFF DUTREMBLE HAVE ADVICE.

1

Identify your target audience.

"Chances are, if you've tried direct mail before but it failed, there was an issue with who you were targeting, and it wasn't the audience that would drive the most incremental impact. Find a provider that offers hands-on, strategic guidance in this area." – Dutremble

2

The medium earns attention.

"The worst thing a brand can do is use the physical medium but fill it with sterile, corporate language from a banner ad. The design and content earn trust. Trust drives conversion." – Dooley

3

Send less mail, not more.

"Like your email and SMS marketing strategy, batching and blasting boatloads of mail isn't the name of the game. You will likely lose money. This is also true in the testing phase: Send as little mail as possible while gathering statistically significant data to understand whether direct mail could be a profitable channel." – Dutremble

4

Design and emotional tone matter enormously.

"Color, typography, imagery, and paper quality all hit the emotional brain before the rational brain kicks in. Well-designed mail creates cognitive ease, and things that are easy to process feel more trustworthy. That's a well-established finding in psychology. Fluency equals trust." – Dooley

5

Don't use direct mail for cold prospecting and acquisition.

"If someone is requiring you to spend a minimum amount of money for prospecting and you haven't tested direct mail on the retention side of the funnel yet, run." – Dutremble

