

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

by Steven Casey
March 12, 2019

Why Read This Report

Today's attention economy is making it harder than ever for B2B marketers to connect with their prospects and customers. Many go-to engagement channels, such as email and cold calling, are becoming tired and ineffective. B2B marketers can use direct mail — old, analog, and novel again — to cut through the content clutter and spark more conversations with their digital-first buyers.

Key Takeaways

The Psychology Of Gifting Is Real

Sending prospects a personalized gift helps you make an emotional connection and creates a feeling of reciprocity that makes it more likely they will be open to connecting with you.

Direct Mail Is Not A Silver Bullet

Direct mail is not a replacement for email or cold-calling — it complements and amplifies all the other digital and human touchpoints throughout the buyer journey.

Be Cool, Not Creepy

Your goal is to create an experience for the recipient that demonstrates you know who they are as a person and a professional. Always err on the side of caution unless you are confident that a highly personal gift will be welcome.

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys



by [Steven Casey](#)

with [Caroline Robertson](#), [Meredith Cain](#), Brandon Shaik, and Ian McPherson

March 12, 2019

Connecting With Customers Is Harder Than Ever

B2B marketers have access to so many new and powerful tools — including sophisticated analytics and rich behavioral data — allowing you to determine which accounts *should be* your customers and focus your outreach on the accounts likely to be starting a buying journey.¹ Having done the homework, your only goal is to start a conversation. Unfortunately, too many years of “spray and pray” tactics — like undifferentiated emails and inappropriate cold calls — have caused most B2B buyers to “duck and cover” when vendors attempt to reach them:²

- › **Emails are easy to send and easy to ignore.** Recipients open fewer than one-fifth of all emails from B2B firms and click-through rates are in the low single digits (see Figure 1).³
- › **Too many calls fall in the forest and no one hears them.** More than 25% of B2B sales reps report that one of their biggest challenges is that customers no longer take their calls (see Figure 2).⁴ “I don’t answer calls from numbers I don’t recognize,” said EMC Dell marketing executive Chris Blaik. “And I delete every email I get from people I don’t know.”
- › **Opt-in requirements make it more difficult to reach net-new contacts and accounts.** Partly in response to the deluge of digital outreach by both B2B and B2C companies, new privacy guidelines like GDPR have tipped the balance of power toward the customer.⁵

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

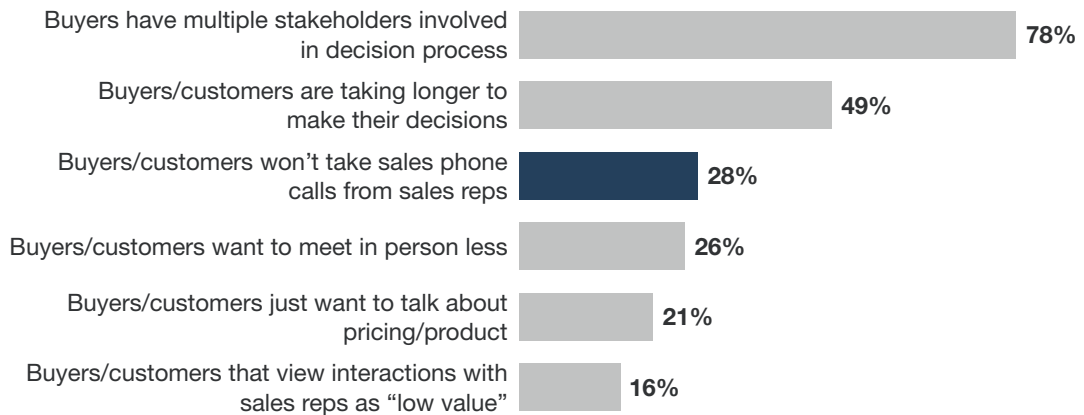
FIGURE 1 Marketers Face Serious Challenges Reaching Buyers Through Traditional Email Channels



FIGURE 2 Sellers Report That A Significant Number Of Customer Refuse To Take Their Calls

“What are the top three challenges your field sales reps face with regard to buyer/customer engagement?”

(Select up to three responses)



Base: 120 marketing and sales leaders
(multiple responses accepted)

Source: Forrester’s Q1 2017 International B2B Marketing Panel Online Survey

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

Direct Mail Can Spark And Sustain More Conversations

With cheap and easy digital engagement contributing to a customer attention deficit that makes it difficult to connect with even highly relevant content, B2B marketers need to find new channels and tactics to cut through the clutter.⁶ Re-enter direct mail — sending physical items through the postal system to move prospects forward in a purchase journey. It's a tactic that has been around for more than 70 years.⁷ And direct mail was a marketing staple until the rise of digital marketing. Today, fewer than 20% of B2B marketers use direct mail (see Figure 3). But it is also enjoying a renaissance, precisely because its analog nature is now so novel. Direct mail complements your digital marketing and helps B2B marketers compete more effectively in the attention economy, by:

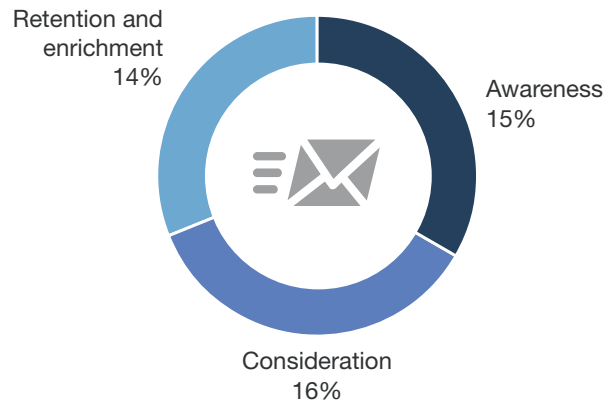
- › **Capturing the attention of digital-first buyers.** “Digital natives are not typically direct mail natives — it's a new channel for them,” said Daniel Gaugler, CMO at direct mail solution provider PFL. “Our data shows that businesses sent 66% more direct mail, personalized gifts, perishables, handwritten notes, and other physical items in 2018 than 2017,” added Kris Rudeegraap, CEO of Sendoso, a sending platform for businesses.
- › **Creating an emotional connection.** As your buyers act more like consumers, B2B marketers need to learn from their B2C counterparts and focus on creating an emotional connection with your customers.⁸ Prospects who receive a meaningful gift from you are likely to feel bound to reciprocate.⁹ “The psychology of gifting is real, and the positive emotional energy it creates helps us connect with more prospects,” said Heidi Vandermeer, account-based marketing manager at Uberflip.
- › **Meeting modern buyer expectations.** In addition to eCommerce, the explosion of subscription-box businesses — for everything from fashion to food to laundry detergent — have made package delivery a staple of modern life.¹⁰ “I call it the ‘Amazon effect,’” said Sendoso's Rudeegraap. “We all expect to get packages now.”
- › **Improving ABM outreach.** Account-based marketing is one of the key drivers of the renewed interest in direct mail, as it fits so well with a targeted, outbound engagement strategy.¹¹ “We've had great success with direct mail across all the tiers of our target accounts,” said Heidi Bullock, CMO of Engagio. “For our tier-one accounts we hyper-personalize our gifts — it is really a 1-to-1 effort — and we have seen an 85% confirm rate on first meetings. For tiers two and three, you can't personalize to the same degree when you're targeting hundreds and thousands of accounts, but we always try to be clever and fun — and we've seen meeting confirm rates in the 20-30% range.”

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

FIGURE 3 Fewer Than 20% Of B2B Marketers Take Advantage Of Direct Mail Today

“How would you rate direct mail as a demand management tactic in the following phases of the customer life cycle?”



Source: Forrester Analytics Global Business Technographics® Marketing Survey, 2018

Today's Direct Mail Is Deliberate, Dimensional, And Digital

This is not your father's direct mail: done on a batch basis, packed on site, managed with spreadsheets, and spanning months from concept to delivery. Most of today's direct mail solutions are SaaS platforms that can launch a single, physical mailer at a moment's notice to meet the unique needs of the recipient *and* the sender. This new class of web-enabled direct mail solutions also:

- › **Integrates into existing solutions and workflows.** Most direct mail solutions have integrations across the marketing and sales technology stack, including CRM, marketing automation and account-based marketing platforms, and sales enablement solutions. “For our reps to send a direct mail piece is as easy a pressing a button in the CRM,” said Marvin Varee, senior demand generation manager at FinancialForce.
- › **Creates digital breadcrumbs for measurement and attribution.** Today's web-enabled direct mail solutions can pass critical engagement and performance data to the solutions B2B marketers use to connect the dots across the buying cycle. “By tracking activity all the way through our pipeline to revenue, we can see that direct mail is having a positive impact on the way people respond to us,” said Uberflip's Vandermeer.
- › **Allows marketers to focus on the strategic.** Because most direct mail solutions handle gift production and mailing, marketers can focus their energies on higher-order activities — such as building tightly segmented audiences and developing highly personalized messaging.

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

- › **Enables recipients to choose their own adventures.** Many direct mail solutions even enable the recipient to decide what gift they receive. “We recently received a personalized gift box that contained a handwritten note with a code we redeemed in an online marketplace for the gift we preferred,” said Tracy Eiler, CMO of InsideView.

Direct Mail Adds Value Throughout The Customer Life Cycle

Extending access to direct mail solutions beyond marketing to sales and customer success will help your company create more valuable touchpoints throughout the customer life cycle (see Figure 4). “We have partnered closely with sales to enable them to take advantage of direct mail, developing packages that fits their needs and providing reps their own budgets,” said FinancialForce’s Varee. “It’s been successful with customers and increased the trust and alignment among our teams.” B2B companies using direct mail across their organizations are able to:

- › **Secure more meetings.** In addition to sending a small gift such as a coffee card prior to first meeting as a reminder, business development reps can also hold back the gift as an incentive to take the meeting (see Figure 5). “We had one prospect who told our rep that he couldn’t meet until three months later,” said Sandra Freeman, head of strategic marketing at Engagio. “When the rep told him about our gift to be delivered after the call — he agreed to meet the next day at nine am.”
- › **Drive increased event attendance.** “We have found that sending Uber gift cards helps make attending our live meetings as seamless and frictionless as possible for prospects,” said FinancialForce’s Varee. “They appreciate the extra effort and more people show up as a result.”
- › **Revive dormant opportunities.** “If a deal is progressing well, we tend not to deploy direct mail there, but instead focus on prospects that have gone cold, and the results have been positive,” said Uberflip’s Vandermeer.
- › **Shorten the sales cycle.** “Our customers find that following up with a gift after a demo is a great way to shorten the sales cycle and get the next meeting on the books more quickly,” said Daniel Rodriguez, head of revenue at strategic gifting provider Alyce.
- › **Celebrate important business and life events.** Post-sale customer engagement reinforces long-term relationships when you deliver valuable experiences that make customers want to support your company.¹² Customer success managers are using direct mail to welcome new customers, recognize significant usage milestones, and express the company’s gratitude for customer longevity and loyalty.
- › **Influence the influencers.** It’s been more of a B2C tactic to date, but B2B marketers are increasing their engagement with the influencers who are having an impact on their buyers.¹³ While many of these interactions will naturally take place in social channels, B2B marketers can use direct mail to augment these efforts and create additional connections and conversations with this important audience.¹⁴

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

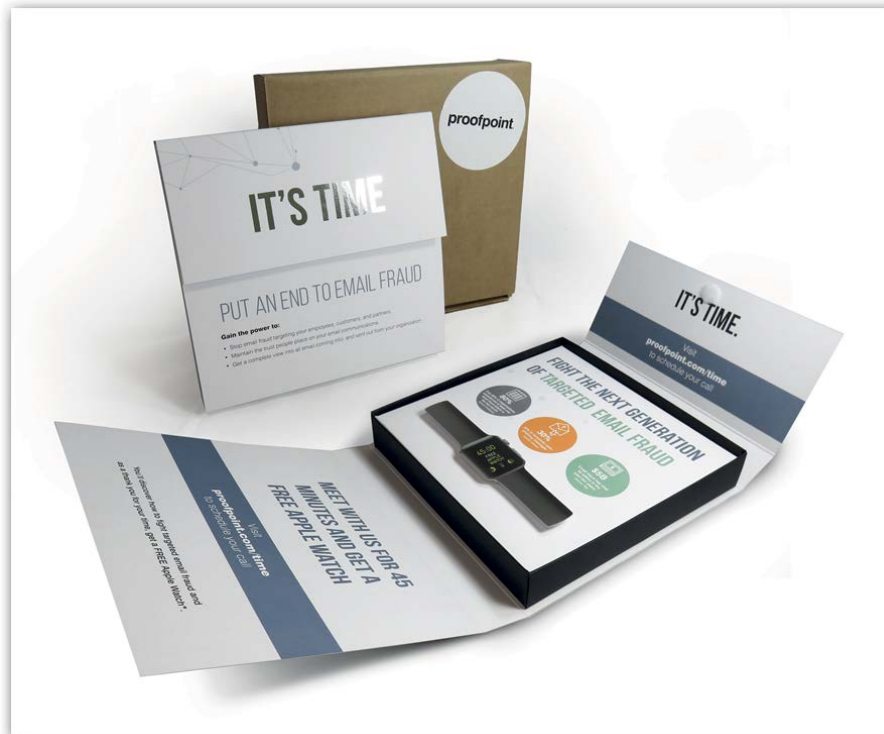
FIGURE 4 Direct Mail Improves Efficiency And Effectiveness Of Use Cases Spanning Entire Customer Life Cycle



Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

FIGURE 5 Proofpoint Gifts An Apple Watch To Incent Top-Tier Prospects To Attend A Meeting With The Company



Source: PFL

Recommendations

Make Direct Mail Part Of Your Omnichannel Strategy

Forrester recommends B2B marketers observe the following best practices to optimize your results with direct mail:

- › **Resist the urge to treat direct mail like a silver bullet.** Direct mail is not a magic, one-off tactic or even a replacement for any other engagement channel. Direct mail complements and amplifies all the other digital and human touchpoints in the buyer journey. Indiscriminate use of direct mail will just ruin the party for everyone else and drive response rates down to the same low levels email generates today.
- › **Only act on quality data.** Unlike email bounces, direct mail returns have a real cost. It makes little sense to spend significant time and effort on messaging and packaging if half your gifts get returned because of poor targeting. “Our experience has shown that marketers who use direct mail frequently also tend to spend more time on planning and analysis because of the costs of involved,” said PFL’s Gaugler. Becoming a more thoughtful marketer is an undeniably good thing.

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

- › **Target by team, not title.** You may have a successful track record of selling big-ticket deals to FORTUNE 500 companies, but the chances of your direct mail piece reaching one of their CMOs if you don't already know her are slim to none. A better strategy is to suss out the likely buying team and ask key members to share what you send with other people. "We tend to reach out to C-level executives with direct mail only when we are already working with their teams on an opportunity," said Engagio's Bullock.
- › **Be cool, not creepy.** Your goal should be to create an experience for the recipient that demonstrates you know who they are as a person and a professional. Sending a gift that refers to a hobby is cool (see Figure 6). Sending a gift that reveals deep knowledge of the recipient's family life may be interpreted as creepy.¹⁵ "One of my colleagues received a gift for her four-year-old son that loved puzzles," said InsideView's Eiler. "That was one step too far." It can be a fine line, but err on the side of caution unless you have high confidence — or first-hand knowledge — that a highly personal gift will be welcomed.
- › **Always follow up.** "The key to success with direct mail is follow up, follow up, follow up," said Engagio's Freeman. And make sure to connect this follow-up to the entire digital record of the buyer journey. Otherwise you're wasting the money you spent to get the prospect's attention, which has a very short shelf-life. "When our BDR's follow up soon after a direct mail campaign, we have seen response rates triple or quadruple," said Uberflip's Vandermeer.

FIGURE 6 Sendoso Engages With Prospects And Customers Through Gifts Referencing Recipients' Interests



Source: Sendoso

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

Engage With An Analyst

Gain greater confidence in your decisions by working with Forrester thought leaders to apply our research to your specific business and technology initiatives.

Analyst Inquiry

To help you put research into practice, connect with an analyst to discuss your questions in a 30-minute phone session — or opt for a response via email.

[Learn more.](#)

Analyst Advisory

Translate research into action by working with an analyst on a specific engagement in the form of custom strategy sessions, workshops, or speeches.

[Learn more.](#)

Webinar

Join our online sessions on the latest research affecting your business. Each call includes analyst Q&A and slides and is available on-demand.

[Learn more.](#)



Forrester's research apps for iOS and Android.

Stay ahead of your competition no matter where you are.

Supplemental Material

Companies Interviewed For This Report

We would like to thank the individuals from the following companies who generously gave their time during the research for this report.

Alyce

PFL

Engagio

Pipestry

Financial Force

Postalytics

Fuze

Sendoso

InsideView

Uberflip

Direct Mail Captures The Attention Of Buyers Overwhelmed By Digital Tactics

Use Direct Mail To Complement And Amplify Digital And Human Touchpoints Throughout Your Buyer Journeys

Endnotes

- ¹ See the Forrester report "[Not Yet The New Normal: ABM Must Evolve Into Account-Based Engagement.](#)"
- ² See the Forrester report "[The Birth Of The B2B Consumer.](#)"
- ³ DMA Email benchmarking report 2018. Source: "The Average Marketing Email: Open Rate, Click-Through, and More," Criteo, August 10, 2018 (<https://www.criteo.com/insights/email-open-rates/>).
- ⁴ Source: Forrester's Q1 2017 International B2B Marketing Panel Online Survey.
- ⁵ See the Forrester report "[The GDPR And The B2B Marketer.](#)"
- ⁶ See the Forrester report "[B2B Consultant Sellers Reign In The 21st Century.](#)"
- ⁷ The exact date of the "invention" of direct marketing (and direct mail) is impossible to pin down, but many observers credit Lester Wunderman for pioneering the practice in the 1940s. Source: Robert D. McFadden, "Lester Wunderman, Father of Direct Marketing, Dies at 98," The New York Times, January 14, 2019 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/business/lester-wunderman-dead.html>).
- ⁸ See the Forrester report "[The Birth Of The B2B Consumer.](#)"
- ⁹ Source: Dean Rieck, "18 Powerful Psychological Principles that Drive Direct Marketing," Direct Creative (<http://www.directcreative.com/18-powerful-psychological-principles-that-drive-direct-marketing.html>).
- ¹⁰ A recent study showed the subscription e-commerce market has grown by more than 100 percent a year over the past five years. Source: Tony Chen, Ken Fenyo, Sylvia Yang, and Jessica Zhang, "Thinking inside the subscription box: New research on e-commerce consumers," McKinsey & Company, February 2018 (<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/high-tech/our-insights/thinking-inside-the-subscription-box-new-research-on-ecommerce-consumers>).
- ¹¹ See the Forrester report "[Not Yet The New Normal: ABM Must Evolve Into Account-Based Engagement.](#)"
- ¹² See the Forrester report "[Help Happy Customers Share Their Delight By Prioritizing Post-Sale Marketing.](#)"
- ¹³ Social listening platforms have been the primary tool for B2B marketers to identify influencers. See the Forrester report "[The Forrester Tech Tide™: B2B Marketing Technologies, Q4 2018.](#)"
- ¹⁴ An emerging class of influencer management solutions are expanding marketers' capabilities in this area. See the Forrester report "[New Tech: Influencer Marketing Solutions, Q3 2018.](#)"
- ¹⁵ See the Forrester report "[Brief: Be Cool, Not Creepy.](#)"

We work with business and technology leaders to develop customer-obsessed strategies that drive growth.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- › Core research and tools
- › Data and analytics
- › Peer collaboration
- › Analyst engagement
- › Consulting
- › Events

Forrester's research and insights are tailored to your role and critical business initiatives.

ROLES WE SERVE

Marketing & Strategy Professionals

CMO

- › **B2B Marketing**
- B2C Marketing
- Customer Experience
- Customer Insights
- eBusiness & Channel Strategy

Technology Management Professionals

CIO

- Application Development & Delivery
- Enterprise Architecture
- Infrastructure & Operations
- Security & Risk
- Sourcing & Vendor Management

Technology Industry Professionals

Analyst Relations

CLIENT SUPPORT

For information on hard-copy or electronic reprints, please contact Client Support at +1 866-367-7378, +1 617-613-5730, or clientsupport@forrester.com. We offer quantity discounts and special pricing for academic and nonprofit institutions.