

7 Habits of Highly Ineffective Ministry Postcards

Last week, I opened our mailbox to find one of the **worst** church direct mail postcards that I have ever sent or received. First, you need to know that I have been a part of sending some real **doozies**, like an “F-Word” (forgiveness) pun on an Easter invite one year... not my idea, but I was definitely a willing participant. On some level, at least there was a point – horrible and offensive as it was.

My recent mailbox find is a direct mail piece following all of the current church-mailer trends, in that it is oversized, has a picture of the pastor and includes a group of smiling multicultural people. However, the messaging is a wreck, confusing and downright crazy-talk. This mailer was either designed by 4 different people who never bothered to coordinate their contribution, or one person with 4 different design personalities that stopped taking their meds. What’s worse is that it is from a large and influential church in the area, who would I assume possesses the means to **do so much better**.

When it comes to direct mail, statistics show the average piece will get three seconds of attention.

Three.

If you are considering a direct mail piece, here are seven ways you too can send an **ineffective** direct mail postcard:

1. Don’t Have a Point – Ramble and demonstrate how out of touch with the reality of everyday life outside of your church walls you really are. Use meaningless quotes and vaguely imply that something is happening that they should be aware of. Lots of people are not busy and looking to spend time trying to figure out your church, so they will **naturally** be drawn to the possibility of a confusing and rambling worship experience.

2. Use the Shotgun Approach – Communicate as much as you can to as wide an audience as you can. If you are launching a series on the Family, make sure you speak to and include content for everyone. Relegate your children’s ministry presence to a tiny corner and use the words “great” and “fun” a bunch. Singles and couples without kids have no need to know how to be a better parent, and for sure an older, empty nest generation doesn’t want to have influence and share their wisdom, so try your best to have **something for everyone** and to not alienate anyone.

3. Employ the “Bait and Switch” – Make sure your stock photography is purely aspirational. You will want anyone visiting to feel immediately uncomfortable and be easily recognizable. When they walk in the door, **it is best if they become racial diversity that you pictured**, or the casually dressed worshipper that they saw on your mailer. Because if you truly want your culture to change, it is always easier to blame it on the new people showing up than to lead and cast vision in the congregation. Also, when guests are easier to spot, that awkwardly over-friendly greeter won’t bother your regulars.

4. Use Insider Language – People outside the church loved to be validated in their “we don’t belong here” thinking. Use as many obscure or made-up words as you can to either illustrate how much smarter your church is or how quirky and cool your church is. The best is to combine two words that might mean something like “*God calendar*” or “*faith-energy*.” Typically, **we are drawn to the unfamiliar and weird as humans**, especially if we have a significant social or spiritual need.

5. Try Too Hard – Everybody loves to see a worn-out cultural phenomenon imitated by the church, especially if it is a few years behind the original. That means your Duck Dynasty teaching series this Fall is right on time! Anything #hashtag, selfie or instagram driven might just now be cresting in Christian culture, and presumably aging like fine wine in your community. No matter what, it is always best to act as cool, awesome and relevant as possible. So if you’re stuck, plan to go to the next hip Christian conference this year to see what you are missing.

6. Talk at the Community – Much like insider language, people really want to feel alienated and even bullied into a saving knowledge of Jesus. It is always best to assume that they don’t know anything, and you know everything. It is a good practice to check the Tea Party or Blaze posts on your Facebook feed to see how a good, pointedly pushy headline should read. Everyone will be SUPER excited to hear what the topic of your next message series is going to be, once they figure out what “*message series*” might actually mean.

7. Don’t Include a Map – If they want it bad enough, they can find you. Plus everyone in the community must know who you are, especially if you are consistent with “dusty Bibles lead to dirty hearts” pun-ny evangelistic techniques on the church sign.

All snarkiness aside, well crafted and thoughtful mailers **can be an effective tool in reaching people and can receive more than the typical 3 seconds of attention**. Here are **three, more helpful, practices** for an effective community mailer:

1. Invest beyond Printing and Postage. Time spent in defining the audience and design excellence is as valuable to the staying power of your direct mail piece as the printing and postage is to the arriving power. Don’t pander for lowest common denominator buzz, like “F-word” shock attention, but create a central message that has meaning to the actual person you are trying to reach. Then **support that message with great design and a coherent brand** connected to your actual personality and presence as a church.

2. Keep it Clean and Clear. In the design-investment phase of your next direct mail piece, answer 4 questions of clarity: who, what, when and why.

Who are we targeting with this mailer and what matters most to that group?

What are we asking or inviting them to do, and does it make sense in the real world?

When do we want them to do it, and have we moved beyond just broadcasting general awareness and hopeful information with a time sensitive approach?

Why should it matter to them, or why should they care about what we are saying or offering?

If your next idea for a mailer cannot easily reflect this level of simplicity, and OBVIOUSLY answer these questions, go back to the drawing board or **use your advertising dollars in a more effective way**.

3. Define the Next Step. Nine out of ten first time guests will visit your church's website before they set foot on your church's property. Even more important than a map or list of service times, then, is a clear and compelling invitation to experience your online presence. Adding value to this invitation through current, community-directed content, a fresh welcome video or advertised event registration increases the likelihood that a recipient would do more than give your mailer a glance on the way to the wastebasket. Also, ***remember to check the age of your web content*** before the direct mail piece is sent. Nothing is worse the rotating Christmas Eve banners being seen in mid-January.

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