

# Open Me Now!

## 11 Tips for More Effective Direct Mail Envelopes

By Dean Rieck

The direct mail envelope is both the easiest and hardest part of every direct mail package.

It's easy in that there's just not that much space to fill with copy or design. But it's hard in that there's so much riding on what you say or don't say. The envelope plays a huge role in determining whether your direct mail package gets opened or trashed.

Before I give you some envelope tips, let's get one thing straight.

You should not expect an envelope to sell your product. You should not use it to show off your design skills. Its job is not to entertain or amuse. You are not required to cover it with clever copy or concepts.

Aside from holding together the contents until delivered, an envelope has only one job: to get opened. Here are few ways to do that.



Follow headline rules to write teaser copy. Generate interest with a provocative statement. Provoke curiosity with a question headline or incomplete statement. State a problem on the envelope and suggest the solution is inside. Teaser copy acts like a headline and leads people to read the letter.

**1. Use teaser copy to select your audience.** It should be clear at a glance that your message is addressed specifically to your reader. Use key words that relate to your prospect's interests or identity, such as "Exclusive offer for golfers inside" or "For serious investors only."

**2. Refer to the contents of the envelope.** Tell your reader there's something free, valuable, new, or exclusive inside. If you've actually enclosed something — such as a sample, booklet, checklist, discount coupon, how-to guide, or newsletter — say so.

**3. Use directive language.** If you want something, you have to ask for it. Prompt your reader to open the envelope with copy such as "inside," "see inside," or "open immediately." Combine this with a benefit to jump start your sales message. "FREE Recipes! Look inside ..." or "How to pay \$0 in taxes! See inside for details ...."

**4. Fully develop your "envelope real estate" to sell the sizzle.** If you have a flashy, desirable product, you can crank up the excitement by using every square inch of your envelope, front and back. Show the product.

**5. Bullet point benefits.** Starburst your special price. Hint at a special gift for immediate orders. This works best for consumer offers that are proven sellers needing little explanation, such as books, software upgrades, fact-packed newsletters, etc.

**6. Use illustrations or photos.** If you're spilling your guts on the envelope, you might as well go all the way and show your product, premium, gift, or whatever. Simple pictures communicate instantly. A photo of a book with the word "FREE" next to it is better than lines and

lines of clever copy.

**7. Consider involvement devices.** Stickers, tokens, stamps, coins, scratch-offs, lift-up tabs, attached notes, seals and other widgets can be used to good effect if you have the budget, if they can boost response enough to justify the added cost, and if they fit with the feel of your message.

**8. Put your deadline on the outside.** Inertia is your enemy. Action is your friend. Deadlines induce action. Therefore, if you're sure about your mailing date, a deadline can prevent your prospect from setting aside your envelope for later. If you're using a window envelope and personalized letter, you can print the date on the letter to cut envelope costs for future mailings. I prefer real deadlines over arbitrary ones. It's more honest and will preserve your believability if you're mailing often to the same lists.

**9. If you're mailing to a business, use a low-key approach.** Most business-to-business mail is intercepted by a secretary, assistant, or mail room. If it looks too much like advertising, it may get trashed. You stand a better chance of reaching your prospect if your envelope looks personal, important, and businesslike. Less is also more for offers that may meet some resistance at first glance and need more selling, which is best done in a letter.

**10. If you use a blank envelope, make it completely blank.** Not a single word of teaser copy. No graphics. Perhaps not even your logo. Just a street address in the upper left corner and your delivery address. You might include the letter signer's name in the corner card, particularly if that person is well-known. This makes your mailing look personal and is almost certain to get opened.

**11. Be careful with "official" envelopes.** Faux express envelopes, government notices, invoices, and other formats can be used to great effect. However, be clear about your intentions. If it's just part of the theme of your message, and people are clear about who you are and what you want, that's fine. If you're trying to trick people or pose as something you're not, that's unethical. If you have to deceive people to get response, there's something wrong with your product or service.



Envelopes are the "red-headed step children" of direct mail. They seem simpler and less important than they really are. Sometimes, you can boost your response by simply improving your envelope.