

INDUSTRY

The Effectiveness of Political Direct Mail in Winning Campaigns

BY PAUL BOBNAK | MAY 3, 2024



Why Political Campaigns Still Rely on Direct Mail in the Digital Age

In a world filled with digital clutter, political direct mail's effectiveness in reaching voters gives your election campaign a powerful tool. Think about all of the distractions people face every day from email, pop-ups, Facebook and YouTube ads, texts, signs, TV and radio commercials, and other communications. Direct mail is the only channel delivered by print (and often with an assist from digital) to every household in America. When a printed mail piece arrives in the mailboxes and homes of citizens, it has the power to drive them to participate in our democracy.

The Advantages of Political Direct Mail

Your political direct mail offers your campaign many opportunities to grab the attention of today's voters, and keep them engaged. As with most mail, finding the right combination of messaging and form factors involves best practices as well as some trial-and-error.

Targeted messaging

Of course you want to engage your audience – voters – with a message that resonates. With direct mail, you can base an entire mail piece on an important issue, candidate qualification, or a [segmentation factor](#).

Personalization

The headlines on a direct mail piece can speak to an individual voter directly and be generated with [variable data printing \(VDP\)](#).

Tangible and memorable

A political campaign email looks like any other email in an inbox. But a political mailer stands out when removed from a mailbox because it is tactile. The format – the headlines – the images – the call-to-action – even the social proof included on the piece – all capture a voter's attention, inspire them to find out more, and hopefully, keep the piece around long enough to get them to vote for your candidate or cause.

Cost-effective compared to other media

As digital ad rates have increased and third-party cookies disappear, surveys show that direct mail enjoys a higher ROI than other channels. With economical options such as postcards and bulk postage rates, more and/or larger campaigns are affordable opportunities to reach voters.

Key Strategies for Effective Political Direct Mail

Direct mail is a proven, time-tested tool to attract the attention of voters, provide information about your candidate, build trust and support, and then, get them to vote. To accomplish all of these goals, these strategies will help you to get the best return on your investment in data, printing, and postage for your political direct mail.

Clear call-to-action (CTA)

This is one that campaigns somehow don't always get quite right:

Don't be subtle about your CTA. You and your candidate can't afford it!

Just tell your voters what you want them to do next and keep it short. Some examples:

→ "Go to [www.\[CandidateName\].com](#) for my full environment plan"

→ "Register to vote by [date]"

→ "Vote on [date]!!"

Also, show them how. Provide clear instructions, such as your campaign website or phone number for more information, or a map showing the physical location of their polling place, or deadlines for early voting sites or vote-by-mail.

Defining your target audience

Your audience is not all voters. It's those people whose values and political beliefs align best with your candidate. Create a contact database starts with lists of registered voters; then supplement those with names from credible data suppliers. Additional data sets can segment voters by gender, age, income, education, and other criteria pulled from issue- or lifestyle-specific compiled lists.

Then, drill down into your voter contact database by targeting people using specific demographics, and build personas to help you visualize your different segments and help you sharpen your copy.

Crafting compelling messages

To be persuasive, your messaging should be to-the-point, focusing on how a candidate's position or experience solves a problem or benefits the voters. Use short headlines, bullet points, and white space to guide the reader to your main points and the call-to-action. Also, with your text and images, tap into emotional drivers: guilt, fear, anger, salvation, exclusivity, flattery, and greed, to motivate action. Align facts and figures mostly as support for the messaging.

Eye-catching design and layout

Great design plays an important role in the effectiveness of political direct mail. It grabs and then the voter's attention on the candidate. For the most common formats, such as postcards, folded self-mailers, and flats, these tips make it easy for the reader to quickly scan:

- Create a hierarchy of text, images, and graphics
- Use high-resolution but less-formal images that help the voter connect with the candidate in a real, human-to-human way
- Include certifications such as union bugs and paper source logos that show how your campaign (and the company it chooses to print its mail) aligns with their values

Timing and frequency of mailings

Timing really is everything. Campaign mail first introduces the candidate, then reinforces their messaging, and finally, mobilizes their likely voters – and, you hope, others – before a primary or general election. The key is in reaching the right voters with the right message at the right time.

To maximize the effectiveness of your political direct mail, keep in mind some important [timing tips](#) as you plan and run a powerful political campaign.

- **Watch your registration deadlines and voting date(s)** – You should be aware of your state's specific deadlines and requirements to plan messaging and directions to voters well in advance.
- **Know your drop dates** – Your mail should be delivered to voter households 2-5 days after arrival at a local USPS facility; tracking with Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMb) and third-party solutions gives you insight on where it is in the system, and allow you to coordinate with other channels.
- **Use USPS Tag 57** – Affixing this red tag to bulk political mailings makes it more visible to USPS staff for expedited treatment during sorting and processing.
- **Reinforce your message with omnichannel** – USPS Informed Delivery gives your mail additional visibility and reach, so use it to drive supporters to your site and social media; also coordinate your mail drops with email and text messaging.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Your Political Direct Mail

One of the most important ways you can analyze marketing performance – and improve your results – is to [track your direct mail campaigns](#). With most political direct mail, effectiveness can be measured and improved through several approaches.

Response rates and tracking methods

A lot of political direct mail isn't intended to produce an immediate, measurable response. Issue awareness, event promotions, nurturing campaigns, and GOTV (get-out-the-vote) efforts pay off with votes cast on (or before) Election Day. However, you can attribute which campaign pieces result in other actions. Call tracking, QR codes, promotional URLs, and PURLs are all trackable. In addition, matchback analysis can identify IP addresses for physical addresses that were mailed to.

A/B testing and optimization

Also known as a split test, this technique tests response rates for one variable two ways for a campaign. In a political direct mail campaign, that could involve testing formats (e.g., flat vs. jumbo postcard), headlines, or images. The control group that was held back (not mailed) lets you determine whether groups that were mailed had a lift over it.

Integration with digital marketing efforts

Digital channels, such as email, text, social media, and display ads, can all be enhanced when launched [in conjunction with political direct mail](#). Each has their own benefits, such as immediacy and reach, that can drive voter engagement when aligned with the strengths of direct mail. For example:

- Prospect for email addresses or social engagement with a direct mail piece
- Send direct mail as a step in a drip campaign for high-value segments
- Sync up postal mailer delivery with email through USPS [Informed Delivery campaigns](#)

Partnering with a Reliable Direct Mail Service Provider

Your political direct mail's effectiveness is directly related to the expertise of the company that produces it. Decades of experience in designing, printing, and mailing marketing and political campaigns of all sizes and complexities gives mailing.com a distinct advantage over other candidates.

Among the ways we can help you win:

- Over 25 years of mailing list and data experience to identify voters
- On-time guarantee to get in the mail quickly and affordably even during election system
- State-of-the-art equipment and choice of products that showcase your candidate
- Union bug certification to meet campaign requirements
- On-site USPS verification that saves time and money
- Award-winning customer service that works directly with your campaign

Wrapping it up

In the right hands, political direct mail's effectiveness can be improved by the best fundamental practices that focus on the right audience and messaging, mail the most affordable and engaging formats, understand how to quickly get into the mailstream, and of course, get voters to act.

At mailing.com, we look forward to being part of your winning political campaign team. Call or [reach out to us](#) to get started on the road to political campaign success.

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