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INDUSTRYALERT

Marketers Giving Mail A Fresh Look, Says Postmaster General

Changing media landscape, integration with digital technologies, strong return on investment sparking reappraisal of mail's role in marketing mix

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WASHINGTON — In a keynote speech at the National Postal Forum—the annual mailing industry trade show—Patrick R. Donahoe, Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer of the Postal Service, today described a changing attitude of marketers toward the role of direct mail as a means of attracting and retaining customers.

“We’re seeing mail being used in some tremendous new ways—especially as part of integrated marketing campaigns,” said the Postmaster General. “All of this is leading to a reappraisal of the role of mail in the marketing mix—and we’re starting to see the beginnings of that reappraisal.”

Providing perspective on the changing media landscape and the use of new technologies to improve the effectiveness of mail for both senders and receivers, the Postmaster General and other senior postal leaders discussed trends in the use of mail and efforts by the Postal Service to spur growth in the mailing industry. “Our industry needs to give all marketers a sense that mail can be used in new ways,” said Donahoe. “We need to drive a better understanding of the value mail brings to integrated marketing campaigns.”

“Mail is the most effective channel for driving customers to a retail location and for driving customers to websites,” Donahoe added. “You can use mail to launch a video on a smart phone, or to make quick purchases out of a catalog or a flyer. We’re now able to measure and analyze all of these interactions—that’s adding value for senders and causing marketers to give mail a fresh look.”

The Postmaster General urged the mailing industry in attendance to talk with customers about new ways of using data and analytics to optimize return on mail and integrated campaigns. Specifically, Donahoe mentioned the need to:

1. Make mail more personally relevant and tailor mail pieces more to an individual.
2. Accelerate the adoption of technologies that make mail more actionable, with emphasis on speeding the customer's purchasing process.
3. Expand the functionality of mail by embedding technologies and enabling interactions with devices, such as mobile phones and tablets.
4. Invest more in industrywide creativity, such as mail pieces that use color, irregular sizes and novel construction.

With advancements in augmented reality, QR codes and Personalized Uniform Resource Locators (PURLs), which are unique and personalized websites created especially for each recipient of a direct mail or email campaign, mail can be a lynchpin for integrated marketing campaigns with interaction of digital and social media.

“All of these strategies are focused on creating a more valuable experience for the receiver of mail—making mail more valuable within the marketing mix,” said Donahoe. “That means getting very thoughtful about the receiver of mail and the mail experience.”

Donahoe also announced plans to partner with the mailing industry to study the behaviors of consumers who opt to forgo paper statements and receive only digital statements. “First-Class Mail is a powerful communication channel because people will open a statement and look at it. They'll spend some time with it. They'll notice a change. They'll catch an error,” said Donahoe. “I'm not sure that's the case with someone who gets an email stating that their online statements are ready.”

A video of Donahoe's full speech will be posted online when it is available at about.usps.com/news.

The National Postal Forum is an annual national gathering of the mailing industry's most influential thought leaders, innovators and visionaries. The 2014 Forum takes place March 16–19, 2014, at National Harbor, MD, and features four days of inspired addresses, instructional workshops and networking events designed to enable greater successes for the mailing industry and associated businesses.

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