

4 Ways to Pass the B-to-B Gatekeeper

Ever wonder what happens to your B-to-B mail? Will it make it to the right person? If you are targeting businesses, especially mid- to large-sized companies, your mailing is likely to face the B-to-B gatekeeper, an employee who receives and sorts a company's mail and decides which pieces warrant attention from the boss or decision maker. "If you watch them at their jobs, you know they sort the mail pretty quickly," says Bob Bly, copywriter and author of "The White Paper Marketing Handbook."

A gatekeeper will screen about 80 percent of B-to-B marketing mail, says Greg Demetriou, president of Farmingdale, N.Y.-based American Mail Communications. Here are four ways to create a B-to-B mail piece that will pass inspection.

1 Segment efforts by company size

Before you tailor your mailings to get past a gatekeeper, consider appending data regarding company sizes to your lists. "Large corporations are much more likely to have gatekeepers than small offices and home offices. As a rule of thumb, the bigger the company, the more likely they are to have gatekeepers; the smaller, the less likely," Bly claims. (A good cutoff for companies that have direct mail gatekeepers is anywhere above 25 employees.)

2 Smart designs get noticed

Gatekeepers may have a keen understanding of the bosses' professional needs or save mail simply on the basis that "it looks important."

In the former case, you need to appeal to the business's present needs and performance. "I want that gatekeeper to say, 'You know, I really have to show this to the boss; this really might be good for us,'" asserts Demetriou. In the latter case, Bly recommends a design that doesn't look too promotional and instead resembles important correspondence, such as content-based mailings (newsletter or whitepaper). Along the same lines, Demetriou suggests that a high-end package will more likely pique interest than a self-mailer.

3 Appeal to a gatekeeper directly

You can also target the gatekeeper directly with offers, freemiums and premiums that address her responsibilities as an employee. Bly cites an example of a classic 9" x 12" mailing that was addressed to the prospect and had a smaller envelope spot-glued to it, addressed "To the Receptionist." The smaller envelope explained the benefits of how and why the boss would profit if he or she had this great technology. Bly says the mailing was a "keeper" because it also offered an incentive to the gatekeeper where she could return a reply card and get a premium or discount.

4 Don't forget the mailroom

When sending a mailing to a company with 25-plus employees, marketers need to realize the mailroom is their first real barrier. "In the bigger companies, Standard mail is usually not making it upstairs. The higher up the corporate ladder you're going to reach, the more highly produced your approach has to be," explains Demetriou, who says that mailings to C-level executives at large companies have the best chance of surpassing the mailroom if they arrive via a courier service or in dimensional packaging. Bly adds, "You don't want 40 of your pieces to arrive in one day in the same pile. Mail three to five pieces at a time, and then wait a day or two before mailing the next five." ■

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