

Marketing

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PREMIER ISSUE NO.2

WE ARE SICK OF

BEING IGNORED

MALCOLM

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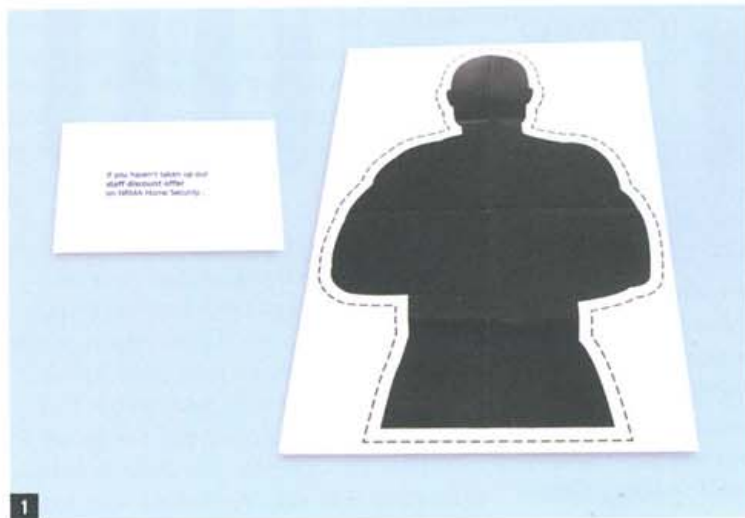
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THE DIRECT MAIL TEST

Malcolm Auld reviews some of Australia's best (and worse) direct mail.



When you're asked to 'judge' finished creative work, there is a tendency to overanalyse, so I've simply commented on these packs based on my initial reaction to seeing them for the first time and then given a bit more insight into how they may have performed better. I have no idea if these packs have been tested or if their success is measured by their contribution to brand awareness, rather than simply the response rates.

And when you've been creating advertising as long as I have, it's rare you see anything new. Which is the case with the mailpacks featured in this issue. Not that there's anything wrong with using ideas that have been executed before – after all, if they've worked previously, there's a good chance they'll work again. But I've forgotten how many facsimile pay envelopes, movie film canisters, coat hangers and paint tubes/free art I've seen over the years.

Typical of many mailings using envelopes, a number of these mailpacks don't use their envelopes effectively. The envelope has two purposes. One is mechanical – to carry the contents. The other is to encourage the recipient to open it or, to quote Bill Jayme, one of the industry's most famous copywriters, "the envelope is the hotpants on the hooker".

We tend to forget these basic premises when writing our mailings and instead we write puffery or corporate statements that don't encourage the recipient to go any further.

1. CLIENT – SGIC HOME SECURITY AGENCY – M&C SAATCHI DIRECT SYDNEY

Having once been a marketing manager in the security business this pack tickled my fancy. A very clever way to demonstrate what you'd have to do if you didn't take up the special offer. Simple, engaging and probably paid for itself easily. And I bet there are a few 'Dangerous Daves' pinned to the walls at the agency. One of those pieces you wish you'd done yourself and also gave the client some personality within the agency.

2. CLIENT – DRA AGENCY – POLKADOT

I look forward to seeing this agency's new business mailings, as it has historically delivered some very creative 3D packs. The film canister is a well-used device that will always be opened and allows for theming around dramas, blockbuster events and the like. This sample included a free DVD with a cover for the movie *Casablanca*, but inside was a DVD of *Ocean's 11*, so was a bit confusing. And the free popcorn matched the film theme as part of the involvement device. I expect everyone who received it opened it to see what was inside.

The target is extremely narrow – marketers who currently have problems with producing their direct mail or their mailhouse does, and only companies or organisations with huge volumes of advertising mail (complicated mailings of 250,000 pages a day, by the definition in the

brochure). It's never easy trying to win business on the hope that your prospect is currently having problems doing what they're already paid to do well, so this is an ambitious mailing.

The copy is all about DRA and its mail and printing machines, rather than the prospect. Brands are built by what others say about you, not what you say about yourself, so some testimonials or examples of how their mailing machines have helped clients would have been useful, rather than lots of content by the agency, about the agency.

There is no offer, apart from a request to submit a quote. I suspect this mailing will get a response if it reaches a marketer in the midst of a mailing problem, or who has just had a problem with a job. But if the prospect doesn't have a mailing problem, then the mailer serves to create some brand awareness, rather than some immediate business.

3. CLIENT – ANZ AGENCY – RAPP COLLINS

This is obviously a piece of advertising that, by its design (a self mailer), is easy to throw away if there is no compelling reason to open it. I'm guessing it's supposed to look like a pay envelope. The use of the hackneyed line 'Private and Confidential' has no credence in advertising mail and doesn't help this piece at all, apart from encouraging more people to throw it away without opening it.

The question posed to the recipient has only one answer – 'yes', as most people would like a pay rise. The assumption of course is that the list was customers who are employees, not small business owners or corporate leaders. If you do open the mailing the headline is quite negative/condescending – it implies the recipient isn't strong enough to ask for a pay rise – they have to grovel.

I thought there was a typo in one of the background boxes, but then realised that '\$\$\$\$cc' is an art director's idea of symbolism for the recipient's salary.

The copy is well written and it's obvious what you have to do to take up the service, but the background type reduces comprehensibility – the art director hasn't studied the available literature on comprehensibility of type and the uses of backgrounds for same. This is really hard to read – why make it harder than it already is to get a prospect to read your message?

Doesn't really do anything for the brand values – it looks cheap but, because it is cheap, it may only need a small response rate to pay for itself.

4. CLIENT – AUSTRALIAN UNITY AGENCY – RAPP COLLINS

At first glance I had no idea what this was about – you have to find the 'shocking' images interesting enough to arouse your curiosity to open the envelope – but I suspect it did the job. This is a fulfilment piece to people who have made an inquiry about health insurance.

The image doesn't link to the copy – it is just a way to attract attention. Inside is a letter with a checklist to remind you what you get from Australian Unity. It would have been good to know if this cover is better value than that of competitors, or how much you can save each week/month/year compared to leading brands.

There is a good offer – one month free cover after you join, but it might have been interesting to test it against say three months free cover before you join. Free cover has worked universally in this category around the world. Given the cheap cost to create the pack it probably paid for itself, though I'm not sure what value it added to the brand.



5. CLIENT – MIELE AGENCY – WUNDERMAN

The envelope is an expensive looking silver stock favoured by premium brands, particularly financial services. It has a Miele logo and a nebulous statement that gives me no reason to open it – "perfection speaks for itself". Someone's in love with their brand more than their customers are.

As a recent Miele dishwasher user, I'm the target market and am interested in what the pack offers – because we are having so many problems with our damn machine and the residue it leaves on our crockery and glasses that we've resorted to old-fashioned hand washing while we decide the future of the dishwasher. The customer service people direct us to a website that doesn't provide any help, so we're a tad frustrated with the brand.

Inside the envelope is an A4 sheet. It is addressed just like you would start a letter, but has no copy, just six small blue-lit photos that don't tell me anything about what the photos are and they aren't easy to look at. These are followed by a signature and PS.

Call me slow, but I had no idea what I was looking at. So I checked the envelope again and finally understood what the copy hook meant – you don't need words when pictures of perfection speak for themselves – if only I'd read the brief. Unfortunately the pictures don't speak for themselves.

The brochure committed the same sin as the 'letter'. It's a photo album of product shots designed by an art director who doesn't understand advertising, let alone how people consume real estate on a page, despite all



the research and literature available. One of the basic facts of marketing communications is that the most read part of an ad or news page, after the headline, is the caption under the photograph, illustration or image.

It's in our DNA – we are taught to read by looking at a picture of a dog then looking at the word 'dog' captioned under it. We cannot naturally look at an image without looking for a caption to tell us what the image is, or why it is there. Can you imagine walking into an art gallery and looking at the artworks without any captions? Or reading the social pages in the Sunday paper without knowing who was wearing that hideous dress? Or a retail ad without any descriptions and prices?

Sadly the floating image is a regular sin in advertising and it nearly always works against the purpose of the message.

I would have thought that a brand that was so perfect would have known something about the customer and prepopulated the response device as part of the perfect service. The response device is the part of the mailing the customers will read with most interest and get most involved with. Instead the response device is the same as any you would find on a discount brand, not a premium brand.

Maybe if the mailing focuses more on the customer than the brand, the results will be even better.

6. CLIENT – SAS

AGENCY – WUNDERMAN

Full marks to Aussie Post for allowing this mailing to get through its system. The coat hanger shape and clear plastic envelope will guarantee that it gets looked at by the recipient. A good clutter-buster and a fine use for broken coat hangers. Although I suspect some recipients wouldn't have realised there was a roll-fold brochure hidden under the die-cut card. It is so tightly locked into the coat hanger it's not obvious you have to pull the card apart to get to a brochure.

The headline is interesting – “you can't hang your business on useless data” because you could say “you'll hang your business with useless data”, so I was interested to see how the play on the 'hang' word was used. But it was never referred to again in the copy. Another communication 'sin' is committed in this brochure. The opening subhead is four lines of uppercase lettering, so it looks like a big block of type, rather than a number of sentences and is very difficult to read. If you understand how to use type and the comprehension level of upper and lower



case, serif and sans serif fonts, you'd know that blocks of upper case type are not easy to read because there is no natural shape to the words. And they're even harder to read as san serif fonts. The paragraph is viewed as a block of uppercase letters and tends to get ignored by the reader due to eye strain.

The copy uses bold statements about what SAS can do without substantiation with facts or examples. And in the opening paragraph, there is a wonderful piece of jargon – ETL to the Power of Q, with no explanation of what Q is or how it benefits the customer. Not the most gripping copy to encourage further reading.

The best part of the copy is the simple demonstration of the samples of data that SAS can correct with its service. Samples and diagrams always work well to explain in layman's language what goes on in a computer-based service or application.

The offer is good – a free data quality analysis. Free trial always works, but putting a value on the free trial will make the offer work even harder. As will explaining what the free analysis report will provide for you. I suspect this piece worked well because the unusual shape meant it was looked at by most of the recipients and all you had to do was read the reply coupon to take up the offer.

7. CLIENT – NAB

AGENCY – GEORGE PATTERSON PARTNERS

There is no reason to open this envelope, apart from curiosity to discover what's inside due to the weight of the mailpack. It's obviously a piece of advertising, aimed at customers, but it doesn't give them any reason to



Take control of your debts in one hit

If bill repayments keep coming at you, a National Personal Loan can help you get back in control.

To kill bills, start with a pen

It only takes a few minutes to understand what your debts could really be costing you.

Step 1 List and total your credit cards, store cards, loans and other debts – the lot, in the first two columns of the table.

Step 2 In the last column, list the approximate monthly repayments you're making next to each debt. Total these repayments to find out how much your debts could be costing you each month.

Step 3 Review our National Personal Loan ready reckoner to see how much you could be paying each month. If you consolidated each of these debts into one National Personal Loan.

And here's how to do it:

- a) Pull the right tab to choose the closest National Personal Loan amount that matches your current approximate debts.
- b) Check the estimated approximate monthly repayments, on a fixed rate loan over a period of five years, and compare this to what you're currently paying per month.

How much are you paying?

Type of debt	Current balance	Approximate monthly repayments
1. Credit card		
2. Store card		
3. Loan		
4. Other debt		
TOTAL		\$

National Personal Loan Ready Reckoner*

Loan amount	\$	5,000
Monthly repayment over five years	\$	113.25
National Personal Loan Fixed Rate – Unsecured		12.80%
Comparison Rate		17.56%

This table shows an example of an unsecured National Personal Loan with a fixed interest rate and a monthly repayment schedule for five years. In addition to the monthly repayment amount, a standard application fee of \$100 and a \$10 monthly service fee are also applicable.

This table gives an example of what you could achieve. Of course, the choice is yours. Pull out the right hand tab to see the range of options a National Personal Loan offers you.

PULL

*The National Personal Loan ready reckoner table is based on fees, charges and indicative rates for unsecured Personal Loans, effective Monday 30 February 2005 and is subject to change. These repayment amounts are an approximation, based only on the information you provide. Please see website for more information. The National standard lending criteria apply. Annual percentage rates are current as at 12/2/2005. Terms and conditions are available upon application. Fees and charges apply.

invest their time looking at it, so I imagine many wouldn't have opened it. Once you're inside, the contents look quite complicated – the letter is accompanied by a six-page application form and a ready reckoner device that appears very complex. It all looks like too much hard work.

And the headline 'Kill Bills' must have been written by a young team who go to the movies and assume the NAB customers do as well. 'Kill' is a harsh word and not very appealing to the average Josephine Customer – people don't really want to kill anything, it's not their nature. And when you read the copy, you're not killing bills; you're just paying them off a different way.

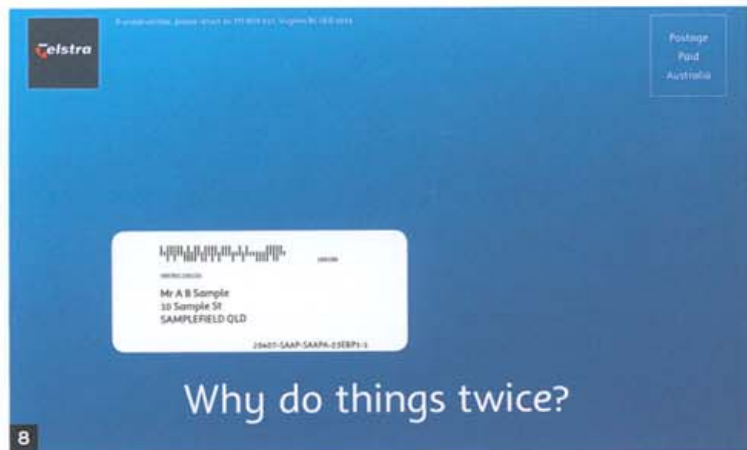
And despite the fact the mailing was personalised to a customer, the response form was blank, demonstrating a 'low care' factor by the bank. There's enough work to do on the application forms without having to repeat information already used in the mailing, such as name and address.

Not a cheap pack and it needs a higher than normal response rate to pay for itself although it may work a treat, because there is so much information and a calculator inside.

The branding experience possibly matched people's perception of most large banks though – difficult to deal with, lots of paperwork, never easy for the customer.

8. CLIENT – TELSTRA AGENCY – GEORGE PATTERSON PARTNERS

There isn't a compelling reason to open this envelope – what's in it for me if I do? Never pose a question unless you know the only answer. There are two answers to this question. Answer number one – because it feels good or because I enjoy it. Answer number two – which is the one I suspect the writer wanted – it's a waste of time to do the same thing twice for no benefit.



If you did choose to open the envelope there is an effective demonstration of how you can waste time doing things twice – like paying two separate phone bills. It is a charming way to demonstrate the proposition and you'll always succeed with a bit of charm. The letter is simple, straight to the point and contains a good offer if you chose to come back to Telstra. I suspect for those who did bother to open the envelope there was a worthwhile response. The imagery fits with Telstra's corporate image, so the pack contributes to the awareness of the Telstra brand.

9. CLIENT – KONICA MINOLTA AGENCY – RAPP COLLINS

This is another category in which I have an interest. I own one of the machines in question and have created ads for competitors in this space. This is a category growing at a rapid rate with lots of direct mail advertising in the market.

By the sheer nature of the size and shape of the 3D pack it will get opened and I'm sure most of the recipients did so. Although the copy

