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The Art of Direct Mail

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Most successful HVAC companies use direct mail extensively. The problem is that they don't always get the most bang for their buck. As a result, they either waste lots of money or miss out on much stronger results.

When I worked at Time Warner, I had the opportunity to learn an enormous amount about what works and doesn't work in direct mail. In a given package, I might have tested as many as 20 different versions: list, creative, offer, timing, etc. I was also able to observe numerous focus groups that gave me the chance to see how people open and read their mail and what types of offers they respond to. And now, I apply those lessons to the needs of our contractor clients.

Here are some common errors most contractors make:

❶ Not testing effectively — If you use only one tool (a letter, package, postcard, etc.) to deliver one offer, you'll never know why it worked—or didn't. Nor do you know whether a different approach would have generated greater response. The old saying: *"Give me a fish and I eat tonight. Teach me to fish and I eat forever,"* absolutely applies. The goal of each direct mailing is not just to deliver results, it's to learn and perfect what works so you can grow results in the future.

❷ Not effectively tracking results— If you don't know the number of leads generated and how many turned into sales, it's impossible to know how well each part of the marketing and sales effort is working. You also won't be able to determine your return on investment, or where to spend future dollars.

❸ Making decisions based on your preferences— You don't always think like your customers — and you're too close to the subject matter, you make more money than most, have more responsibility, live a different lifestyle, etc. Thinking that your customers make decisions or look at offers and creative packages the way you do is presumptuous and dangerous to your bottom line. That's the virtue of testing and using professionals.

❹ Not using enough frequency— Repetition is one of the most important keys to effective direct mail. It's smarter to send something 5 times to 10,000 people than once to 50,000.

❺ Looking at costs instead of what's generated — You don't advise your customers to buy the cheapest equipment; you help them see the value of the comfort and efficiency they receive. Why would you make marketing decisions that way? The key is results.