

# Architext

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## AIA CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

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A Chapter of  
The American  
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# Marketing Tip: The Value of Direct Mail

By Scott D. Butcher, CPSM

A recent study of Internet usage in 2009 revealed that 90 trillion e-mails were sent during the year, with an average of 247 million e-mails sent daily. Of those daily e-mails, well over 200 million were spam. In fact, a recent New York Times article noted that as many as 94% of all e-mails are unwanted. If this “bane of some people’s professional lives,” as the Times referred to e-mail, is not annoying enough, we now have to deal with seemingly legitimate e-mails from people we know actually being disguised viruses looking for financial information on our computer. Most of us rely on e-mail as part of our communications cycle with co-workers, clients, friends, professional organizations, etc. Sadly, the most effective spam blocking software may also block as much as 20% of legitimate e-mails.

So how does this relate to marketing? Legitimate e-mail marketing is a low-cost way to prospect, stay in touch with clients through electronic newsletters, and provide rich, dynamic content that we simply couldn’t recreate in a standard printed piece. Unfortunately, we are all overwhelmed with e-mail as it is (up to 25% of a professional’s work day is spent with e-mail). How many e-newsletters do you regularly receive? And how many times do you hit the delete key without ever opening those e-newsletters? How many times have you received a seemingly legitimate e-mail, only to open it and be “fooled” into reading another advertisement for the latest fabulous pharmaceutical or notification that you’ve been “selected” to help transfer funds out of Nigeria? And now Internet security experts are recommending that you only receive or send e-mail in plain text format – devoid of graphics, colors, images, hyperlinks, etc. – as a way to reduce the threat of launching a virus on your computer or increase your odds of getting through a spam filter on your intended recipient’s e-mail server.

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These statistics and recommendations greatly compromise the ability to effectively use e-mail for marketing purposes.

As e-mail volume has increased, “snail mail” has decreased. It costs a lot more money to print and send direct mail when compared with electronic mail. The decreases have been well documented: the United States Postal Service has lost billions of dollars and may even eliminate Saturday delivery to cut costs. What this has created, however, is an opportunity to incorporate direct mail into your marketing program. Personally, my e-mail box is usually overwhelmed, and if I go a few days without addressing the mail in my inbox, I fall behind – way behind. So I’m very aggressive with the delete key. On the other hand, my physical company mailbox is not as crowded as it used to be, so I at least look at every single piece I receive. I may not open a letter, but I’m typically inclined to look at both sides of a postcard.

In fact, I’ve become a big fan of postcards. They can be produced quickly and cheaply – even in-house on a laser printer. And the right postcard to the right person at the right time has a better chance of standing out than the right e-mail to the right person at the right time. As with other forms of marketing, consistency is the key. You need to have a regular schedule for sending your direct mail. It doesn’t have to be monthly, but probably no less than quarterly. Repetition builds familiarity. In the past few years I’ve had several instances of a prospective client

calling my company because they received a postcard. They might have received five or six over the previous 12-16 months, and this one hit at the right time: when they had a need for our services. Take a cue from some of your building material vendors who regularly send you postcards. You’ve probably given the postcards a passing glance before you threw them away; but then one day you were working on a project, the postcard arrived, and you thought, “This might be perfect – I’m going to check out their Web site for more info.”

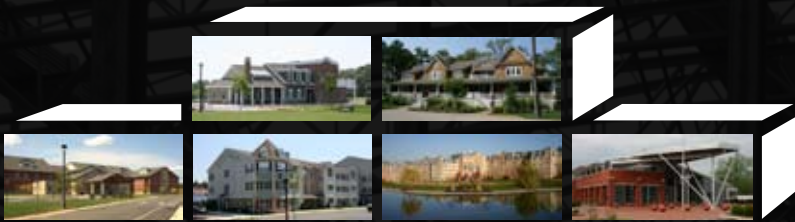
Direct mail is not going to bring work in your door – you still have to do that. But a consistent direct mail program can create familiarity, warm up an otherwise cold call, and occasionally result in a direct project opportunity. True, direct mail is not as “green” as e-mail, but you can use recycled paper and natural inks to elevate its level of sustainability.

For more information on incorporating direct mail into your marketing program, check out one of the country’s leading postcard production firms, located right here in Central Pennsylvania: [www.custompostcards.com](http://www.custompostcards.com).

Scott D. Butcher serves as honorary affiliate member on the AIA Central PA Board of Directors and is director of business development for JDB Engineering. He is a Certified Professional Services Marketer through the Society for Marketing Professional Services and the author of several books.

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