

Cutting through the noise:

WHY DIRECT MAIL OUTPERFORMS
DIGITAL IN SATURATED MARKETS



Cutting through the noise:

**DELIVERED
ISN'T THE SAME AS
REMEMBERED.**

Why the strongest campaigns optimise for consideration, not just reach.



**MORE MARKETING DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY
CREATE MORE MEANING.**

The brands that cut through are not simply louder. They are more deliberate about where, when and how they earn attention.

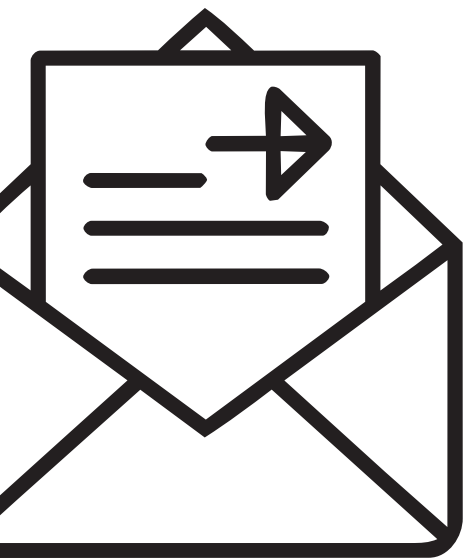
A point of view on building more thoughtful, connected campaigns in a crowded market.

Executive summary

THE CASE IN ONE MINUTE

Marketing is not short of channels. It is short of moments that change minds. Paid media, email, social and search can put a message in front of an audience quickly, but exposure is not the same as attention - and attention is not the same as consideration.

That distinction matters. In high-value, complex or regulated markets, decisions are rarely made because someone saw one more message. They are shaped through repeated, relevant moments that build familiarity, confidence and a reason to act.



**MOST MARKETING IS OPTIMISED FOR CONTACT,
NOT CONSIDERATION.**

Direct mail earns its place when it gives a message a more deliberate, memorable role within a wider journey - not when it is treated as a nostalgic alternative to digital.

The point of this paper is not that print beats pixels. It is that an intelligent media mix needs both: digital for precision, speed and response; physical mail for a more focused moment that can be held, revisited and acted on.



CONTACT

Did the message arrive, appear or get served?



ATTENTION

Did someone actually stop long enough for it to register?



CONSIDERATION

Will they remember it when the decision comes?

A good campaign should be designed to move people through all three
- not stop at the first.

The attention gap

THE REAL PROBLEM ISN'T REACH

Digital has made it easier than ever to make contact. We can target narrow audiences, automate sequences and report activity in real time. Those are useful advantages. But they can also create a false sense of progress.

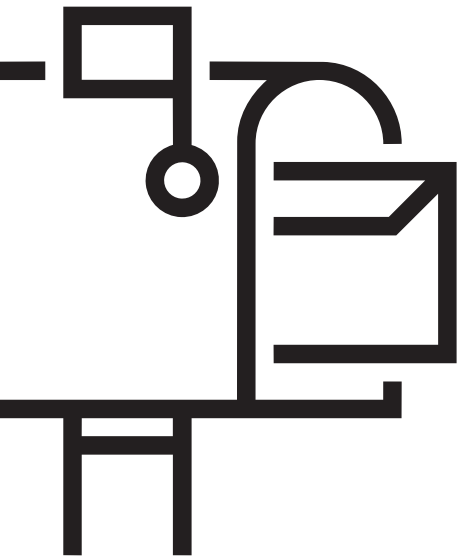
An impression, an open or a click tells us that a message was exposed. It does not necessarily tell us that it was understood, remembered or persuasive. When teams are under pressure to prove activity, it is easy to mistake movement for momentum.

A CAMPAIGN CAN BE MEASURABLE AND STILL BE FORGETTABLE.

The issue is not that digital no longer works. It does. The issue is over-reliance: putting every job into the same fast, crowded environment and expecting the same level of attention every time.

THE FLIP

For years, physical mail was dismissed as the “junk” while digital was seen as the cleaner, smarter way to reach people. But the environment has changed. The inbox, feed and search page now carry much of the everyday clutter. Physical mail is no longer the default - and that can make it feel more considered when the message is relevant and well made.



**THE INBOX IS CROWDED.
THE DOORMAT IS NOT.**

Not because mail is automatically better, but
because it creates a different context for attention.

This is especially useful when a message needs time, trust or a more human sense of effort. A physical item can stay in sight, be picked up again and give a digital journey something more tangible to build from.

An old channel, used intelligently

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Going “offline” is not a backwards step. It is a smarter use of what has always worked: a tangible message, a moment of focus and a reason to pause. The opportunity is to combine those strengths with the modern tools that make campaigns more relevant and more accountable.

Today, direct mail can use audience data, variable content, geo-targeting, QR codes, personalised landing pages, call tracking and automated follow-up. It can be a precise part of the journey, not a blunt alternative to it.

141

SECONDS

Average household interaction with a direct mail item over 28 days.

JICMAIL, Q1 2026

7.8

DAYS

Average direct-mail lifespan in the home before filing or disposal.

JICMAIL, Q1 2026

9.4%

Of all mail items prompted a website visit in Q1 2026.

JICMAIL, Q1 2026

These are industry benchmarks, not guarantees. Results will vary by audience, sector, proposition, creative and follow-up. But they point to a useful truth: physical mail can create a longer-lived moment than many of the faster formats we have become used to measuring.

THE BETTER QUESTION

The question is not “should we use direct mail?” The question is “what job can it do better within this particular journey?”

- Make a high-value prospect pause and take notice.
- Bring a complex proposition to life more clearly.
- Re-engage an audience that has stopped responding to digital-only activity.
- Give a campaign a physical cue that leads into a digital next step.
- Support longer-term brand memory while still creating a measurable route to action.

Count the outcomes that matter

BEYOND THE CLICK

Direct mail is often judged against email on cost per send. On that measure, it will almost always look more expensive. But cost per send is not the same as cost per meaningful response - or cost per acquisition.

The more useful conversation is commercial: who are we trying to reach, what is a qualified response worth, what happens after the first interaction and how does this channel support the longer-term value of that customer?

THE CHEAPEST CONTACT IS NOT ALWAYS
THE MOST EFFICIENT CUSTOMER.

A lower-cost channel that creates little attention or poor-quality response can simply move the cost further down the funnel.

7.2%

All-time average
response rate for
warm direct mail.
JICMAIL, 2025 tracker

0.9%

All-time average
response rate for cold
direct mail.
JICMAIL, 2025 tracker

3X

Response rate
reported for
campaigns built for
brand and response,
versus response alone.
JICMAIL, 2025 tracker

These numbers are not a promise - and they should not be copied into a business case without context. They are a reminder that strategy, repeat exposure and brand thinking can affect response. A campaign that chases only the immediate click risks missing the conditions that make people more likely to respond in the first place.

A MORE GROWN-UP PERFORMANCE CONVERSATION

The question is not “should we use direct mail?” The question is “what job can it do better within this particular journey?”

- 1. Start with value** - Know what a qualified conversation, conversion or customer is actually worth.
- 2. Plan the role of each channel** - Do not expect every touchpoint to do every job.
- 3. Measure the journey** - Track response, conversion, sales progression and repeat value - not just activity at the top.
- 4. Use benchmarks carefully** - They are a useful starting point, not a substitute for testing your own audience and proposition

Physical and digital are better when they have different jobs

STRONGER TOGETHER

The most effective campaigns do not ask direct mail to replace digital. They use each channel for what it can add best. Physical mail can create the pause. Digital can make the next step easy. Together, they give a message more opportunity to be noticed, understood and acted on.



PHYSICAL MAIL

Creates a distinct, tangible moment. It can signal effort, make an idea easier to hold onto and stay present beyond the first glance.



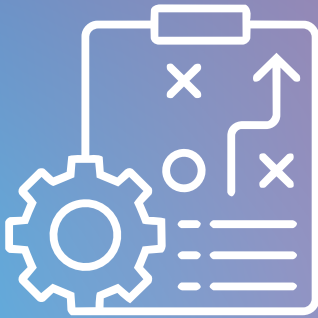
DIGITAL

Makes response easy. It can offer immediacy, useful follow-up, richer content and a measurable route into the next step.



TOGETHER

Creates a connected journey: a reason to notice, a simple way to act and a clearer picture of what happened next.



GOOD CHANNEL STRATEGY IS NOT SCATTERGUN. IT IS DELIBERATE SEQUENCING.

The aim is not to be everywhere. It is to create the right moments, in the right order, for the right audience.

A SIMPLE CONNECTED JOURNEY

1. **Build relevance** - Use digital, CRM insight or audience data to understand who matters and why now.
2. **Create a physical moment** - Use mail to make the proposition feel more considered, useful or hard to ignore.
3. **Make action easy** - Use a QR code, personalised URL, campaign landing page, phone number or clear response route.
4. **Follow up with purpose** - Use digital to answer questions, provide depth and continue the conversation.
5. **Learn and improve** - Bring mail and digital signals together to understand where the campaign is genuinely working.

A mailing is not automatically a campaign

FROM SCATTERGUN TO STRATEGIC

The difference between activity and results is rarely the paper stock. It is the thinking that happens before the print file is released - and the coordination that happens after it has landed.

A well-managed campaign links audience, proposition, creative, production, delivery and measurement into one accountable process. When one of those pieces is missing, even the best-looking item can become expensive noise.

Five places where performance is won or lost

1.

Audience selection - Use data to identify the people most likely to care, rather than treating every contact as equally valuable.

2.

Relevance and message - Give each audience a clear reason to pay attention. Personalisation should feel useful, not creepy.

3.

Creative and production - Design for the real-world moment: what will make someone pick it up, understand it and keep it?

4.

Postal strategy and fulfilment - Choose the right format, sortation and delivery profile, then make sure the process stays controlled at scale.

5.

Response and attribution - Plan the route to action before sending - and agree how success will be measured across channels.



A CAMPAIGN IS ONLY AS CONNECTED AS ITS WEAKEST HANDOVER.

Data, creative, print, fulfilment, digital response and reporting should work as one system, not a relay race.

This is where a specialist partner can add value beyond production: bringing the moving parts together, reducing friction for internal teams and creating a clearer line of sight from audience data to campaign outcome.

No shortcuts with data

Direct mail is a channel. It is not a data-protection loophole. The same discipline that makes a campaign relevant also makes it safer, more respectful and more effective.

The ICO is clear: postal marketing does not require consent in the same way as electronic marketing, but if a mailing uses identifiable personal data, the organisation still needs a lawful basis. It also needs to be open about how data is used, provide a clear way to object and stop postal marketing when someone asks it to stop.



GOOD DATA IS NOT JUST A COMPLIANCE ISSUE. IT IS A PERFORMANCE ISSUE.

Poorly managed lists waste budget, damage trust and weaken the message before it has even arrived.

THE BASICS THAT SHOULD NEVER BE SKIPPED

- A clear, documented lawful basis for using personal data.
- Transparency about how data will be used, plus an easy way to object.
- Suppression, cleansing, deduplication and address validation before every send.
- Careful due diligence on third-party data sources and suppliers.
- A clear audit trail so the campaign can be explained, checked and improved.

This guide is general marketing guidance, not legal advice. Data protection teams should confirm the approach for individual campaigns.

Before you add mail to the mix

A QUICK READINESS CHECK

1.

Where are we over-relying on activity metrics? - Identify the moments where reach is high but response or recall is weak.

2.

Which audience needs more consideration? - Prioritise high-value prospects, lapsed customers or complex decisions that need more than one touchpoint.

3.

What is the job of the mail? - Be clear whether it needs to create awareness, prompt action, build trust or re-open a conversation.

4.

What happens next? - Build the landing page, QR code, phone route, sales follow-up or email sequence before the item is sent.

5.

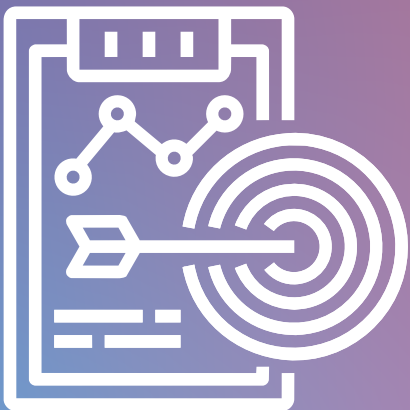
How will we prove value? - Agree the measures that matter before launch: qualified response, conversion, commercial pipeline or retention.

Conclusion

THE NEXT MOVE

Direct mail should not be used because it is traditional. It should be used when it can give a campaign something the rest of the media mix is missing: a more deliberate moment of attention, a sense of care and a physical cue that makes the next step easier.

The intelligent approach is not to reject what worked in the past, nor to use it out of habit. It is to recognise where its value has changed, pair it with modern data and digital capability, and give it a clear strategic role.



THE BRANDS THAT CUT
THROUGH ARE NOT
SHOUTING THE LOUDEST.
THEY ARE MAKING THE
MOST THOUGHTFUL MOVES.

In a world full of messages, that is a competitive advantage.

How PIN can help?

PIN helps organisations build connected communications that work harder across the full journey. That can include data and audience planning, creative and personalisation, print and production, fulfilment and postal management, digital response journeys and reporting.

The aim is not simply to send more mail. It is to create better-connected campaigns that are easier to manage, safer to deliver and more useful to measure.



READY TO MAKE YOUR MEDIA MIX WORK HARDER?

Talk to PIN about a more connected campaign journey.

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pin
COMMUNICATIONS

www.printimagenetwork.com