



Simplified Mail Guide

Step Direct is your partner for conceptualizing, designing and executing superior direct mail marketing campaigns.

With almost 25 years in the industry, Step Direct offers a wealth of experience to help you to:

- Establish realistic goals for your direct mailings;
- Design mail pieces for reliable delivery and maximum machinability;
- Most effectively tie your mailing strategy to your marketing communications strategy;
- Budget wisely; and
- Successfully coordinate direct mail with your other direct marketing media and strategies.

This *Simplified Mail Guide* is a tool designed to provide quick and easy access to basic information which can help you think about mailings the right way.

This **Guide** is divided into five (5) sections:

1. Media and Mail Class Standards
2. Select Print Considerations which Affect Mailings
3. Mailing Lists and Quality
4. The Top Ten Most Useful Mail Solutions
5. Budgeting Cost and Timeframe

We hope you will find the ***Simplified Mail Guide*** to be useful and valuable. We would be pleased to learn your reaction to it and will strive to improve it for you as we work together in the months and years ahead.

1. MEDIA AND MAIL CLASS STANDARDS

These are their most noteworthy features of the two principal classes of mail:

First Class Mail

- Quicker delivery timeframes: often 1-5 days nationwide
- Mail is returned and forwarded for free: Undeliverable mail is returned, recipients who have moved are forwarded the mail pieces

Standard Class/Non-Profit Mail

- Slower delivery timeframes, in general terms:
 - New England mail often arrives in 2-7 days
 - Mid-Atlantic and other northeast states often receive mail in 5-9 days
 - Southeast and Central time zone states often receive mail in 5-14 days
 - Southwest and Rocky Mountain time zone states often receive mail in 7-17 days
 - Western time zone states often receive mail in 12-21 days
- Mail is NOT returned for free: Undeliverable mail is discarded

Other Mail Classes

- Other Classes of mail (e.g. Periodical, Parcels, Bound Printed Matter) require too many considerations to be simplified in this manner; please contact us for assistance.

These are the most common media used:

Postcards

- Minimum size: 3.50" x 5.00" and Maximum size: 4.25" x 6.00"
- Printer must supply 9 point stock or thicker
- Graphic design must be reviewed to ensure adequate space for a bar code to obtain the discounted automation rate
- Receives First Class service standards at a special low rate

Letters

- Maximum Size: 6.125" height x 11.50" width
- Folded self mailers MUST be tabbed to receive discounted postal rates
- Must be 1/4" thick or less
- There must be AT LEAST 1.3" in width for every 1.0" in height and there must be NO MORE THAN 2.5" in width for every 1.0" in height (e.g. a letter 4.5" in height must be AT LEAST 5.85" wide and NO MORE THAN 11.25" wide
- Weight cannot exceed 4.0 ounces without additional charges and reclassification

Flats

- Maximum Size: 12.00" height x 15.00" width
- Must be 3/4" thick or less
- Weight cannot exceed 16.0 ounces

2. BUDGETING COST AND TIMEFRAME

Provided that your mail pieces abide by the standards on Page 2, you should plan on:

First Class Mail

- Postage for under 1 ounce: plan on **32.6¢ each** (may be as low as 29.0¢)
- Special rate for Postcards: plan on **20.4¢ each** (may be as low as 18.0¢)
- Timing During Peak Season: Allow 5-10 days for print production and 3-5 days for mail production in most cases
- Timing During Low Season: Allow 3-7 days for print production and 2-3 days for mail production at Step Direct in most cases

Standard Class Mail

- Postage for under 3.3 ounces: plan on **23.1¢ each** (may be as low as 20.0¢)
- Timing - Peak Season: Allow 5-10 days for print production and 3-5 days for mail production in most cases
- Timing - Low Season: Allow 3-7 days for print production, 2-3 days for mail production

Other Considerations

- Unused mail pieces, “Overs”, can be shipped back for a modest charge
- You are welcome to pick up Overs for no charge within 30 days of job completion
- **100% of Postage Monies must be paid in advance of mailing** (these monies go to the U.S. Postal Service and are NOT marked up by Step Direct)

3. SELECT PRINT CONSIDERATIONS WHICH AFFECT MAILINGS

- **Very Important:** Allow Step Direct to review your artwork before going to press; mail piece graphic design has a major impact on Step Direct processing and postage costs. We will complete our review and return comments in under two hours.
- Step Direct CAN ink recipient addresses on coated and gloss paper stock.
- Step Direct CANNOT ink recipient addresses on paper stock finished with varnish or aqueous. When necessary, most printers can knock-out a 2” x 4” area free of finish into which Step Direct can ink.
- Thicker/heavier stock runs more reliably through mail equipment and generally gives a better appearance when it arrives at the door of recipients.
- Allow printers time for their inks to dry. Rush jobs often lead to slightly wet ink, which in turn can cause mail pieces to mark significantly during Step Direct’s mail production process.
- A number of extra, very important graphic design requirements apply to Non-Profit mailers; be certain to review these with Step Direct prior to print production. Failure to strictly comply with these extra requirements can double the cost of postage.
- When inserting into envelopes, remember these select few items to ensure your job can be run on a machine at a cost-effective rate:
 - o The minimum size of any insert piece is 3.5” x 5.75”
 - o The largest insert must be at least 1/2” less wide than the width of the envelope
 - o Envelopes must be booklet style (i.e. with the flap on the long side)

4. MAILING LISTS AND QUALITY

Perhaps the most critical component of mailing is the quality and suitability of your mailing list. List problems are common and often can readily be avoided. Our most useful tips are:

- Improper names in lists cause waste in your time and the cost of: postage, print production and mail production. Every dollar spent on cleaning data produces several dollars in waste reduction.
- When renting lists, use a reputable broker or list owner. Pay a little extra for a quality list. The lowest priced lists are poor in quality and cause enormous waste; we see this every day.
- In-house lists should be submitted for National Change of Address (NCOA) processing once or twice per year. At only \$75 for up to 30,000 names, this processing is inexpensive and notably reduces waste. By the way, it is required for discounted First Class mailings.
- Keeping your data safe and secure is a big deal these days. New government laws have set important rules for keeping information private. Step Direct can handle your data in encrypted files and store it behind a hardware and software protected firewall. For one job or forever.
- Step Direct offers advanced data cleaning of in-house marketing lists. We can securely house your databases as well.

5. THE TOP TEN MOST USEFUL MAIL SOLUTIONS

1. Involve Step Direct early in the design process. Review your graphic design and final press proof with us before the printing press starts to run. Like a carpenter, measure twice and cut once.
2. Confirm that paper stock and sizes are machinable.
3. Be clear on job needs: Timing, quantities, class of mail, address appearance, etc.
4. Identify unusual items; some sizes produce postage surcharges or production upcharges.
5. Secure postage as early as possible so as to not delay mailing.
6. Make sure to re-price jobs if requirements change.
7. Do not cut your timeframes too tight. Rushing ALWAYS produces heartache.
8. If you are involved with a Non-Profit Organization, be aware of the many strict rules which govern the graphic design and mailing process required to make use of the special low postage rates. We can help you understand and comply with these rules.
9. Do nothing verbally. All requirements, and any changes to them, should be documented in writing.
10. Make sure name list counts match print order counts and postage budgets.