



THINKTHINK!

Pushing the envelope



Does the way the Post Office has “reorganised” the way it charges for mail impinge on creativity? Probably not.

Rats. That’s the end of exciting and interesting formats then, isn’t it? On August 21st 2006, the direct marketing business suffered its biggest blow since the Data Protection Act’s poxy opt-out box in 1984.

Since the unassailable monolith that is the Royal Mail changed its charging structure to make more/some/any money, art directors and designers everywhere are crying into their carrot and mango smoothies. Clients are shuffling along corridors, wincing as they pass a C4 envelope. And the Royal Mail’s bean counters are sitting back rubbing their hands and watching their cunning scheme pay off.

The Post Office can *only* have introduced this tariff in a bid to make more money. Maybe they’ll spend it on another rebrand! Perhaps the extra revenue will go towards funding more bean counters – the consultants who came out with this schemey little scheme. Maybe they’ll spend it on training and teaching their van drivers to, well, drive. (According to a survey, Post Office delivery people are the worst drivers in London.)

Let’s get down to how much more it’s going to cost you. These are the cold, hard facts.

Before August 21st 2006, if you wanted to send 4,000 A4 brochures (the national standard size for crying out loud) with a letter totalling sixty grams or less it would cost you this much in postage:

£1,280

If you wanted to repeat the exercise today it would cost you this much in postage:

£1,760

That is what we call a *substantial* increase. It is, in fact, an **increase** of exactly:

37.5%

Most people who read this occasional column are in the business of sending about that many brochures a few times a year. And it really doesn't matter how hard the Post Office try to say in their brochures and advertising that they are 'changing' the pricing structure. They are in fact sending the cost of postage quite a long way north. No consultation. No negotiation. Tough. Live with it.

But what can you do?

Size isn't everything. Make your packs small but perfectly formed.

Well, what you *can* do is this. Play them at their own game. Play to win. By way of some kind of compensation, the Royal Mail has increased the weight limit from 60g to 100g for standard postage of a "letter". (They have done this because hardly anything sent in a C5 or DL envelope weighs more than 60g anyway.) So stick to C5 or DL for your promotional literature but splash out a bit more on the quality of the finished piece. The last research ThinkThink saw on this subject indicated that format actually had very little effect on response in any event.

Die-cuts and embossing were always thought to be expensive but because we're forced to reduce the size, we can increase the quality to achieve the standout that you need. If you tot it up, you can have a much plusher, albeit smaller, piece for less than the cost of a standard A4 six, eight or twelve-page format. Ask your designers to recommend more interesting stock. Don't flinch when there's an interesting die cut on the visual because, chances are, the whole thing's gong to be costing you less than it did when we felt it necessary to make sales literature almost always A4.

When you need a larger space to show something like a floorplan, there are interesting folds that can come out of an A5 piece to give you a bigger spread. Look at pop-up formats. Things that attract attention.

And, here's the killer, when you've got a lot to say, let the website do the donkey-work. Get your copywriter to pile on reason after reason to go to the website rather than act off the page or leaflet – and let the team run riot with creativity online rather than in an envelope.

But, please, please make the piece as close to 100g as possible to get you money's worth.

Closing music

There's something that is puzzling your correspondent beyond belief. Why, in the name of all the gets posted, did the business consultants and bean counters fail to suggest the one very thing that could have turned the Royal Mail round eight or ten years ago? OK, it's easy in retrospect but that great ogre that is biting lumps out of the Post Office's revenue as we speak has been clearly visible for at least the past decade. Did they not see that this thing called the internet and, ergo, email was happening? Or were their heads buried so deeply in the sand that they thought it would just go away.

The real question is this: given that every forecast in the business universe predicted that the internet revolution would explode (and most of them underestimated the size of the blast quite considerably), why is the Royal Mail *not* the biggest, best run, least expensive and most respected internet service provider in the UK if not the whole of Europe? Why is there *not* a state-regulated Royal eMail? They could have had it but they didn't.

They managed to miss the ship to cyberspace and now they're making *you* pay the cost out of *your* budgets. Don't let them get away with it.

Give someone a call who can make the most out of your budget, achieving better results for the same money! Spend it where it counts don't waste your budget on postage because your designers can't see past A4!

With Clear Focus, your marketing is measurable, profitable and provocative.
Call us now on 0845 225 0325. Taken from www.clearfocusdesign.com

