



AMERICAN
DIRECT MAIL

MAIL TIP

Designing a Better Postcard

Everyone wants to design their mail piece to get the “best results”. What this boils down to is getting the greatest response for the least dollars spent. But most often, one’s time is focused on achieving a greater response without much thought or effort given to how much money is spent to print and mail the job. Many of you can lower the cost of your entire mailing simply by following a few simple rules to ensure that your postcards qualify for the lowest possible postal rates without causing extra mail steps during processing.

Postcard Size. The Postal Service recognizes three size categories for automation postcards. The smallest regulation size postcard is a maximum size of 4-1/4” x 6”. This size gives you reduced postage for first class mail. The postage and mailing costs associated in sending a 4-1/4” x 6” postcard first class, is about the same as that of a 6” x 9” postcard sent standard mail (bulk rate). The small first class postcard is a great deal if your piece needs to get to its destination in a hurry. However, if you have the time to wait for standard mail delivery, a larger postcard will attract more interest.

The second category is a letter-sized postcard. It has a maximum size of 6-1/8” x 11-1/2”. By keeping your card within these size parameters, you could maximize your space, without getting into a higher postage rate. The third and largest size of automation postcards is a flat and has a maximum size of 12” x 15”. These larger cards cost more to process, and have a higher postage rate, but do have the greatest impact.

Thickness. The thinner the card, the more money you save on printing, right? But there are two things to consider before choosing your card stock. First, your postcards need to be a certain thickness to qualify for automation postal rates. For small (4-1/4” x 6” or smaller) postcards mailing at the first class rate, the minimum thickness is .007”, or 7 pt. stock. For anything larger, your minimum thickness is .009” or 9 pt. stock. You may also want to consider how your postcard’s thickness will impact results. Generally, a thicker card will have more perceived quality. So while a 10 pt. or 12 pt. stock will cost you a little more during printing, it may improve your results.

Design for Automation. While the bulk of one’s design time is often given to the appearance of a postcard, ample consideration must be reserved to make sure the piece meets the basic qualifications for automation mail. For example, without an adequate area for the addressee and the barcode, the mail piece will not qualify for automated postal rates, and thus will cost more in postage. First of all, the entire 5/8” from the bottom of the mail piece must be completely free of text. Next, you must leave an area 2” in height and 4” in length free for addressing the mail piece.

Lastly, to **qualify for automation postal rates**, your postcard must have an aspect ratio of 1.3 to 2.5. The aspect ratio is simply a number calculated by taking the length of your mail piece and dividing it by the height. So a card that is 8 inches long and 5 inches in height would have an aspect ratio of 8/5’s or 1.6. The length of the card is the side that is parallel to the addressee’s name. Cards that are too square or have the recipient’s address running in the wrong direction, will not qualify for the best postage available and could even have a surcharge applied to their normal rates.

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Paper Stock and Coatings. Having a quality paper stock is important, but not all papers work equally well with mail processes. While most glossy stocks are fine, some high gloss papers do not allow ink to dry quickly on it. This means we must ink-jet address your postcards more slowly, to give time to dry. Even though we have specialty formulated inks and industrial dryers, certain high gloss stocks could still run slower and incur additional costs due to an increase in processing time. That's why we suggest you send us a sample of your stock for testing, before your next print job.

Even more troubling than high gloss paper is aqueous or UV coating placed on top of your printing. Sure, it looks great and helps protect your piece while traveling through the mail stream, but it could also cost you when it comes to processing your mail & meeting automation postal rates. The important thing to remember on coatings is that you need to have your printer leave a 4" x 2" box for addressing, free from the coating. This will allow us to ink-jet address your piece, instead of using costly labels that detract from the appearance of your postcard.

Don't Forget the Permit. The least expensive way to apply postage to your postcards is to print a permit where normally we would meter the piece. Since this takes place in the printing process, it does not cost you any additional money. American Direct Mail will be happy to provide your designer with camera ready art of our permit. Also, if this is a repeat job, you should verify that you are still mailing at the same class of mail as previously, or if the permit needs to be changed.

Fax Us a Proof. When designing a postcard, the objective is to maximize results with the least possible cost. We would like to help you keep your costs down by creating a mail piece that does not have unnecessary mail processing costs and qualifies for the lowest possible postage rates. By faxing over your artwork before your print, we can look it over to help ensure it will meet guidelines. Thank you for your business.



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