The Ultimate Guide to

Every Door Direct Mail

Deliver better marketing with
Every Door Direct Mail

PFL

Table of Contents

Introduction

Unless you're living off the grid, you trek to your mailbox daily. Some of its contents are immediately identifiable as junk, irrelevant: dime-a-dozen envelopes, or content addressed to the former resident or business owner.

Other envelopes feature return addresses you recognize, letters from friends and family.

And then there are the eye-catching pieces. These are the mailers with print effects as striking as the offer itself. They may shimmer or feel soft on your fingertips. They may seem like they were created exactly for you: a business owner looking for a commercial cleaning service, a young woman ready for a wardrobe overhaul, or a college kid in need of a pizza.

These are the coupons you tuck into your wallet or briefcase, the announcements you pin to your bulletin board, and the invitations you tape to your calendar.

If this has happened to you, you've likely been on the receiving end of an incredibly powerful local marketing tactic called Every Door Direct Mail™ (EDDM) — and it's one of the most cost-effective advertising methods for businesses targeting specific geographic areas.

What is EDDM?

EDDM stands for "Every Door Direct Mail." It's a cost-effective and highly powerful marketing tool offered by the U.S. postal service. It lets you select specific mail carrier routes where you'd like to send your direct mail. Once you've made your selection, the U.S. postal service sends your mailers to every house and business in that locality.

EDDM solves the problem of having to purchase a mailing list from a third-party, saving your business thousands in advertising spend. It also gives you more control over your targeting, while taking the heavy lifting out of doing it yourself. It's not ideal for every business, but for many, it provides a steady stream of new local business.

There are two categories of EDDM. There's a "do it yourself" model for businesses that want to send 5,000 mailers or less (EDDM Retail), and commercial EDDM (also called Bulk Mail Entry Unit or BMEU) for larger businesses or those that need to send over 5,000 mailers.

Here's a quick comparison between the two options.

	EDDM Retail	EDDM BMEU
Cost	$0.178 per piece	$0.178 per piece
Online Payment Accepted?	Yes	No; you must have a USPS Marketing Mail permit number.
Where It's Available	Within the US and its territories.	
Online Registration Links	https://reg.usps.com/register	
Refunds	Must be made at the post Office.	Must be made through BMEU associated with the permit used for the order.
Mailpiece Requirements		
Quantity Minimum	Must be at least 200 per day, per zip code	Must be at least 200 per day, per zip code
Quantity Maximum	Up to 5,000 per day, per zip code	No maximum
Shape	Rectangular with four square corners, or finished corners, that don't exceed a radius of .125"	
Minimum Dimensions	Mailpiece must meet one of the following conditions: Length: 10.5", Height: 6.125", Thickness: .25" *If the length requirement is met, minimum thickness can be as small as .007" and minimum height can be as small as 3.5".	
Maximum Dimensions	Mailpiece cannot be more than: Length: 15", Height: 12", Thickness: .25"	
Weight (per piece)	Up to 3.3 oz.	Up to 16 oz.

EDDM
Ideal Candidates

Like any advertising technique, EDDM isn't for everybody. If you go for it without examining how it'll really work with your business, you may end up with lackluster results -- wasting your advertising budget and your time.

Here are some of the qualities of the ideal candidates for EDDM:

You've tried direct mail on your own before, and found it too expensive or slow to get the return on investment you expected. If this sounds like you, you might benefit from the local targeting capabilities of EDDM, and the cost-effective nature of these mailers. EDDM also has a faster delivery time than bulk mailing and arrives in almost the same amount of time as First Class mail.

Purchasing a third-party mailing list hasn't worked for you (or it's too expensive). While using a third-party list can be ideal for demographics-based targeting, EDDM is the better choice for geographic targeting. For example, if you're selling expensive electronics, you may be better off purchasing a targeted list of high-income customers than using EDDM. But if you're a local pizza shop, geographic targeting through EDDM may be the better choice. Plus, EDDM is less expensive in terms of postage, so it's ideal for businesses with limited budget hoping to reach local audiences.

You do business within a specific mileage only. If the bulk of your business is restricted to a specific location (say, you don't serve customers beyond 20 miles of your business location), EDDM can be a very powerful tool in your marketing arsenal, allowing you to "hit" every resident and business within a specific radius.

Your targeting can be closely tied to geography. Similar to the point above, some types of businesses are simply better suited to EDDM marketing due to their industry. Lawn services and hardware stores may target homeowners, local food delivery services may target college campuses or apartment complexes, and high-end retail might only target affluent neighborhoods in town.

You're in one of the following industries. Though anyone can utilize EDDM, these industries or types of businesses tend to have the best results with EDDM.

- Retail
- Restaurants
- Auto dealerships
- Business services
- Medical professionals
- Local health clinics and hospitals
- Dry cleaners
- Contractors and home services
- Attorneys
- Realtors
- Local arts and community organizers
- Political campaigns

You do business in volume and need to reach a large audience. EDDM BMEU is perfect for businesses that need the reach of direct mail without the cost of doing it themselves. Because BMEU allows you to send over 5,000 mailers per day, it's a cost-effective solution for businesses that target the mass market.

You're a non-profit. USPS EDDM offers discounted rates to non-profit organizations.

EDDM

Are There Disadvantages?

Before we go into detail about planning your EDDM campaign, we'll be honest: EDDM isn't for everyone. It's much better to recognize that EDDM might not be a good fit for you before you plan a campaign than to realize it after you've spent your precious marketing budget and aren't seeing the ROI you expected.

Here are the disadvantages of EDDM:

You can't segment by business or residential. When you choose a carrier route, your mail goes to all residential mailboxes or all residential and business addresses in that route. You can't send your mail to "just businesses" in a specific area.

Your mail will go to everybody in a given carrier route, even if they're not a good fit for your business. For instance, imagine you're a lawn care service hoping to target homeowners. If you choose a route with a mixture of owned homes and rentals, you may be wasting half of your budget since renters won't be interested in lawn care. You can't target by zip code or community; you're restricted to the USPS's carrier routes, which may not have logical demographic boundaries.

Doing EDDM yourself (without the help of a direct mail marketing specialist) may be time-consuming. As you'll see in the next section, there are many steps and nuances involved with EDDM. Business owners have to plan their campaign, select the best routes, create the mailers, bundle and label them properly, and deposit them at the correct post office for final delivery. These processes can be time-consuming for people who aren't familiar with EDDM.

How Does EDDM Work?

A lot has to happen to get your brilliant EDDM ideas out of your head and into your customer's hands. Here's the process for creating both an EDDM Retail and EDDM BMEU campaign from design to delivery.

Before we begin, however, there's one part of the EDDM process that's notoriously confusing: the size requirements.

There are both **minimum** and **maximum** size requirements for EDDM mail. Your piece has to fall within these limits, but there are additional rules within these limits that merit a closer look.

EDDM
Size Requirements

In the world of the United States Postal Service, length is always the longest side of a piece, and height is the other side. Thickness is the third dimension of your piece. Huh? Here's an example: with a postcard, if you pinched the paper, the postcard's thickness would be the microscopic measurement between your fingers. If it's a brochure, USPS would measure thickness in terms of the final, folded brochure which is thicker than the opened-up, flat brochure.
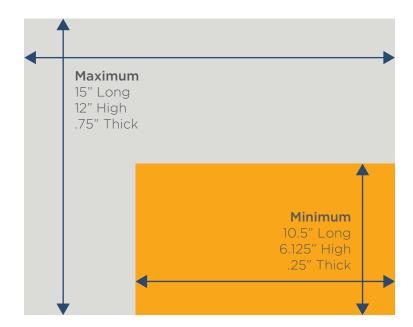
Minimum Size Requirements

Your piece must meet one of the following minimum size requirements:

Minimum 10.5" in length

Minimum 6.125" in height

Minimum .25" thick

Maximum
15" Long
12" High
.75" Thick

Minimum
10.5" Long
6.125" High
.25" Thick

Your mailer can meet all three of the minimum requirements, but you're only required to meet one of them. Note that if you've opted to fulfill the minimum length requirement and you want to go even smaller for the height and thickness, you can't go smaller than the following:

Minimum thickness is .007", about the thickness of three sheets of paper.

Minimum height is 3.5".

EDDM
Maximums and Flats vs. Parcels

The EDDM program only allows flat mail, not parcels. You've probably heard of parcels before: in simplest terms, these are the three-dimensional packages that usually ship in boxes or thick envelopes.

In order for your piece to be considered a flat and not a parcel, it has to fall within all of the maximum size requirements. These are:

Maximum 15" in length

Maximum 12" in height

Maximum .75" thick

Wes Kirk, EDDM director at PFL, suggests this method for considering the length and height of your piece. "If you were to create a hole in the wall (with dimensions of 6 and 1/8th inches by 10 and 1/2 inches) and your EDDM piece bumps into at least two of the edges of the wall, the piece qualifies. If it goes through without bumping, it's too small."

Note that you can get away with creating a bigger piece by adding folds -- for example, a tri-fold brochure, or a single gate fold. However, your piece always needs to fall within the maximum thickness to avoid being considered a parcel.

To streamline your design process, find a list of free EDDM mailing templates here.

EDDM
Creating an Account on the USPS Website

The way you use the USPS website depends on whether you're doing EDDM Retail or BMEU. Here's an overview of each.

Retail

Create an EDDM account on the USPS website. You'll need to create a username, password, security questions, and to enter some basic contact info.

Once you've created an account, you'll be automatically directed to the online mapping tool where you'll select carrier routes.

Commercial

Visit the online gateway to log in, or to create a new business account.

Go to the "Mailing Services" section, scroll down to "Every Door Direct Mail," and click "Get Access".

Select "Go to Service" to open the EDDM tool, where you'll get to choose your carrier routes.

EDDM
Choosing a Carrier Route

One of the most puzzling aspects of EDDM is how to choose the best carrier route for your campaign. The USPS website shares demographic data about different areas, but it's not as reliable as you might think.

"If I'm in business and I want to reach people around me who meet specific demographic data, it's important to understand that the demographic info like 'median age' and 'income' on the USPS website is based on census data -- which isn't usually very accurate," says Kirk. "EDDM is really good for a business that services an entire neighborhood, or route, but the demographic data on the site is only as accurate as the last census - which may have been almost ten years ago."

Let's imagine for a moment that your targeting depends heavily on demographic data (let's say, you want to target low-income neighborhoods). Census data may show that a particular neighborhood is low-income, but this data doesn't take recent gentrification into account.

To get the best possible results, conduct your own research outside of the USPS website before selecting carrier routes. Unless your campaign is strictly location-based, the demographic targeting information on the USPS website isn't likely to get you the results you're looking for.

Selecting a Route on the USPS Website

Enter your starting location. This is usually where your business is located.

Search for your mailing audience. You can search for carrier routes by street address, city and state, or zip code.

Select your carrier routes. Review the table of search results that USPS provides, and choose the carrier routes that match your objectives.

EDDM
Selecting Your Drop-Off Date and Payment

You can choose a drop-off date (the day you'll take your finished mailings to the post office) up to 30 days in advance. If you're using the USPS website, you'll use an interactive calendar to choose a date. You'll also be able to choose whether you want to pay online or pay at the post office.

Before your order is complete, for commercial EDDM (also called BMEU), you'll also have to enter the weight and container information for your mailpieces. Then, the site will prompt you to download necessary forms for you order. These include the Retail Post Office Listing form, a mailing statement, and facing slips, and more. You also need to have your own permit to use commercial EDDM unless you use a third party to handle it for you.

At any time, you can save your progress and return later.

Pricing

What can you expect in terms of pricing for EDDM? While you can get access to small business discounts (and apply coupons to your EDDM order), here are the baseline fees for both types of EDDM services:

EDDM Retail: $0.178 per piece

EDDM BMEU: $0.157 per piece

So, if you're running an EDDM Retail campaign at the maximum number of mailers (5,000), you'd spend around $890.

EDDM

Working with a Printer

The next step in your EDDM campaign is to submit your final design to a printer. Your printer is far more than a vessel for converting your digital designs into physical ones. An experienced printer can serve as a design and marketing consultant, working alongside you to customize your design to perfection.

They can answer your questions about EDDM and offload the burden of bundling and mailing your content to the right post office. They can even help you refine your marketing campaign and offer ideas for innovative print effects you may never have heard of. You can find a list of EDDM third-party direct mail marketing specialists (like PFL) from the USPS's website.

But before you contact a printer, consider the following questions and have your answers ready. These will help your printer advise you on next steps.

What Your Printer Will Ask

Do you have artwork?
If you do, have a concept or final design ready to present. If you don't, a high-quality printer will help you put together an effective design. They'll ensure your mailer meets the USPS's specifications, while helping you plan a layout and custom print effects like die-cuts, folds, and special inks that will make your message stand out.

When a customer gets your piece, what do you want them to do?
A good printer can help you pinpoint the best call-to-action to verify that your mailer won't just look good, but it will get the response you want. When planning a call-to-action, keep it short, tangible, and trackable. Use a unique coupon code on your mailer so you can tell which customers are contacting you as a direct result of your EDDM campaign.

How easy is it to find your business location?
If you're difficult to access by foot or to see from the street, your printer may advise you to include a map or directions to your location on your EDDM mailer. Consider incorporating this into your design before you submit files to your printer.

Finalizing Your Design

Ask your printer what kind of proofs you can expect to receive before shipping your mailers to their final destinations. A PDF proof may be enough, but some printers will provide a physical "press proof" or a digital proof to give you an idea of what the final design will look like.

Printers vs. Direct Mail Specialists

A printer will make your digital design into a physical one, but a direct mail specialist will provide both printing services and ongoing assistance with EDDM. Here are some of the top benefits of working with a direct mail specialist.

The convenience of not having to lug your pieces all over the city (or country).
You won't be able to simply drop off your EDDM mailers at your local post office and call it a day. "One thing new EDDM customers don't realize is that if they've chosen five or six different zipcodes, they'll have to drive through lots of little town and villages to drop off their EDDM bundles, where those post offices will then disperse them to the carrier routes you've chosen."

This can be a lot more work than you've bargained for, especially if you've chosen EDDM BMEU and you're shipping thousands of pieces.

"If you're doing one carrier route with 300 pieces, it's not that hard to lug a box of 300 to the post office. But if you're mailing anything over 1,000 pieces -- and with EDDM's size requirements, these are going to be bigger pieces of mail -- when you have them all together, they weigh a lot." If this sounds like you, you may want to engage with a direct mail specialist to help you.

A streamlined EDDM process.
Some printers may only provide your printed content, while others work directly with the USPS to streamline your route selection process. "We have a route selector tool embedded in our ordering site, making it a one-stop shop for printing, selecting routes, and mailing your EDDM content," says Kirk.

Done-for-you bundling and USPS paperwork.

Here's another EDDM task that can take loads more time than you might expect. When you submit your content to the post office, you have to turn your mailers in within groups of 50-100 pieces. The ideal bundle sizes vary depending on the number and size of carrier routes you've chosen. Further, each of these bundles requires a facing slip.

"We recently did an EDDM with 18,000 pieces," explains Kirk. "It needed 180 different facing slips. Each bundle requires the zipcode it's going to, the residential or business address, and the route number. If you were to print a facing slip from the USPS website, they'd provide a blank slip -- and you'd have to type in all of the various zip codes, the routes within that zipcode, and determine how many pieces to put in each bundle."

By contrast, an EDDM specialist will print your content and take over the EDDM process from there -- allowing you to get back to the daily demands of your business. "At PFL, there's a link online where you can pick your carrier routes, upload artwork, and get a quote. Then, we'll print it, and based on the routes you've chosen, our system will intelligently pick bundle sizes and the size of priority mail box we'll ship it in. Then, we'll fill out all of your postal paperwork, put rubber bands around your bundles, and ship it for you."

No details missed.

If you're new to EDDM (or direct mail in general), there are enough details and nuances to drive even the most diligent business owner into a frenzy. With a direct mail specialist, you'll have someone experienced in the field verifying your counts, packaging your mail to the USPS's specifications, and delivering it to the post office in a timely manner.

EDDM
Preparing Your Bundles for Shipment

Your EDDM pieces are printed and ready to go. After you've chosen a drop-off date on the USPS website, you'll pay for your mailing online. You can also pay at the post office where you'll be dropping off your deliveries. Here's how to prepare your content for shipping if you're doing it yourself:

Fill out processing forms. These are the forms that USPS prompted you to download after you finished submitting your order. To save time, you can fill these out while you're waiting for your printer to send your final content.

Determine how many bundles you'll need for each carrier route. Bundle your mailers in groups of 50 or 100. To figure out how many bundles you'll need for a route, divide the number of addresses in that route by 100. For example, a route with 200 addresses will require 2 bundles of 100. If the number of addresses won't divide cleanly into 100, calculate how many pieces are left over and bundle them together. If there are 262 addresses, you'll create two bundles of 100, and one bundle of 62.

Make sure your bundles don't exceed 6" in thickness. If they do, reduce the per-bundle count to 50 instead of 100.

Print your facing slips. Fill out any static information on your facing slip and make copies of it to save time. Each bundle will need its own facing slip, so print as many facing slips as you'll need for the total number of bundles in all routes.

Bundle your mailers. Count out your mailers and bundle them together with a rubber band.

Put a facing slip on each bundle, and label it as a number out of the total bundles for that route. For example, if you have 10 bundles, label the first "Bundle 1 of 10," and on.

Write the number of pieces in each bundle on its facing slip.

If you have addresses of mail recipients who have opted out of your mailings, include those addresses in the "Do Not Deliver Address" column of the facing slip.

Save a copy of all paperwork. It's wise to save copies of your paperwork for your records, in case something goes awry.

EDDM
To the Post Office

Your bundles are together in neat little stacks. They're only days away from being in the hands of your future customers. Your next steps diverge depending on whether you're dropping off your content at a local post office (to deliver to local zip codes) or sending your EDDM mailings to distant zip codes.

Local Delivery
Place your bundles into boxes or totes and bring them to your post office on the scheduled day. Your EDDM mailers will begin to be delivered the following business day.

Non-Local Delivery
If you're targeting a distant zipcode, you'll have to do a little more planning to get your content into your customers' hands.

1. Select one of the USPS's shipping boxes to place all of your bundles into. If they won't fit into one box, label your boxes "1 of X," "2 of X," etc.

2. Place all of the following contents into your box:

A - A sample mailpiece

B - A check or money order made out to "Postmaster" or "Postal Service" for your postage amount (this is only if you haven't paid for postage online).

C - Write your phone number on the check.

D - All of the forms required for the type of EDDM you're doing (Retail or BMEU).

E - The Postmaster Instruction letter.

3. Address your box, or boxes, to: POSTMASTER; CITY, ST; Zipcode. Write "Every Door Direct Mail–Retail" and "Open Immediately" on each box.

4. Send your mailing to the correct post office. If you're using Priority Mail, you can usually expect it to take 1-3 business days. From there, the post office will usually add your mail to their delivery route for the next day. However, delays can happen, so it's a challenge to target a specific day with much accuracy. If you send your content through First Class Mail, you can get a bit more accuracy with your timeline.

Note: if you're using EDDM BMEU, you might be able to save money on large mailings by using a mailing permit. When you obtain a permit, you'll be able to drop your boxes off at a local Business Mail Entry Unit (BMEU) rather than shipping your mailings to distant zip codes or carrying them into the post office yourself.

If you've made it this far, congratulations! You've successfully launched your first EDDM campaign.

Direct Mail Ideas: Getting the Most Out of EDDM

Of course, you can follow all of the technical rules of EDDM and see your hard work fall flat. Maybe your offer didn't resonate. Maybe the design or copywriting didn't stand out. Or maybe your recipients didn't know what step to take next, and your mailer wound up in the trash!

The notion that "an ounce of preparation is worth a pound of maintenance" really applies to the EDDM realm. Direct mail, unlike digital marketing, doesn't allow for a quick change to your copy after your ads have gone live. Spontaneous A/B testing doesn't work, either, as your content is "final" once your print run is over.

Here are the most important planning steps you can take to get the most out of EDDM.

Localize Your Content

Because EDDM is inherently a local marketing tactic, your content will be far more eye-catching if it reflects this notion. For example, call out a city (or better, a neighborhood) by name in your copy. Ask your printer about variable data printing, so you can customize your content for different mailing routes.

Narrow Your Focus

It's a common misconception that hyper-focused targeting is a bad thing. After all, doesn't a broader reach mean more potential customers? But if you're being honest about your business, there will always be people who will be more interested in what you provide than others. Capturing attention isn't enough: to be successful, you'll need to capture the right attention by segmenting your audiences.

Think of a company that sells fly fishing gear. If they advertise to a broad audience, they're unlikely to get much of a response. Even among anglers, fly fishing is a specific technique that requires its own unique rods, bait, and other gear. However, if you limit your targeting to neighborhoods within a specific distance of the hottest fly-fishing destinations, you'll probably have better luck.

Use Strong Creative

It's much easier said than done, but strong creative, both written and visual, sets the pros apart from the amateurs. Hire experienced copywriters and designers to create your content, or at least have a marketing pro look over your creative before you submit it to the printer.

Strong copy will use clean, powerful language. It will "sound" like you, or your brand, while using the same words and ideas your audience does. Strong design isn't cluttered or confused; it melds perfectly with the copy and generates emotion -- curiosity, delight, concern -- and ultimately moves the customer to action.

Add Custom Printing Effects

There's a whole world of print effects, and most businesses have only skimmed the surface. For instance:

- Unique folds that create suspense by revealing information in increments

- Die-cut images that pop up or peel away

- Luxurious metallic inks that shimmer in the light

- Elegant embossed or debossed logos, fonts, and images

- Pieces that become three-dimensional or useful in the long-term to the recipient (beyond just an advertisement on paper)

Add Interactivity

Examples of interactivity include tactile print effects like tipped-on (glued) gift cards, pop-ups, die-cut inserts in the shape of your product or service, and bioluminescent ink that reveals a glow-in-the-dark message. Interactivity can also be digital, like including an online redemption code or URL, QR codes, and UTM codes for campaign tracking.

An interactive mailer serves multiple functions. It lingers in your recipient's hand longer than a standard postcard or brochure might, increasing brand awareness. But it also beckons the reader to take your desired action -- whether that's to go online to learn more, redeem a discount, or interact with your business in some unique way.

Keep It Simple

Use only one call to action and opt for less text and compelling visuals. Simplicity doesn't mean dull, however. A custom print effect may be complex in reality, but the effect is one cohesive, irresistible piece. Be clear about your offer (is it a middle- or bottom-funnel offer, like a buy-one, get-one free? Or a top-funnel offer, like an invitation to attend a free event to learn more?)

Be wise about your time. If you're a business owner, or you play multiple roles at your organization, it may be tempting to take total control over your EDDM campaign rather than work with a direct mail specialist. But how much is your time worth? If you could've sold one widget or attended to several top-priority CEO duties in the time it takes to prepare your campaign, bundle your mailers, fill out the paperwork, and take your content to the right post office, you're far better off outsourcing the EDDM dirty work.

Compare Rates and Ultimate Cost

In line with the previous tip, you'll be wise to compare the actual cost of doing EDDM yourself versus working with a direct mail specialist. Often, a specialist gets a shipping discount and knows how to package EDDM bundles most efficiently to save space (and subsequently, postage). If you have more time than budget, DIY may make sense. But if you have limited time, the better pay may lead you to a direct mail specialist.

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