

A smiling woman with dark braids is sitting on a grey couch. She is wearing a red t-shirt and light blue pants. She is holding a yellow card in her right hand and a laptop in her left. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a white shelf and a lamp.

2024

What Consumers Want:

The Dos and Don'ts of Direct Mail

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Introduction

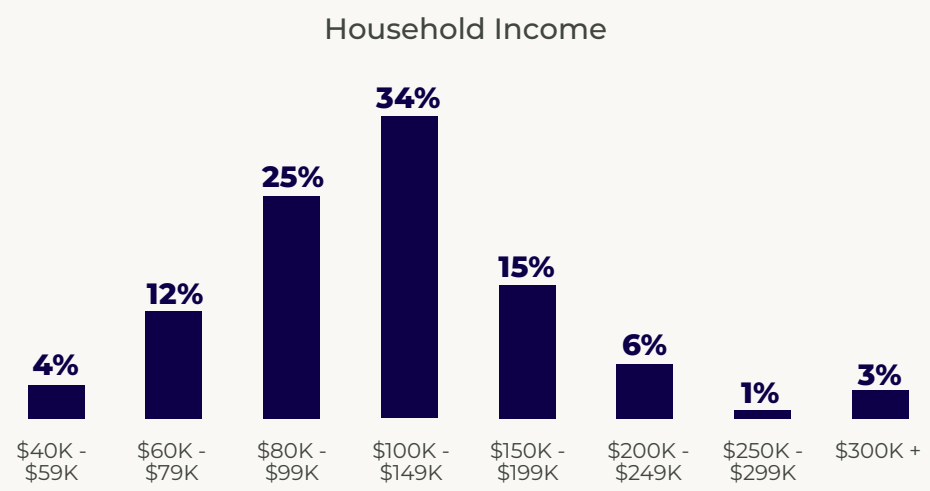
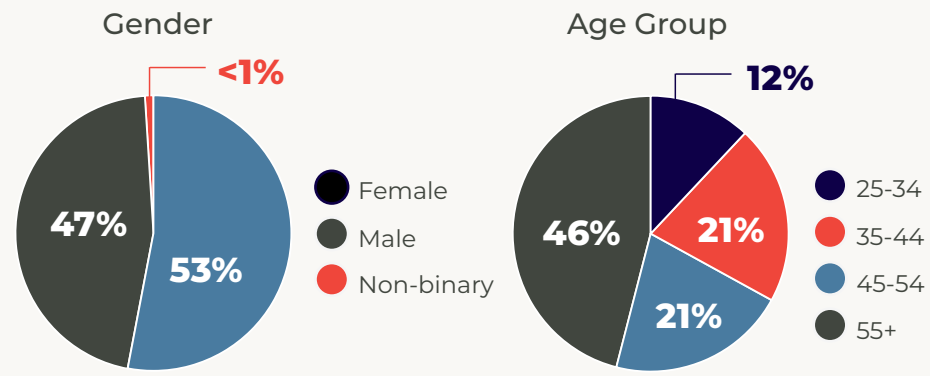
Mail's steady performance over the last 12 months proves that, even as digital channels grow, direct mail remains an essential tool for reaching and converting consumers of all ages. But, as with any marketing channel, there are clear dos and don'ts that can either elevate your campaign or leave it flat. In **What Consumers Want: The Dos and Don'ts of Direct Mail in 2024**, we'll explore key insights on consumer preferences and engagement with direct mail and highlight best practices marketers can follow to maximize mail's impact to drive conversion.

Methodology

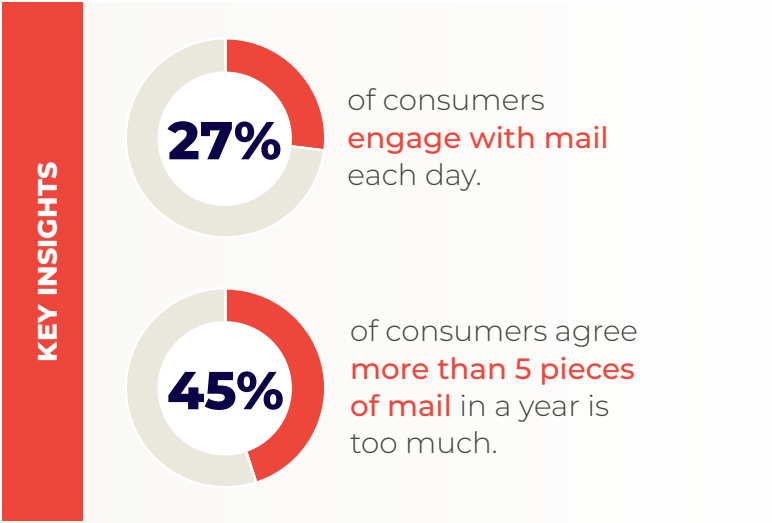
To complete our consumer benchmark study, we partnered with research firm ISG to survey 600 consumers of various genders, ages, and incomes across the U.S. Via a custom online questionnaire distributed in April of 2024, ISG gathered insights on consumer sentiment around mail's engagement levels, enjoyment, influence, and overall channel impression.



Consumer Audience



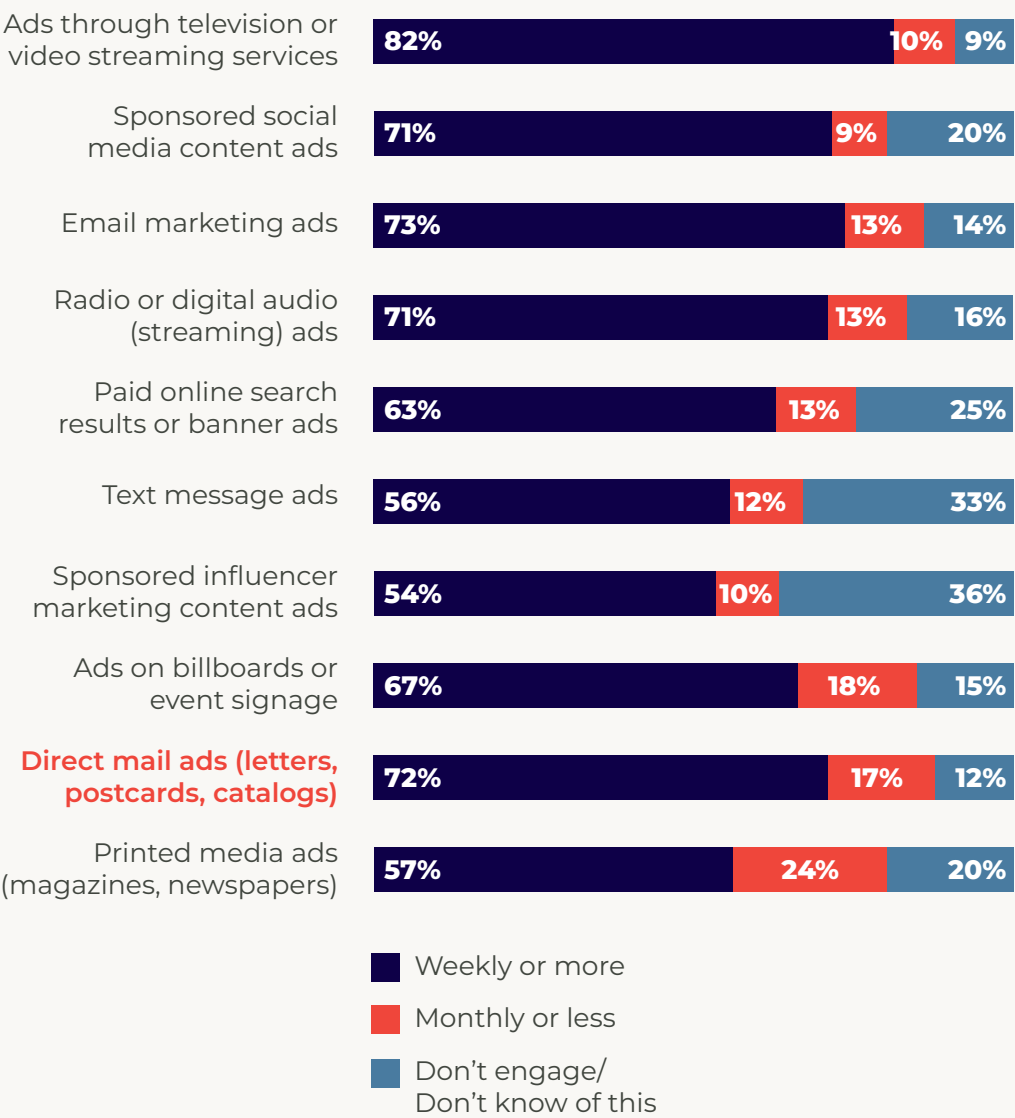
Consumer Engagement and Direct Mail



A standout insight from this year's survey is the **consistent effectiveness of direct mail** as an advertising medium, with **72% of respondents engaging with direct mail each week** (up 3 percentage points from 2023's survey). This level of engagement highlights mail's continued relevance, especially among younger audiences. Interestingly, we found that **35% of consumers aged 25-44 are engaging with direct mail each day** (up 13 percentage points from 2023), the highest engagement among consumer groups. This suggests that younger consumers are still responsive to direct mail advertising, particularly when it includes personalized or relevant content that resonates with their needs.

When you take a closer look at the channels consumers are not engaging with, 30% or more do not interact with sponsored influencer content or text messaging, while

Advertisement Engagement Frequency



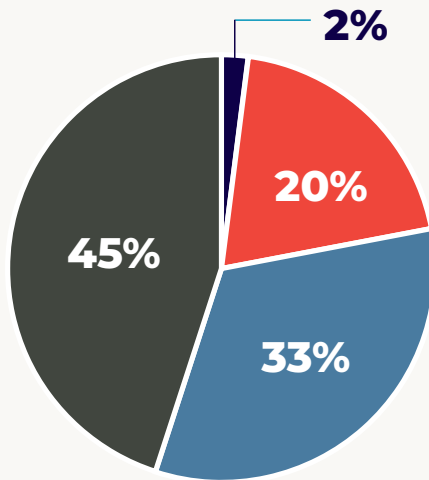
? On average, how often do you engage with (notice, read or act on) each of the following types of advertisements?

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- ★ Do target younger audiences with direct mail, as they are more likely to engage than previously assumed.
- ★ Don't ignore the importance of balancing frequency with content quality. Sending too much mail can erode trust and cause disengagement.

Number of Mail Pieces That are "Too Many" To Receive in a Year



- 1 piece
- 2-3 pieces
- 4-5 pieces
- More than 5 pieces



In general, how many mail pieces from the same company is too many to receive in a year?

Consumer Engagement and Direct Mail, continued

20% or more do not engage with sponsored social media, paid online search, or printed media ads (magazines/newspapers). **Only 12% of consumers do not engage with direct mail**, the second lowest non-engaged channel behind television or video streaming (9%).

While **67% of consumers agree that direct mail is not an overwhelming form of advertising**, all survey respondents did indicate feeling overwhelmed by the volume of nearly every type of channel.

Among all consumers, the top three most overwhelming marketing channels are:

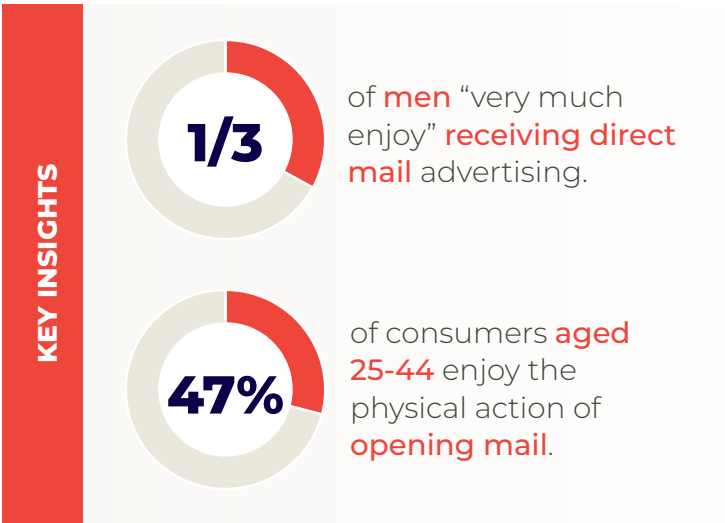
- Email marketing ads (27%)
- Sponsored social media content ads (25%)
- Ads through television or video streaming services (23%)

Among all consumers, the top three least overwhelming marketing channels are:

- Ads on billboards or event signage (8%)
- Printed media ads (magazines/newspapers) (9%)
- Radio or digital audio (12%)

Focusing on quality over quantity will significantly enhance consumer engagement. Build your program cadence with the customer journey in mind, ensuring each piece adds value without inundating your audience.

Consumer Enjoyment and Direct Mail

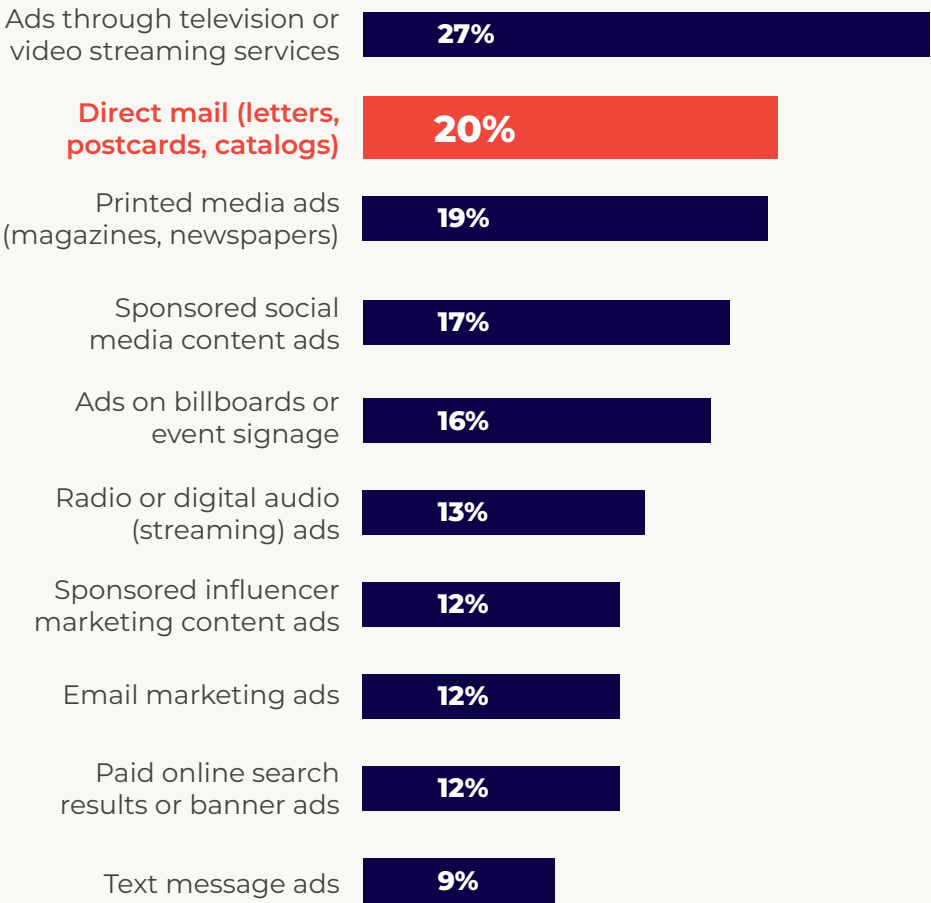


When asked to rank their most enjoyable types of advertisement, consumers ranked direct mail as **the second most enjoyable format**, following TV/video streaming ads, with 65% of respondents saying they enjoy receiving it. This is especially true for those aged 25-44, who indicated that they appreciate direct mail’s physical nature. Text messaging, paid online search/banner ads, email, and sponsored influencer ads are the least likely to be included on a consumer’s top three list.

Direct mail has a longer shelf life than many digital channels. **The ability to keep an interesting piece of mail for later reference continues to be the most appealing aspect of direct mail.** Learning about new brands, products, or services through the channel jumped from third last year to the second most enjoyable/appealing thing about mail in 2024. Coming in at number three is that mail feels less intrusive than other types of advertising.

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Most Enjoyable Types of Ads (Top 3 Types)



Please rank the most to least enjoyable types of advertising.

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- ★ Do use direct mail to introduce new products or services, as consumers are more likely to appreciate and remember this tangible form of discovery.
- ★ Don't send generic or mass mailings that feel impersonal. Recipients are more likely to engage if the content feels relevant to their needs.

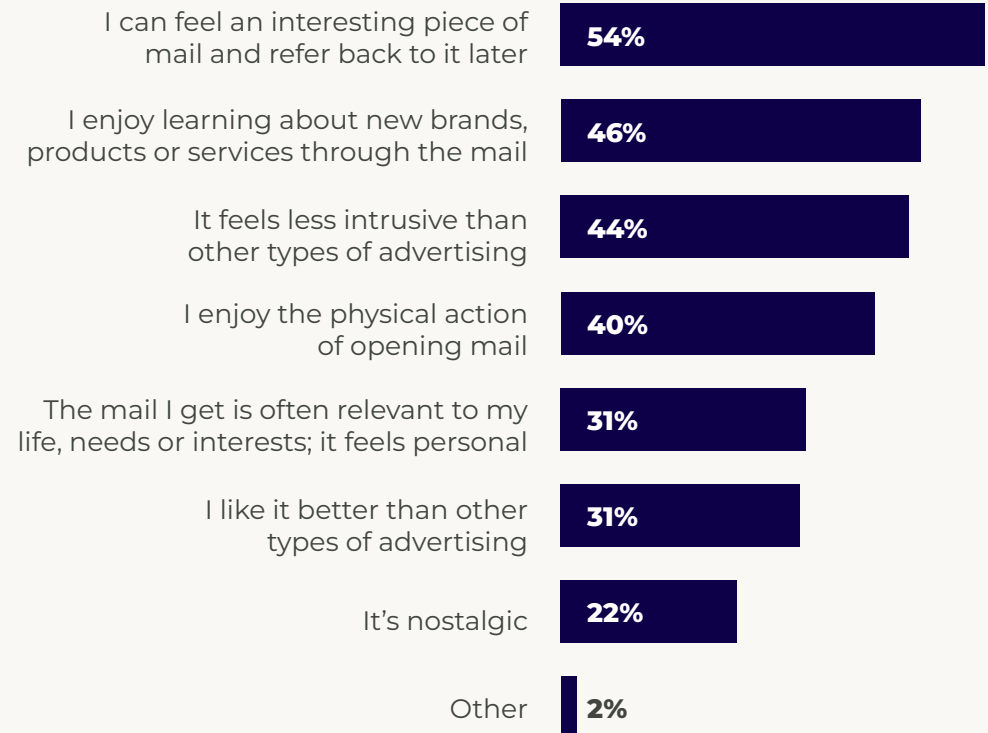


Consumer Enjoyment and Direct Mail, continued

Similar to last year's results, the top reasons for disliking direct mail relate to its abundance and irrelevance, and perceived sustainability. Women are more worried about the environmental impact of mail than men, who are more likely to find it intrusive. Consumers aged 45-60 are significantly more overwhelmed by their mail volume than other respondents.

Despite digital advertising dominating today's marketing landscape, direct mail remains a highly enjoyable and impactful channel for many consumers.


Reasons for Enjoying/ Appreciating Direct Mail Advertising



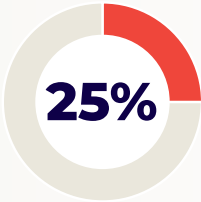
Which of the following best describes what you enjoy or appreciate about receiving direct mail advertisements? (select all that apply)

Direct Mail's Influence and Consumer Behavior

KEY INSIGHTS



Men are significantly **more likely to act** on a relevant piece of mail than women.



of consumers have **purchased what was advertised** in a relevant piece of **direct mail** in the past 6-12 months.

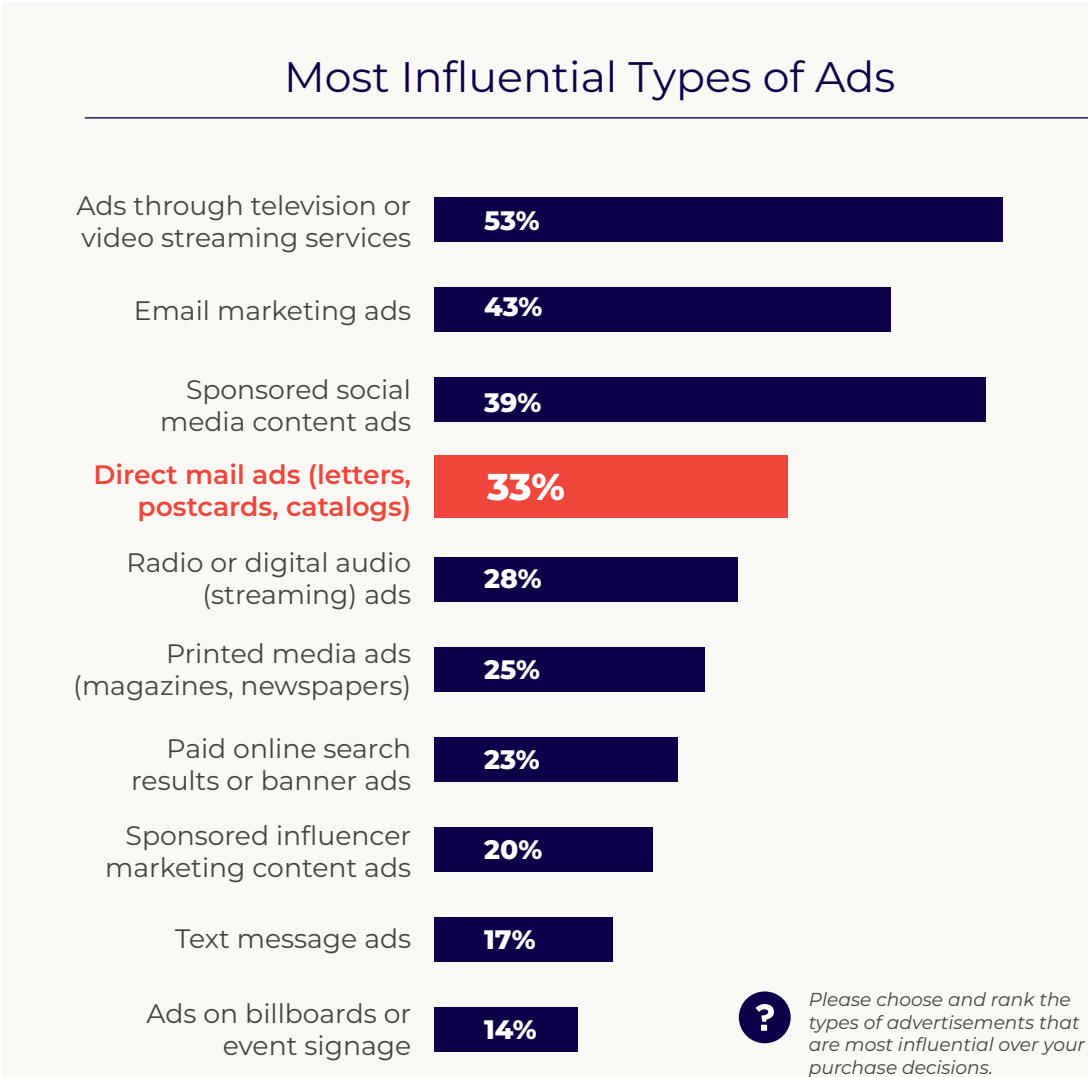
Direct mail continues to rank among the **top four most influential advertising formats**. The tactile experience of mail encourages consumers to spend time reviewing the piece, which leads to stronger recall, greater emotional connection, and enhanced credibility. Mail's physical experience also influences overall brand perception, as **1/3 of consumers agree direct mail sometimes/usually improves brand and product sentiment** (up 6 percentage points since last year's survey).

The actions consumers take after receiving direct mail represent the effectiveness of mail in driving engagement. **Visiting a website continues to be the most common action taken after receiving a direct mail piece**. Other common actions include Google searches on the brand, product, or service. This year has also seen an increase in the use of promo codes and QR scans from last year's results, particularly among younger consumers. This demonstrates the channel's

growing ability to convert physical interest into digital actions. Interestingly, men are more likely to take action on direct mail ads than women, and younger consumers are significantly more likely to act compared to older recipients.

Overall, the persuasive power of direct mail is emphasized by the notable finding that **25% of consumers purchase what is advertised**.

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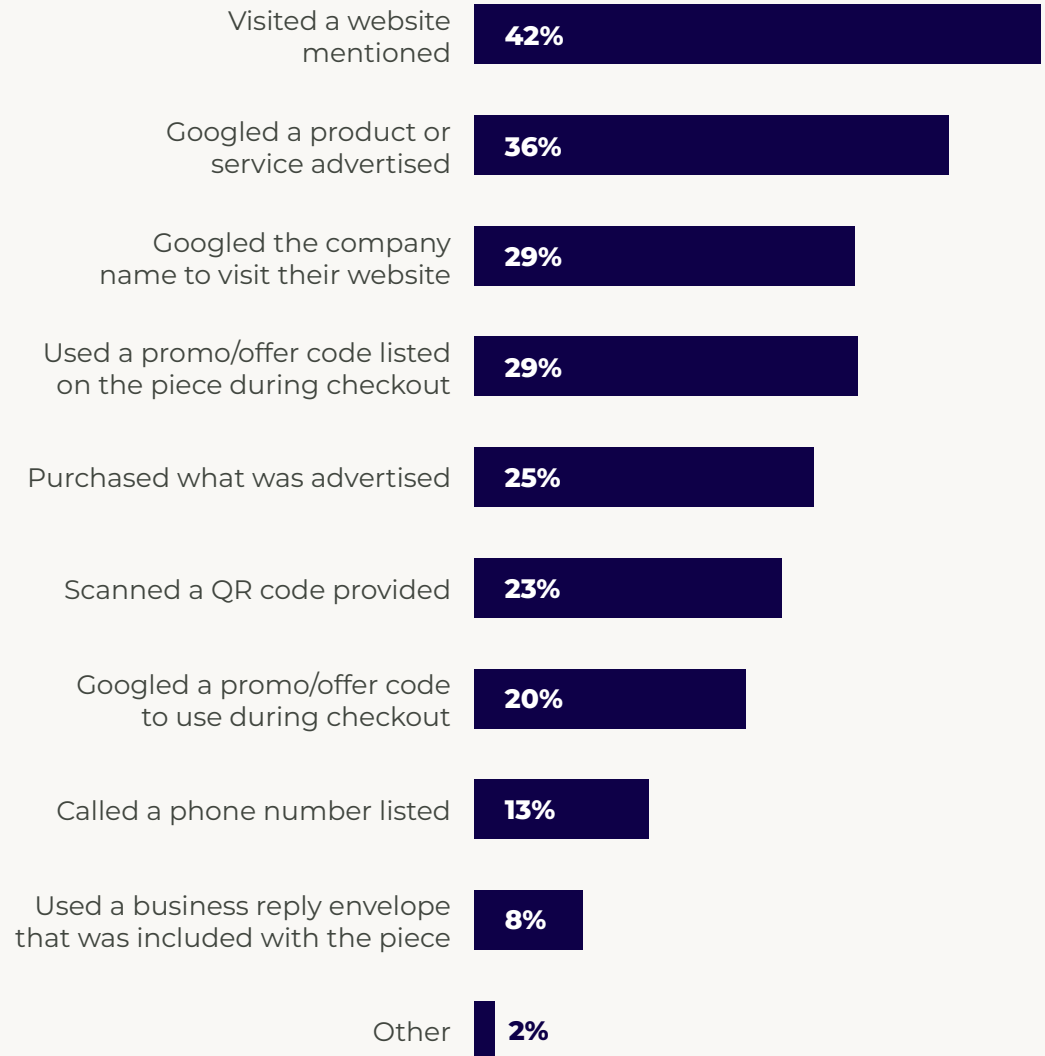
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- ★ Do include interactive elements like QR codes, promo codes, and personalized URLs to drive immediate action.
- ★ Don't rely solely on promotional mail – building trust and improving brand perception is also about delivering relevant, consistent content over time.

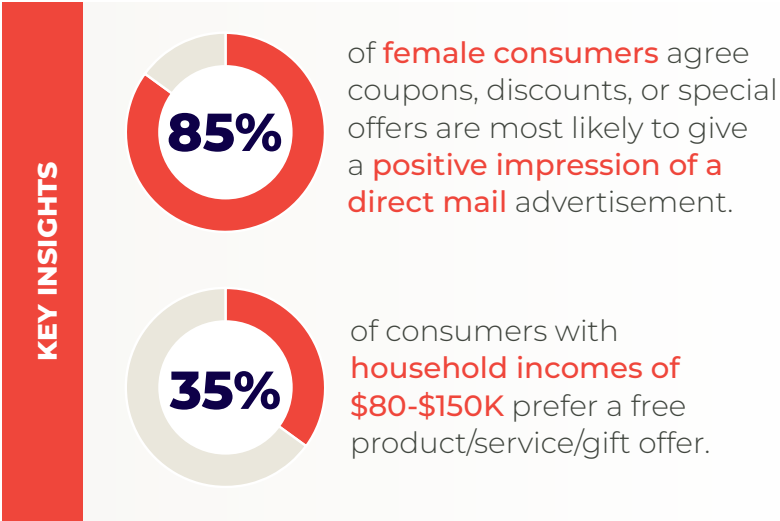


Actions Taken on Direct Mail Advertising



In the past 6-12 months, which of the following actions have you taken as a result of receiving a relevant piece of direct mail advertising? (select all that apply)

Consumer Experience and Direct Mail Design



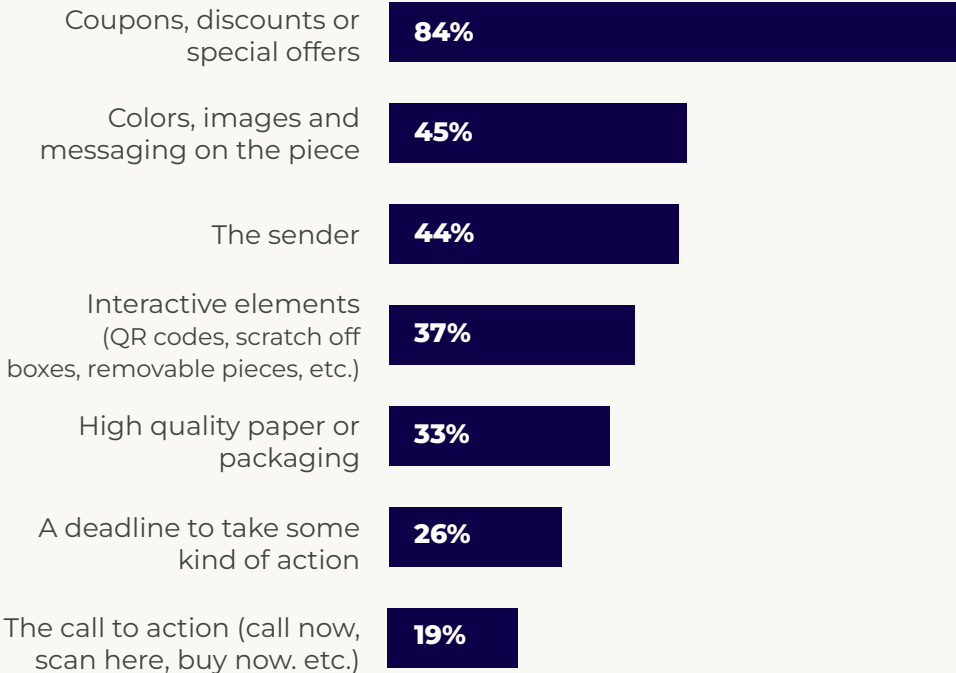
Direct mail design plays a critical role in shaping the customer experience. **Coupons, discounts, or special offers continue to be the most attention-grabbing aspect of direct mail**, followed distantly by creative visuals and the sender. The interest in interactive elements has increased significantly this year (up 9 percentage points from 2023), while paper and packaging quality matters less (down 7 percentage points from 2023).

In addition to financial offers attracting attention to a mail piece, they are also most responsible for creating a positive impression, according to 76% of consumers. **Relevant product or service recommendations and clear and concise messaging remain top influences on perception**, with relevance surpassing messaging in this year's results by 7%, significantly among consumers over 45 years old. High-quality paper and packaging have a stronger impact on those aged 25-44.

With just a three-point difference between them, each type of offer (percentage, dollar value, or free product/service) shows similar potential to drive conversions. A percentage discount offers a slight lead, with 33% of consumers preferring this offer. Close behind, 32% of respondents were more inclined to act on offers that included a free product, gift, or service. One-third of consumers are most likely to act on a dollar discount. Finally, 5% is most likely to not act on any offer type – especially for those over 60 years of age.

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Most Likely To Attract Attention to a Direct Mail Ad



Which of the following are most likely to attract your attention to a direct mail advertisement? (select top three attributes)

★ Do test different types of incentives (discounts, exclusive offers, etc.) among audience segments to identify which drives the most conversions for your product or service.

★ Don't neglect the role of design in influencing brand perception and consumer behavior. A poorly designed mailer can damage the image of even a well-established brand.



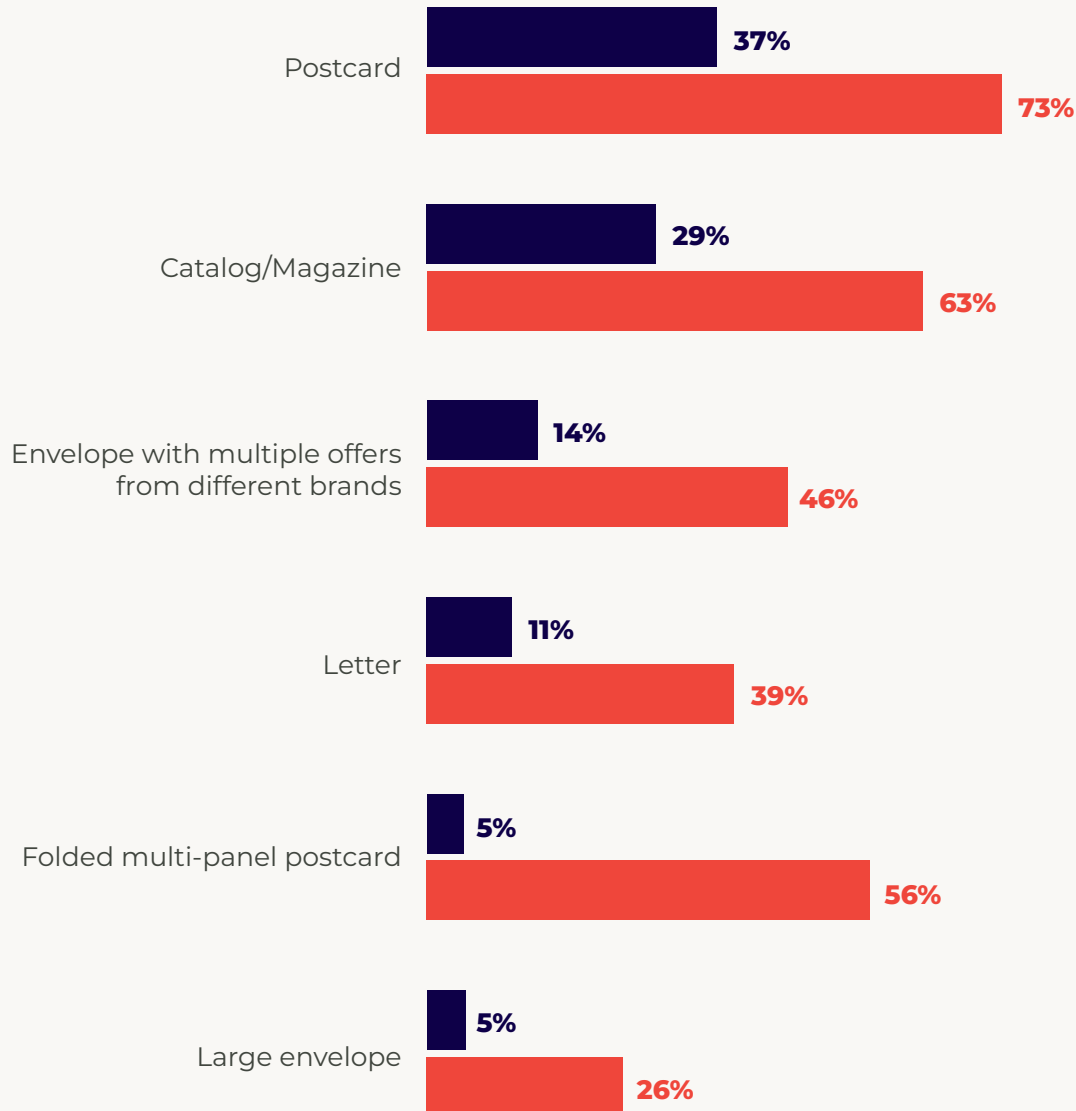
Consumer Experience and Direct Mail Design, **continued**

When we take everything we've learned about consumer engagement and mail in this study, it's no surprise that **postcards continue to be the most preferred type of direct mail (37%)**:

- The offer is immediately visible on a postcard—the most attention-grabbing element of a mail piece!
- Postcards allow the recipient to instantly evaluate whether the advertisement is relevant to their needs – irrelevance is a top reason for disliking mail!
- Postcards can be easily shared with others or hung on the refrigerator to come back to a later date—the top reason for enjoying direct mail advertising!

Thoughtful design significantly impacts your direct mail campaign success by influencing visibility, engagement, and clarity.

Most Preferred Types of Mail



Please rank the following types of mail in order of preference to you.



Most Preferred



Top 3 Most Preferred

Magic in Every Mailbox

With **65% of respondents ranking it as one of the most enjoyable advertising formats**, direct mail's tangibility and personalized nature make it stand out. However, as effective as direct mail can be at grabbing consumer attention, its success hinges on relevance, clear messaging, and thoughtful design. By focusing on quality over quantity, marketers can leverage mail to build stronger connections, drive engagement, and convert interest into action.



About Franklin Madison Direct

Franklin Madison Direct is a comprehensive direct response marketing agency that drives our clients to exponential growth through data-driven direct mail and digital marketing strategies. Leveraging our proprietary testing methods, innovative data strategies, and deep understanding of direct response channels and best practices, we're experts at launching our clients into a new growth channel and reinventing existing programs.

About ISG

ISG is an independently owned, full-service market research firm offering strategic consulting and research capabilities to serve clients across a wide variety of industries.



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