



The Essential Guide to

Boosting Direct Mail Response using Membership Cards



First Edition

Dear Marketer,

We are excited to introduce our first edition of ***The Essential Guide to Boosting Direct Mail Response using Membership Cards***, an exclusive project of our card production and direct mail experts at [MCT](#).

Did you know that marketers have been designing card packages and fine-tuning their direct mail card strategies for over thirty years?! Organizations employ cards in a variety of creative ways to boost direct mail response and strengthen connections with their customers.

Whether you are designing a card package for the first time or are looking to enhance or make changes to existing card campaigns, we hope you find the insights, examples, and resources in this guide thought-provoking and useful.

Please don't hesitate to [reach out to us](#) during the planning of your next direct mail package design. We welcome the opportunity to be a partner in your direct mail success!

We can't wait to see your ideas in print!

Your Team at MCT

Table of Contents

Cards Deliver Results	5
Boost your open rate	5
Extend the length of time your customer spends reading and interacting with your direct mail piece	6
Bring greater attention to your key message or CTA.....	7
Cards Transcend Markets.....	8
Nonprofit organizations	8
Businesses offering B2B and B2C financial and insurance products and services	8
Health and wellness businesses	9
Subscription retailers.....	9
Brick-and-mortar and eCommerce retailers	10
Internet, telecommunications, software, and streaming content businesses ...	10
Popular Styles of Direct Mail Cards	12
The Keepsake Card	12
The Membership Card.....	14
The “Faux” Card	15
The Promotional Card.....	16
The Call-to-Action Card.....	17
Card Manufacturing Options	19
Choosing the right material	19
Inks, coatings, and film lamination.....	21
Unique treatments and embellishments	21
Art Requirements / Standards.....	23
General considerations for card design & art prep.....	23
Software	24
Art preparation	24

CR80 card layout	25
Embossing.....	26
What is embossing, and why do I care?.....	26
Are all cards compatible with embossing?	26
Does the number of lines of embossing affect price?.....	27
What fonts and characters are available for embossing?	27
Visual reference for embossing layout & limitations	28
Feedback.....	29

Cards Deliver Results

As marketers we recognize that humans are naturally curious and are drawn to the unexpected or unusual. Cards are a powerful marketing tool for sparking curiosity and motivating behavior. How might inclusion of a card in your direct mail package impact your customer's behavior?

Boost your open rate

From the moment your customer reaches into the mailbox and removes the day's mail, your card package will stand out from the others. Cards add bulk, weight, and rigidity to any package - whether a #10 envelope, a self-mailer, or a larger flat.

There are several ways to add visual cues that further entice your customer to open your package to see the enclosed card. You might consider adding a special window in the OE to allow a full view of the card. Or you might allow the card to peek out at the edge of the address window. Some marketers choose to print a preview of the card on the front of a closed outer envelope.

Your card is not just another printed component. In many cases, the card is the focus of the mailing, elevating your offer and helping your package feel less like a piece of standard mail and more like an important piece of transactional mail.

Extend the length of time your customer spends reading and interacting with your direct mail piece

Card packages tend to be more effective than non-card packages at holding customers' attention. Your customer will spend more time reviewing the contents of your direct mail package when it is first opened, and in the event your customer isn't immediately sold on your offer, the presence of a card in the package makes it more likely that your customer will save the package and revisit it later. The reasons for this behavior can vary, depending on the design of your package and nature of your business and your offer. The customer may perceive the card as unlocking access to a high value offer or as holding unique information. In some cases, the card itself might be perceived as a valuable keepsake because of the emotional connection the customer feels with the object, person, place, or idea showcased in your card design.

Bring greater attention to your key message or CTA

Upon opening a direct mail card package, your customer's eyes are immediately drawn to the enclosed card. Assuming that there is a connection drawn between the card design and the offer, your customer's attention will repeatedly return to the card as the customer is reviewing the accompanying letter and other aspects of the direct mail package.

Depending on the copy and creative design of the card, the customer may be motivated to remove the card from the letter, to review the contents of the back of the card, to compare the card to other elements of the package, or to set the card aside for future use.

Cards Transcend Markets

Are you uncertain how cards might fit into your organization's direct mail strategy? Your options are only limited by your imagination. Let's start by looking at some of the industries using cards in direct mail today.

Nonprofit organizations

[Nonprofit organizations](#) use cards for new donor acquisition and for strengthening relationships with repeat donors.

- Nonprofit Schools, Colleges, & Universities
- Museums, Historical Sites, & other Attractions
- Charitable Organizations
- Political Action Committees
- Candidates for Public Office

Businesses offering B2B and B2C financial and insurance products and services

These [businesses](#) use cards to increase open rate, draw attention to their offers, and create a sense of urgency. Here are just a handful of examples...

- Credit Card Offers
- Business Financing, Personal Lines of Credit
- Loan Consolidation or Reputation Repair Services
- Auto Clubs and Auto Warranty Packages
- Legal Services

Health and wellness businesses

These businesses use cards in direct mail as an acquisition tool - inviting customers to enjoy immediate savings or other benefits.

- Pharmacy Discounts
- Vision or Dental Practice - Special Offers
- Vision or Dental Savings Programs or Insurance
- “Free Trial” or “Free Assessment” Offers
- Health Insurance Offers

Subscription retailers

Subscription retailers design direct mail cards to resemble gift cards, loyalty cards, or coupon cards - promoting featured offers or special savings.

- Wine Club
- Fashion Styling or Outfit Rental

- Meal Kits or Prepared Meals
- Book Clubs
- Travel Clubs

Brick-and-mortar and eCommerce retailers

These [retailers](#) use cards to drive traffic to stores and websites. They often design their direct mail cards to resemble gift cards, loyalty cards, or coupon cards - conveying a clear and tangible value for the customer.

- Department Stores, Discount Stores, and Warehouse Club Stores
- Food & Beverage Establishments
- Fashion Retailers
- Book, Nutrition, Game, and other Specialty Retailers
- Electronics Retailers

Internet, telecommunications, software, and streaming content businesses

These businesses use cards to increase open rate and to draw their customers' eyes to specific key messages and calls-to-action. Think of this business category as AaaS (Anything-as-a-Service).

- Internet Service Providers
- Mobile Service Providers
- Cable or Satellite TV or Phone Plans
- Streaming Video and Music Content
- Computer/Device Security Providers

Popular Styles of Direct Mail Cards

The Keepsake Card

This approach is popular when mailing to an audience that has an emotional connection to the work that you do or the product or service that you sell. Are you mailing to a hobbyist? To an animal lover? To an artist or an art lover? To a donor who cares deeply about your cause?

Keepsake cards are particularly popular for nonprofits, businesses targeting hobbyists, and high-profile brands with access to licensed characters or images.

We refer to these cards as keepsake cards because your customers will enjoy the cards simply on their own merit. Keepsake cards do not have to be “rare,” nor do they have to be part of a larger “collection.” Keepsake cards do not have to be expensive to produce, but image selection and image quality are very important.

Make sure you select a high-resolution image or illustration that will appeal to individuals across your entire list. If you are a school or historical site marketing to your donors, and you’ve been using a grainy image for years, now is the time to have one of your interns go out on a nice day and capture

a fresh shot of the monument, building, or scene that you've been showcasing on your cards for years. Mobile phone cameras have come a long way! Follow your printer's art specifications to achieve beautiful results. Don't be afraid to experiment with special finishes or treatments that elevate your design without breaking the bank.

Customers will typically remove keepsake cards from the accompanying letter to view the backs of the cards, so put some thought into the content for your card back. To add to the keepsake value of your card, consider a miniature annual calendar, a tipping guide, or an impactful mission statement that delights or inspires.

While some customers will love to see their own name on their keepsake card, consider how adding personalization to the card will impact the card design. If you would like to add customer names, try to select card artwork that is not too "noisy" or chaotic in the personalization area. It can be very difficult to read names against a distracting background. Similarly, you will want to avoid covering up important design elements with your personalization. **Always consider your personalization before finalizing your card artwork.**

The Membership Card

This approach is used to establish or strengthen long-term relationships with customers. The card appeals to the customer's own sense of identity, welcomes the customer into the community, and gives the customer a sense of ownership.

Membership cards are used, of course, to promote established membership clubs and loyalty programs. They are also used in an informal way, however, for any sort of non-profit or subscription service that is looking to win or retain long-standing donors or customers.

Be sure to use high-resolution artwork; and **membership cards should always, always, always be personalized.** No exceptions! Keep in mind that adding personalization to the card will impact the card design. Choose card artwork with a background for the personalization that will not be too distracting or impact legibility. Similarly, you will want to avoid covering up important art elements with your personalization. **Always consider your personalization before finalizing your card artwork**

The “Faux” Card

Merriam-Webster says that although “faux” is the French word for “fake,” it has come to mean “chic fake” - not crude or misleading fake. A faux card in direct mail is a chic fake card designed to generate interest in the product it represents.

What are the use cases for direct mail faux cards? Faux cards are used by marketers in direct mail to promote credit and debit cards, to drive enrollment in insurance products, and to market membership programs. They are sufficiently similar to their “real” counterparts to be recognizable as promoting the real thing, but not so similar as to cause confusion.

Faux cards can be produced on plastic or paper. Because the card designs commonly include the organization or program brand logos, artwork should be clean and high-resolution. Faux cards may or may not be personalized; and it is not unusual for the cards to have “faux personalization” instead of real personalization, meaning there is static information either printed, embossed, or surface imaged onto the cards.

While in most instances, the content of the back of a faux card is not important, each marketer should consider their own design to make a call on whether and what to print on the card back.

One final note about faux cards - while most marketers will opt for low-cost materials and processes for faux card production, there are instances where it makes sense to upgrade to higher quality materials and special techniques on a faux card. Specifically, direct mail campaigns promoting major rebrands or highly exclusive credit cards are good candidates for premium faux card materials and features. [Reach out to your MCT representative](#) to talk through options, and plan on allowing a little more card production time when premium materials and features are being used.

The Promotional Card

Promotional cards in direct mail are typically simple in both purpose and design. A direct mail promotional card highlights an attractive special offer that is intended to drive the customer to take the marketer's desired action. Consider these examples:

- 30% off your next purchase
- 90-day free trial
- Free mystery gift with purchase
- Buy one, get one free
- 0% interest for 2 years

Each one of the above offers is highly appealing. How better to immediately draw your customer's attention to an

exciting promotional offer than to print it prominently on a card attached to its accompanying letter.

The printed design for a promotional card should be simple and clean, with large typeface and simple graphics or colors that draw the eyes. Don't worry so much about the prominence of your brand logo on the card. Let your letter promote your brand - the purpose of the card is to promote your offer.

Most direct mail promotional cards will not be personalized with names; however, you can absolutely use personalization to hyper-target your offers based on customer criteria, such as zip code or credit rating.

The artwork for the back of your promotional card is not critically important - focus on getting the front right.

The Call-to-Action Card

When incorporated successfully into a direct mail package, CTA cards can serve to improve open rate and to draw your customer's eyes immediately and repeatedly to the call-to-action. Direct mail CTA cards share many characteristics with promotional cards and function very much as CTA buttons do in your email marketing campaign. CTA cards have clean and simple eye-catching designs, with large type. Design

content is often no more than a tagline and a phone number or web address. Call-to-Action cards generally do not require prominent logos, personalization, or back artwork.

Card Manufacturing Options

Choosing the right material

Direct mail cards can be printed on a variety of plastic and paper materials. White PVC is by far the most popular material used in card manufacturing, and it is the material of choice for most credit cards. It is highly printable, is compatible with lamination and foil stamping, and is durable in your customer's hands. Thicknesses typically range from 10 mil (.010") to 30 mil (.030"). Printed PVC cards can be protected with a UV coating, or they can be laminated to a highly durable premium finish in industrial hydraulic lamination presses. Note that clear and colored PVC are available, although minimum orders and longer lead times may apply.

While PVC is the most attractive resin from a manufacturing perspective, alternative plastics are available, so [ask your MCT representative](#) if you'd like to explore other plastic options.

Paper can be a very attractive choice for some faux cards, promotional cards, and CTA cards, when economy trumps durability. Just keep in mind that paper cards do not add the same weight and substance to the package, so paper cards may not be as effective as plastic for improving open rates.

Paper cards are a particularly nice choice when you are marketing to a target audience that is highly environmentally conscious and may be put off by the use of plastic. MCT has received [FSC® Chain-of-Custody certification](#) (FSC-C197562) from the [Forest Stewardship Council](#) and is proud to support sustainable forestry practices.

Marketers wishing to use thin (8 - 12pt) paper cards will generally opt for clean-release cards, which are produced in a manner that is similar to producing a label.

Heavier (18 - 30pt) paper cards are typically printed on either a coated cover, a board stock, or an engineered paper, depending on your design and quality expectations.

When evaluating materials for your card, consider first the purpose that the card is serving in your direct mail package. If you are depending on the card to increase open rates, the weight and thickness of the card will be more important to you. If you want the card to be viewed as a “keepsake,” durability is a factor, as might be compatibility with special features like foil-stamping. If you want to be able to personalize the card, you need to use a material compatible with your desired method of personalization. Your [MCT representative](#) can help you identify the right material for your specific needs.

Inks, coatings, and film lamination

Other than clean-release cards, which are printed on web presses, most cards are printed in sheet form on offset presses. MCT uses high-quality UV lithographic offset printing for our 4-color process printing and for most Pantone spot colors.

Sparkly metallic, pearlescent, fluorescent, glitter, glow-in-the-dark, scented, and other specialty inks and coatings can be applied using MCT's silkscreen process. Silkscreen printing is slower and more costly than UV litho printing, but it allows marketers to achieve colors and effects that would not otherwise be possible using only lithographic printing.

Most direct mail cards that require a protective finish are simply UV coated in-line during printing (usually with a stampable coating). Marketers who prefer a more premium card finish, similar to the finish on credit cards, may wish to upgrade to a laminated finish. MCT offers a choice of three different finishes for laminated cards - gloss, matte, or satin. [Talk to your MCT representative](#) for samples.

Unique treatments and embellishments

While cards with unique treatments and embellishments are not commonly used in direct mail, there are circumstances

that warrant their use. From time to time, we see premium faux cards and membership cards with quite elegant and complex designs. Because MCT produces card products of all types and complexities, including secure payment cards and eye-catching gift cards, we have both the equipment and the experience to support requests for special-order materials, foils, unique card shapes, and more! [Talk to your MCT representative](#) for samples and information.

Art Requirements / Standards

General considerations for card design & art prep

While card manufacturing is not entirely unlike other types of printing, there are some important differences to keep in mind.

- Most cards are printed on plastic. Printing on plastic comes with its own unique set of challenges.
 - Plastic does not absorb ink! MCT's inks are specially formulated to deliver vibrant colors on plastic and to bond with our materials.
 - Some printing and other card manufacturing steps involve exposure to heat, pressure, and UV light - all of which have the potential to change the characteristics of the plastic sheet. Some of the guidance provided in the following section is specifically designed to ensure that the challenges inherent in plastic card production do not get in the way of a beautiful finished product.
- As you've undoubtedly noticed, cards are quite small - some of the guidance provided in this section is intended to ensure legibility and a balanced design despite printing on a very small canvas.

- Your card is often the focal point of your mailing. For this reason, it is important that your artwork sets the campaign up for success!

Software

During card design, use each Adobe Creative Cloud tool for its intended purpose, and package your files in Adobe InDesign before sending. Please [reach out to your MCT representative](#) if you need any guidance for packaging your artwork or exporting PDFs from Adobe InDesign. We can provide instructions.

Art preparation

Please follow these guidelines with respect to images, fonts, bleeds, etc. Please do not provide your artwork in the form of flattened, uneditable images.

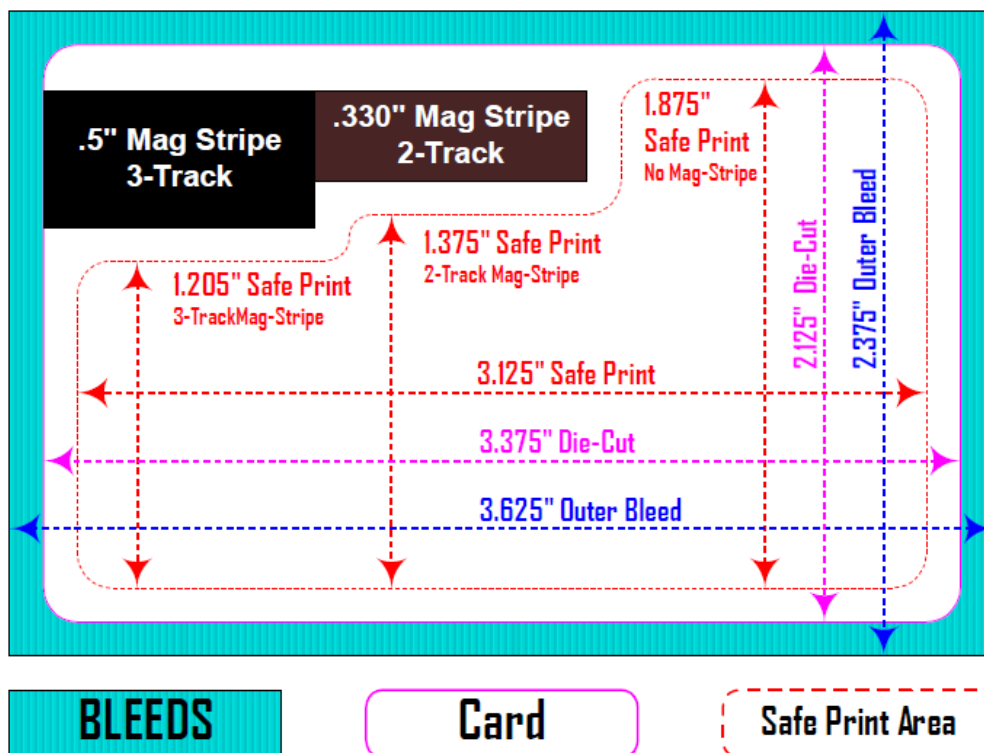
- Convert all RGB images to CMYK and provide separations as needed.
- All supporting images should be at least 300 DPI high resolution at 100% of final size.
- Line art images should be at 1200 DPI.
- Provide 1/8" (.125") bleed on all sides, if applicable.
- All fonts used in the creation of the art files should be included in a separate folder labeled "fonts."

- Any reverse type should be no smaller than 6pt. To ensure legibility and crisp type, avoid reversing small type out of CMYK where possible.

CR80 card layout

Standard card dimensions (CR80) are 3.375" x 2.125" with round corners. Your artwork with bleed should measure 3.625" x 2.375". We recommend you keep all critical logos, type, and other important design elements .125" away from the edges of the card to maintain a balanced look and avoid cropping.

Please see the following diagram you can use as a visual reference when preparing your card artwork.



Embossing

What is embossing, and why do I care?

Embossing is a legacy card personalization method that involves high impact of alpha-numeric characters into the plastic card. As a result, the characters are raised on the front of the card and appear in mirror-image as depressions on the back of the card. Embossing is **affordable** and **popular with customers**. Embossing can be felt through the OE in many direct mail packages, so it has a positive impact on open rate.

Are all cards compatible with embossing?

We generally recommend embossed cards be constructed of 18-30 mil PVC (.018" - .030"). If you wish to emboss cards made from other materials, [talk to your MCT representative](#) about options and limitations.

Because of the way embossing works, each line of embossing adds a slight bow (curve) to the card. The more lines of embossing, the less flat your finished card will be. The thinner the card is, the greater the extent of bow. For this reason, if you would like to emboss 3-4 lines of personalization on the card, we suggest going with a 24-30 mil card thickness.

Does the number of lines of embossing affect price?

Yes, the number of lines of embossing affects both the machine the embossing job can be run on and the speed of production. Please provide accurate information at the time of quoting about the number of lines of embossing.

What fonts and characters are available for embossing?

There are only 2 industry-standard fonts used in card embossing. You may emboss up to 1 line using a numeric-only OCR font, and you may emboss up to 4 lines using the alpha-numeric AN font. Please provide accurate information at the time of quoting about the number of lines of embossing required.

All AN alpha characters are UPPER CASE. Please convert all embossing data to UPPER CASE before sending it to MCT.

All special characters should be removed in the data with the following exceptions:

, . / ' - &

Examples of illegal characters:

(	)	#	\$	*	+	%	!	@	=	^	{	}	[	]	:	;	<
>	_	?	`	\	ñ	Ñ	é	É	Ä	ä	Ü	ü	á	ï	î	ì	í

Visual reference for embossing layout & limitations

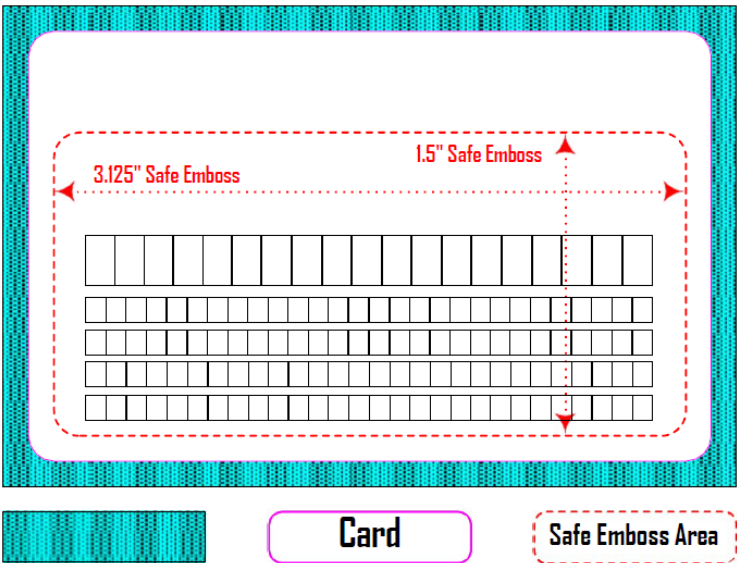
The following diagram provides an overview of your options and limitations when embossing a direct mail card. We welcome the opportunity to answer any questions that may come up as you are preparing your data.

EMBOSSING TEMPLATE

AN = 10 characters per inch (28 characters)

OCR = 7 characters per inch (19 characters)

Note: These are general safety limits for embossing. Any exceptions should be presented for review before proceeding.



Feedback



Thank you for your feedback!

We hope you enjoyed our latest publication.
Please help us make the next one even better by
answering a few short questions!



TALK TO MCT

Are you looking for a partner for highly personalized, hyper-targeted mail that drives acquisitions? Are you interested in working with a lettershop that can provide IN-HOUSE membership card manufacturing, personalization, and match-affixing?

We provide full-service direct mail production services, helping businesses across a variety of sectors employ the power of direct mail to achieve their customer acquisition and retention goals. Beyond our in-house card production, we offer state-of-the-art full-color, roll-fed digital form printing, high-speed inserting, 3-way match at insert, and much, much more. | U.S.-based and minority-owned. Let us handle your next direct mail project!



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