



Connecting to Voters

**How to Deliver a Personal Touch
During Times of Uncertainty**





One tried and
true method of
delivering personal
communications
is direct mail.

When it comes to political campaigns, unprecedented times require adaptable communications strategies.

Standard tactics to make personal connections with voters—such as campaign rallies and door-to-door canvassing—may be challenging to execute during this time of social distancing, so other methods need to fill the void and take a larger role in an integrated campaign.

One tried and true method of delivering personal communications is direct mail.

Since the founding of our country, the United States Postal Service has delivered through even the direst national and global emergencies. Even during a pandemic, mail carriers continue to bring letters and packages to our homes—a rare sign of normalcy and reassurance of better times ahead. The mail binds our society and our democracy, whether by helping citizens exercise their right to be counted in the census or participate in elections. At a time when social distancing has increased the value of personal connections, direct mail helps us to connect with one another.

In fact, mail's power to target communications directly to individual voters is one reason political campaigns spent significantly more on it in the first three months of this year than they did during the first three months of the last presidential election year. Spending on direct mail in campaigns rose 131 percent over that time from \$49 million in January through March of 2016 to \$113 million during the same period in 2020.¹

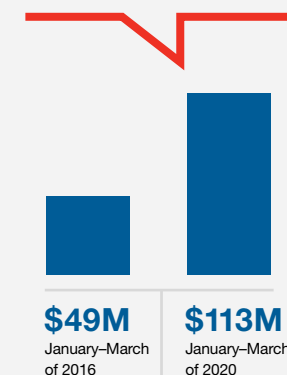
In an election year when so much seems uncertain, one thing is clear: there will be an election. That means we must find ways to identify supporters, persuade voters, and inspire them to vote. To help you navigate this strange and uncharted landscape, the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) and the United States Postal Service have developed an election guide based on both quantitative and qualitative research we have conducted over the past few election cycles, including post-election voter surveys in five states, a consultant survey from this year, and consultant tips and testimonials.

In this sixth joint whitepaper, we show how direct mail reaches voters where they currently are to introduce candidates and issues with exceptional depth and memorability, how direct mail establishes trust with voters, how direct mail effectively complements efforts to share political information through other channels, and how direct mail can help ensure that voters cast their ballots.

Time is short, money is tight, and events are unpredictable. Let us help you find your way.



131%
increase in
spending on direct
mail campaigns





Introduce the Candidate to the Voter at Home

Since widespread stay-at-home orders began in March, many voters are continuing to stick close to home.

VOTERS AT HOME



2-in-3

Americans don't feel comfortable going to a polling place²



Even with many parts of the country reopening, voters' preference to still stay home when possible means it is likely that even if campaign rallies, fundraising events, meet-and-greets, and door-to-door canvassing resume, many voters may be reluctant to attend or engage with candidates through these channels. As a result, many campaigns will need to shift in-person opportunities to connect with voters and find alternative ways to deliver the same value and personal touch.

This year more than ever, political campaigns must reach voters where they are: at home.

Direct mail is unique in that it can deliver campaign messaging directly to the voter's doorstep. The Mail Moment[®] experience—when consumers bring in their direct mail, sort it, organize it, and search for relevant content—is an occasion that Americans like and feel is time well spent.³

Even before they were shut in by the pandemic, most surveyed voters checked their mailbox nearly every day.⁴ And almost half of surveyed voters (46%) say they would read direct mail with information about candidates or ballot issues upon seeing it.⁵

In these days of increased social distance, the Mail Moment[®] experience has become more important.

“Historically, even through 9/11 and the last recession, data shows that trust and use of mail remains consistent even when our world is turned upside down. Getting mail reinforces a feeling of ‘normal’ and during times of crisis, people tend to pay attention to it even more.”

—Direct Mail Consultant

“ The conventional impression of voters spending five to seven seconds reading mail has been expanded with voters at home. More voters have time to read what’s in the mailbox. Voters are slowing down to actually look at it.”

—Direct Mail Strategist



AAPC Tips

Tapping into the Mail Moment® experience is a powerful way to introduce a candidate to voters. Nearly 3 out of 4 surveyed voters (72%) said that direct mail increased awareness of which candidates were running.⁶ Two-thirds of surveyed voters (66%) said that direct mail was a helpful starting point to learn about a candidate and their positions.⁷

Direct mail not only gets people’s attention, it offers deep, memorable information that other media can-not.⁸ Voters expect direct mail to show where the candidate stands, how they differ from their opponent, their voting record, and their biographical details.⁹

After the 2018 Midterm Elections, nearly 6 out of 10 surveyed voters (57%) ranked direct mail as the most credible political advertising technique.¹⁰ Political consultants recognize mail as an effective vehicle for

communicating lengthy content, including information about a candidate’s stance on issues (84%), positive claims about a candidate (80%), and information about how to vote (72%).¹²

As voters increasingly spend time at home, direct mail is a uniquely effective way to start your campaign and introduce your candidate.

“ The recipient in most cases has to physically interact with the piece of information you’re sending them—it gives direct mail an advantage that other advertising platforms don’t have.”

—Campaign Strategist



USE MAIL EARLY

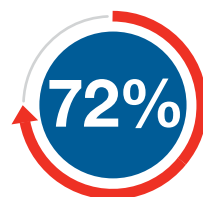
Direct mail can grab a voter’s attention and offer deep and memorable information, which makes it an effective way to introduce a candidate early in the campaign.



BUILD A “NO-CONTACT” CAMPAIGN

Direct mail, television, radio, digital, and phone banking will replace campaign tactics that don’t comply with public health or new social norms this campaign cycle.

INTRODUCTION THROUGH MAIL¹¹



Voters say direct mail increases awareness of which candidates are running



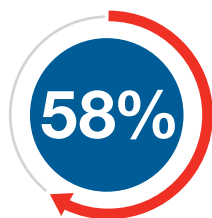
Voters say direct mail is a helpful starting point to learn about a candidate and their positions

2

Establish Trust with Voters Throughout the Campaign

Trust is hard to win these days: voter skepticism about the media runs high and political polarization runs deep.^{13,14,15}

To earn the trust of voters, it helps to have a way of communicating about political candidates and campaigns that is tried and true. No media can match direct mail's exceptionally long track record of delivering political communications directly to the voter's doorstep. Direct mail is more believable than radio ads, telephone calls, and, notably, all forms of digital marketing and communications, according to our research.¹⁶ Only television can even compete with direct mail when it comes to trust among voters.¹⁷



Voters say they are more likely to trust positive claims about candidates made in direct mail than other types of political advertising



Voters say they trust direct mail when it comes to information about a candidate's biography, stance on the issues, and legislative record

Most voters believe that direct mail delivers believable, factual information.¹⁸ More than half (58%) of surveyed voters say they are more likely to trust positive claims about candidates made in direct mail than other types of political advertising.¹⁹ When it comes to information about a candidate's biography, stance on the issues, and legislative record, more than 7-in-10 surveyed voters say they trust direct mail.²⁰

“Mail helps establish trust in several ways, including: offering facts, citations for the facts and transparency of source, where the mail comes from.”
—Fundraising Consultant

Mail targeting allows campaigns to reach specific types of voters. Surveyed consultants call out rural voters, Baby Boomers and, more specifically, older voters (age 74+) as groups that mail can effectively target.²¹ However, campaigns should not underestimate the value of using direct mail to reach young voters; our most recent voter survey shows that Gen Z, Millennial, and Gen X voters were more likely than older voters to acknowledge the power of direct mail to reinforce television ads, drive them to search online for more information, and impact their voting decision.²²

“ In today’s political environment, mail is still the best way to reach specific voters. Mail is our secret advantage to connect with voters through the most accurate and credible channel.”

—Direct Mail Consultant

Direct mail also allows campaigns to target voters who may be receptive to critical messages about opponents.

In fact, 2 out of 3 surveyed political consultants say direct mail effectively delivers information about candidates; 1-in-3 say it is the single most effective use of direct mail.²³

For voters to trust information, they must trust its source and how it’s delivered. That’s why campaigns should use a method of communication that’s highly trusted—direct mail.

“ When you contrast candidates through mail, you give the details, back it up with citations, and directly target the voters you want to receive that message. You can’t do that on television. You can’t do that online. The mailbox is how you can get that very specific message to a unique audience without having a broader adverse effect on your campaign.”

—Direct Mail Strategist

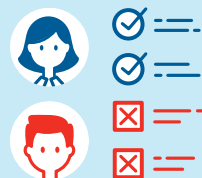


AAPC Tips



DEVELOP VOTER TRUST WITH MAIL

Direct mail is one of the most trusted channels by voters. Mail enables campaigns to back up what they say by citing facts and being transparent with sources.



USE MAIL TO EFFECTIVELY CRITIQUE OPPONENTS

Direct mail is a highly effective way to illustrate the differences between candidates. It’s highly targeted and powerfully visual, so you can offer a unique contrast between messages depending on the voter universe.



TARGET VOTERS WITH DIRECT MAIL

Voter targeting has really evolved, having become increasingly data and model driven, and direct mail can now be used with precisely tailored messaging to specific voter demographics.



Leverage the Media Mix to Inform & Influence Voter Decisions

In recent surveys of both political consultants and voters, we found that voters are determining who they will vote for earlier in the election cycle.

VOTERS DECIDE EARLY



Voters decide a few months or more before the election



Voters decide in the last month before the election



Voters decide in the last week before the election

Yet, in our most recent survey of consultants, they told us they traditionally focus their direct mail campaign in the month before an election. Using direct mail early will help campaigns connect with voters who are making up their minds several months before the election.²⁴

Even before the pandemic, voters weren't waiting to decide at the ballot box who would win their support. In 2019, for two hotly contested gubernatorial races in Louisiana and Kentucky, 60 percent of surveyed voters in these states decided who to vote for a few months or more before the election.²⁵ Among the rest, 1-in-4 (25%) decided in the last month before the election, while only 1-in-10 (10%) waited until the last week before the election.²⁶

Direct mail helps voters decide.²⁷ Six out of 10 surveyed voters (60%) said that direct mail made them a more informed voter.²⁸ And almost two-thirds of surveyed voters (65%) rated direct mail as one of the top three most persuasive political advertising techniques.²⁹ Ultimately, nearly half of surveyed voters (47%) said direct mail had an impact on their voting decision.³⁰



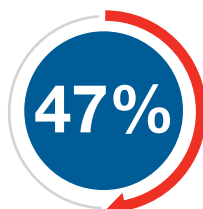
HOW MAIL CONNECTS WITH VOTERS



Voters feel direct mail makes them a more informed voter



Voters rate direct mail as one of the top three most persuasive political advertising techniques



Voters believe direct mail has an impact on their voting decision

Direct mail is a powerful part of an overall integrated media strategy to influence voter decisions.³¹ For example, by listing website and social media channels, direct mail helps reach Millennials, who prefer to verify information from multiple sources.³² Half of surveyed voters say direct mail motivates them to go online to search for more information about a candidate and their campaign, while more than half (56%) say it reinforces the impact of TV campaign advertising.³³

It's increasingly possible to synchronize the timing between direct mail and other types of communications, which makes a significant difference in the campaign's effectiveness, according to political consultants surveyed.³⁴

The Postal Service has several new tools—such as Informed Visibility® Service and Informed Delivery® Service—that allow campaigns to track their direct mail pieces and digitally integrate their direct mail program, allowing campaigns to sequence and layer messaging across channels.

“Messages should be simple, clear, and authentic. If you're inconsistent with your narrative, you lose effectiveness and are wasting valuable campaign resources. Messages should also speak to the right audience with exactly the right message and should align across channels.”

—Outside Spending Strategist



AAPC Tips



VOTERS MAKE UP THEIR MINDS EARLY

Campaigns should consider reaching out to voters earlier because they are increasingly determining who to support months before Election Day. Direct mail can be effectively used to introduce a candidate or issue in a thoughtful, in-depth way.



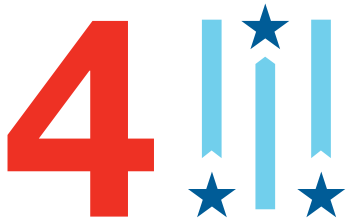
TRACK YOUR MAIL PIECES IN REAL-TIME

The Postal Service's Informed Visibility® Service brings near real-time tracking data to deliveries of direct mail pieces.³⁵ Campaigns can use the service to execute phased communications—knowing that the mail piece has arrived enables you to then contact voters through other channels to reinforce the messaging.



DIGITALLY INTEGRATE YOUR MAIL PROGRAM

The Postal Service's Informed Delivery® Service is the email notification service that allows residents to digitally preview incoming direct mail and packages scheduled to arrive soon.³⁶ It offers campaigns the opportunity to engage voters through synchronized direct mail and digital marketing—voters can see the mail piece that has arrived at their house, and then click on the link to a campaign or donation web page.



Spark Voters to Cast Their Ballots

If the primaries are any indication, the general election this year will be like no other previous election. Voting timelines were disrupted in more than one-third of the states.

A USEFUL, HELPFUL SOURCE FOR INFORMATION



Consultants agree that direct mail is useful for sharing information



Voters found direct mail to be a helpful source for deadlines on registering to vote or voting early

As we wait to see how the pandemic will play out later in the year, questions of when, how, and where voting will take place remain in flux. Many political consultants and election experts anticipate a significant increase in voting-by-mail, early voting, and potential changes to in-person polling locations.

No matter what happens, campaign missions remain the same: reach voters, identify supporters, and get them to vote. What's new this year is that get out the vote (GOTV) tactics need to prioritize communicating to supporters when and where to vote or, for voters who fear going to the polls, how to vote early.

Since each state has its own rules regarding absentee ballots and early voting, campaigns need to help voters stay current on their options.

Direct mail has long been an important part of GOTV, with 6-in-10 surveyed consultants believing that mail is a very relevant part of today's elections.³⁷

Voters depend on direct mail for details about early voting, absentee ballot, and voter registration details.³⁸

In fact, 7-in-10 surveyed political consultants agree that direct mail is useful for sharing information about when and where to vote, and information on early voting.³⁹ In recent elections, nearly 8-in-10 (77%) surveyed voters found direct mail to be a helpful source for deadlines on registering to vote or voting early.⁴⁰ In the last presidential election, voters wanted to receive direct mail when they don't know about the deadlines for absentee ballot (81%) and voter registration deadline (69%).⁴¹

“We're definitely watching vote-by-mail programs closely right now and using mail pre and post to chase ballots—in conjunction with text and robocalls. This year is going to require a lot of voter education. And research tells us that mode alignment works. So, if ballots are coming through the mail, you should use mail to educate your voters and get them to take action.”

—Direct Mail Strategist



AAPC Tips

Clearly, GOTV tactics will need to prioritize informing supporters when, where, and how to vote. What's more, they must inspire voters to cast their ballots.

Political consultants believe that direct mail is not just an effective way to GOTV, but a cost-effective way as well.

“In my experience, mail is one of the most cost-effective ways to get low propensity turnout voters to come out to vote.”

—Direct Mail Consultant

Campaign managers can coordinate with their local registrars or election commission officials to time a direct mail piece to coincide with the arrival of the absentee ballot. Assuming the campaign has built a case for the candidate with the voter, it's a great way to increase the chances that they vote for the candidate.

“The ultimate voter engagement is when direct mail arrives the same day as an absentee ballot.”

—Consultant Quote



START EARLY

If absentee ballots play an expanded role in the election, campaigns should start contacting voters in the months before the election to ensure they understand the options to cast their ballot. This may mean state and local campaigns should not wait for national campaigns to start educating voters on their voting options.



GET THE DETAILS RIGHT

Explain the mechanics of absentee voting, such as how to return absentee ballot requests. It varies by state, but some campaigns plan to send supporters pre-paid envelopes for absentee ballot request forms and voter registration forms.



START WRITING GOTV CONTENT NOW

Volunteers who are engaged months before an election may be looking for ways to contribute early. Utilize them now to prepare handwritten GOTV postcards that can be mailed in the final weeks before Election Day to voters who may need an extra push to get to the polls.



USE SHARE MAIL® SERVICE

For voter registration and vote-by-mail, Share Mail® service is a customized direct mail product that works like a word-of-mouth marketing tactic. It enables campaigns to pre-pay for postage and then track usage—the invoice comes at the end of the month and the campaign only pays return postage for mail pieces that are sent.⁴²

Success in 2020

1



**Introduce the
Candidate to the
Voter at Home**

2



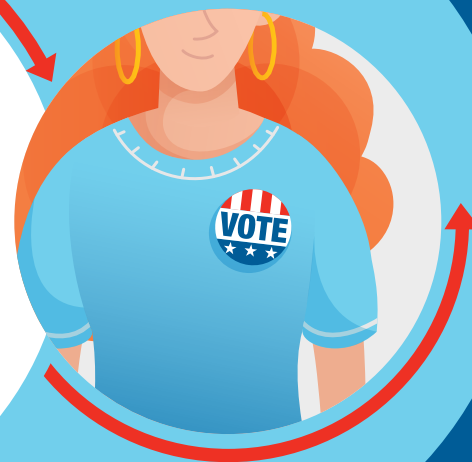
**Establish Trust
with Voters
Throughout the
Campaign**

3



**Leverage the
Media Mix to
Inform & Influence
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4



**Spark Voters to
Cast Their Ballots**

Conclusion

Holding a presidential election or general election during uncertain times presents challenges that we have never seen during past election cycles. Although none of us can know the conditions under which the 2020 campaign will take place, we can prepare our political campaigns through thoughtful planning and increased flexibility.

Preparations should start with direct mail. Aside from its truly historic track record of delivering success, recent technological advances have made direct mail even more effective in reaching voters in a timely, impactful way.

During times of upheaval, it often makes sense to stick with what is tried and true. For political campaigns, that means direct mail.

To find out more, visit us at:
[DeliverTheWin.com](https://www.DeliverTheWin.com)



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Get In Touch



The Postal Service has specialists available to help campaigns capitalize on their direct mail outreach with voters. Whether you're interested in direct mail insights, mail piece design analysis, or operational support, the Postal Service is committed to helping you and your campaign.



To find out more, visit us at:
DeliverTheWin.com

In Association with AAPC

Thanks to the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) for their participation in this study. Founded in 1969, the AAPC is a multi-partisan organization of political and public affairs professionals dedicated to improving democracy. It is the largest association of political and public affairs professionals in the world. AAPC members consist of political consultants, media consultants, pollsters, campaign managers, corporate public affairs officers, professors, fund-raisers, lobbyists, congressional staffers and vendors. Membership is open to everyone associated with politics from the local level to the White House.

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