

A young woman with curly hair is shown in profile, looking down at a stack of mail she is holding. She is standing in a hallway of white mailboxes. The lighting is bright, creating a warm atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# Political Mail and Millennials



Young Voters Paying Close  
Attention to Direct Mail

United States Postal Service and  
the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) study

# The Landscape

Millennial voters, the so-called tech generation, have grown up with and around computers. They have taken to social media in droves and driven the need for smartphones and other devices.



## Does this mean campaigns should focus exclusively on digital advertising to reach them? Surprisingly, no.

Polling and focus group research supported by the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) show that an exclusive focus on digital channels would miss an important opportunity for communications outreach: direct mail.

In fact, Millennials are paying very close attention to political direct mail—it is a must-have component of a multichannel communications strategy and important launching point to digital channels.

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## Millennials and the Mailbox: Survey Findings

Understanding Millennials' attitudes and behaviors towards political mail is vital given the 2016 political climate. To that end, the United States Postal Service and Summit Research conducted an online survey among U.S. adults with an oversample of Millennials.<sup>i</sup>

**THE SCOPE:** This survey focused on mental recall of political mail, actions taken after receiving political mail, comparisons to other forms of advertising and attitudes about the benefits and features of political mail.

**OUR GOAL:** We wanted to understand the Millennial mindset on direct mail and compare results to non-Millennial adults. This comparison would provide further context on Millennials' use and attitudes of political direct mail compared to use and attitudes of older segments, who are generally considered to be top targets for direct mail.

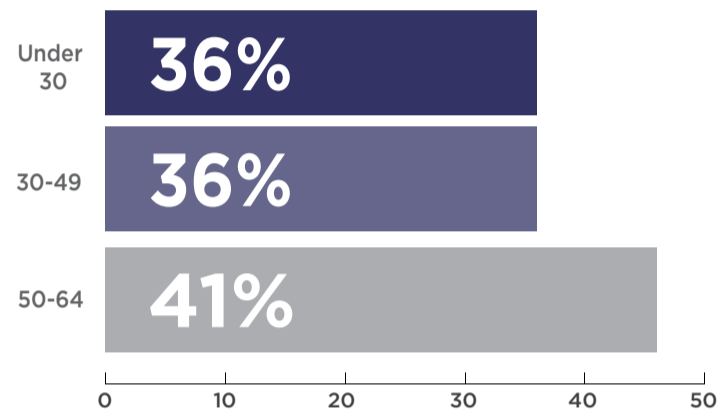


First, to set the stage, we looked at prior research findings, which demonstrate that Millennials still pay close attention to the mailbox. As large numbers of Millennials pay more bills and payments electronically, items received through the mail have the potential to truly stand out.<sup>ii</sup>

Importantly, that moment between the mailbox and the front door—when the recipient is touching, turning and scanning the piece—is a critical opportunity to grab recipients’ attention.

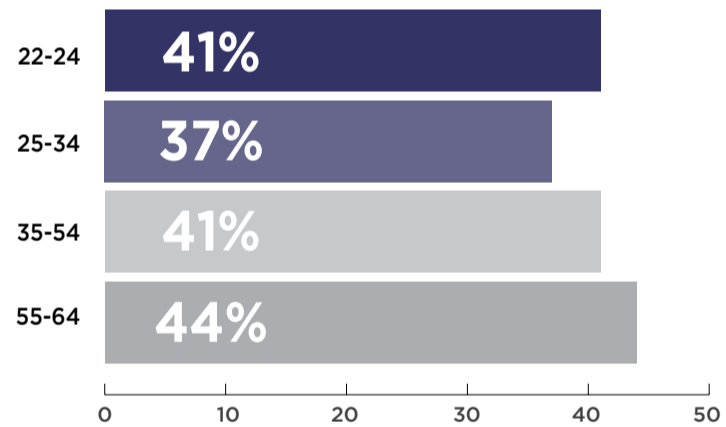
**Many Millennials are eager to check their mailbox on a daily basis.**

A 2015 Gallup poll shows that 36 percent of those under 30 “look forward to checking the mail each day,” equal to the percentage for 30-49 year olds (36 percent) and just under the percentage for 50-64 year olds (41 percent).<sup>iii</sup>



**Many Millennials immediately open their mail.**

According to the USPS’<sup>®</sup> 2014 *Household Diary Study*, 41 percent of 22-24 year olds and 37 percent of 25-34 year olds immediately read mail sent to their house. This is near the level seen with older groups (41 percent for 35-54, 44 percent for 55-64).<sup>iv</sup>



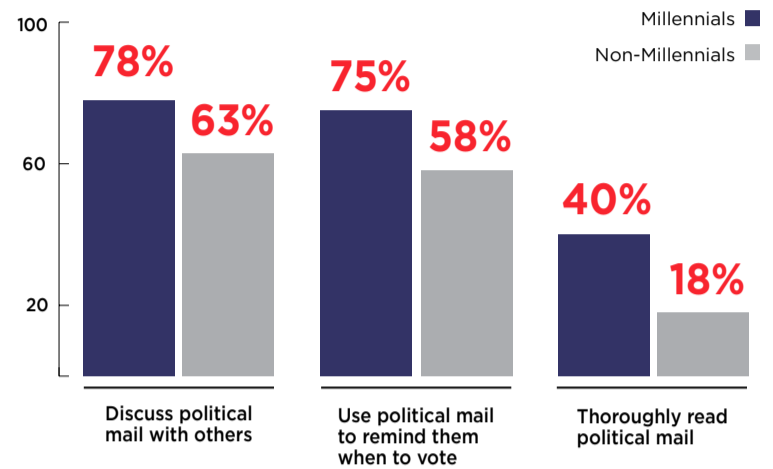
**Key findings from the USPS and Summit Research survey reinforce that Millennials not only pay close attention to direct mail, but they also are involved in politics and very engaged in the political mail they receive—even more than non-Millennials.**



**Millennials read, discuss, and use political mail at higher rates than non-Millennials.**

**They are more likely to:**

- Discuss political mail with others (78 percent compared to 63 percent for non-Millennials).
- Use political mail to remind them when to vote (75 percent compared to 58 percent for non-Millennials).
- Thoroughly read political mail (40 percent compared to 18 percent for non-Millennials).



**Political mail prompts Millennials to learn more about the candidates online.**

Because of political mail, about two-in-three Millennials are likely to search for information about the candidate (66 percent), as well as the opponent (63 percent). A majority will take this search directly to the candidate’s website (54 percent).

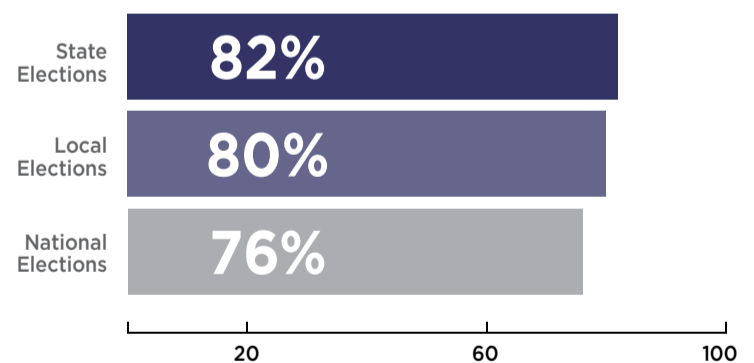


Are likely to search for information about the candidate



Are likely to search for information about the opponent

**Political mail has importance for down-ballot races.** Four-in-five Millennials find political mail important for state and local elections (82 percent and 80 percent respectively), just above national elections (76 percent). For all three of these elections, they find political mail more important than non-Millennials do.



**Millennials prefer political mail over other forms of political advertising.**

In a forced-choice question comparing political ads by mail or online, 80 percent of Millennials prefer political ads by mail over online (favored by 42 percent) or both equally (38 percent), with a small portion preferring political ads online over mail (20 percent).



Prefer political ads by mail over online, or both equally.

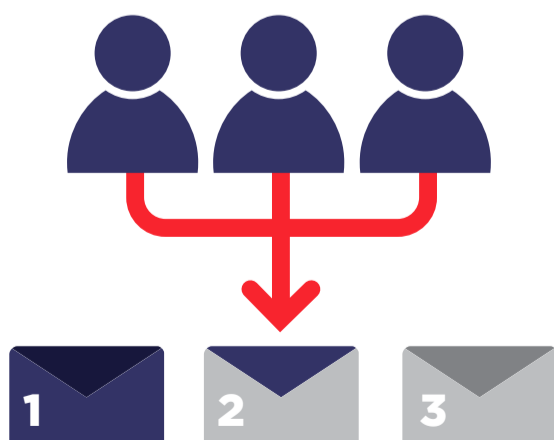
# Creating an Authentic and Direct Connection: Focus Group Findings

Knowing the impact political direct mail has in educating and motivating voters, the United States Postal Service and Deep Blue Insights conducted a series of focus groups with Millennial voters (ages 18-34) in Tampa, Florida, to better understand how they use and react to political mail.

**THE SCOPE:** We talked with four focus groups representing diverse political affiliations: Democratic, Republican, Independent, and unaffiliated voters. All focus group participants are informed registered voters who regularly pay attention to news and events.

**OUR GOAL:** We wanted to understand how Millennials think about political mail. We exposed them to both positive and negative mailpieces from candidates and independent expenditure groups, provided by members of the American Association of Political Consultants.

We asked focus group participants to quickly sort each ad into one of three piles “as if they were walking from the mailbox to their door.”



Piles included:

1. **Would read**
2. **Neutral**
3. **Would throw away**

We then discussed the commonalities across the “would read” and “would throw away” pieces to gain greater clarity on how to communicate and reach young voters.



## OUR KEY FINDINGS:

### 1 Millennials prefer and are accustomed to verifying information from multiple sources. Political mail provides an opportunity for campaign integration, by listing website and social media channels.

- Millennials rely on news aggregating sites like Google, Reddit, Huffington Post, or the Drudge Report. They like to see messages or quotes well-sourced.
- Millennials expect to find a source or reference to explore further online. A direct mailpiece feels incomplete when it doesn't include a website or social channels.

“It caught my eye again. This one gives very specific references and examples for all the claims that it's making. I would trust that. But if it doesn't, if it's just like, this guy sucks; I'm not going to pay any attention to that.”

- Millennial Democrat

“Just using the QR codes and having maybe a website that they can direct us to. I think there's a direct lack of any additional information or where we can go to find more information about these people.”

- Millennial unaffiliated

“They break it down for you right here. Then, if you're interested, you can always go online and do more research.”

- Millennial Independent

### 2 Political mail can be seen as a helpful, sharable and useful educational tool (for voting deadlines, early voting details, etc.).

- As many Millennials are new to the voting process, direct mail can serve to educate and remind them of important upcoming action, such as early-voting dates.
- Millennials like to be able to share these details with friends and family.

“This one I like because it tells you where and when to vote, which is very informative and helpful.”

- Millennial Republican

“The only positive was I felt this ad had the right balance of information. And what I also liked was the absentee ballot request form, which one could easily rip right off and pop it right in the mail, which I thought was extremely convenient.”

- Millennial Democrat

“I can make sure to let my friends and family know. November 3rd, that's the date. Go out and vote.”

- Millennial unaffiliated

### 3 Millennials want an authentic and direct connection to the candidate.

- Millennials view direct mail from candidates as coming directly from the source, without any news bias or filter.
- Millennials respond well to candid shots of the candidate, instead of posed or staged photos. They like to see a candidate in real-life scenarios.
- They want images that reflect themselves and their lives.

“This one right here: head shot, head shot, head shot. This other one for example, she’s in three pictures in a row but she’s engaged in the pictures. Stay away from the whole glamour shot.”  
- Millennial Republican

“Definitely pictures because I’m a more visual person. Pictures basically relating to me, like families.”  
- Millennial Democrat



### 4 Millennials approach negative mail cautiously —but use it as an opportunity to learn more.

- Many Millennials, like other voters, have an instant gut reaction against overtly negative ads.
- However, negative mail does grab their attention—they just also want a clear source or website to learn more. Millennials may mistrust negative direct mail, but they’re willing to verify.

“Don’t particularly care what you think about your opponents because you should think negatively of them. That’s implied, so I can just do without all of the attack propaganda. I just want to know what you’re about.”  
- Millennial unaffiliated

“I don’t know how you follow up with a majority of these [negative pieces]. The majority don’t even mention a website.”  
- Millennial Republican





## 5 Millennials respond well to political mail that includes simple messages, uncomplicated design, limited text and high contrast colors.

- Millennials are accustomed to tools like Twitter with a 140 character limit and scanning short, online articles, and briefs. They like concise and limited text with bold headlines to draw attention.
- Design should be simple, avoid bi-folds and tri-folds.
- Make use of high contrast fonts, headers and subheaders to make the main points stand out.

“There’s so much going on here and even though there are bullet points and things. I appreciate interesting graphic design that someone is trying to target where your eyes are going.”

- Millennial Republican

“There’s too much generalized information out there. I think to grab my attention, using the bold letters, the colors, all of that stuff, really highlighting specific things that they would like to accomplish, I think is probably the best thing for me.”

- Millennial unaffiliated

“I think if they sent a little booklet I wouldn’t really - I don’t want to read. Even this trifold one, it’s too much. You want to have a two-sided thing.”

- Millennial Independent

## 6 Millennials respond well to creative attention-grabbing techniques and humor.

- Humor and pop culture references can grab their attention. It makes them pause and wonder “where are they going with this?”
- The moment between the mailbox and the front door is an important opportunity to grab attention.

“Not only was it with the color scheme that instantly grabbed me. But they made references to Britney Spears, so instantly I’m going to gravitate more towards that and read more about what they’re tying it to.”

- Millennial unaffiliated

“So they can be catchy. Like the monkey, oh that’s funny. The *Breaking Bad* thing, oh it’s *Breaking Bad*.”

- Millennial Independent



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# The Opportunity

With a saturated and competitive political advertising environment in the 2016 election cycle, campaigns will need to maximize opportunities to get the right messages in front of the right audiences at the right time.

Voters under 30 are expected to represent approximately 20 percent of the electorate in competitive states. Further, nearly two million voters under thirty turned out in 2008, but stayed home in 2012.<sup>vi</sup> Direct mail presents an opportunity to reach these Millennial voters. **Here's why:**

- Direct mail can hit them in the homes where campaigns know they live.
- Many Millennials anticipate and instantly read mail.
- Political mail spurs Millennials to research candidates online, discuss with friends and family, and remind them to vote.
- Attention-grabbing visuals encourage Millennials to further explore information on their own.

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With this in mind, how can a political direct mailpiece best grab the Millennial voter's attention? **Consider these tips:**

- Keep it short and sweet.
- Use a flat, double-sided design.
- Use bolding, bullets, short phrases, and large high-contrast fonts to make key points stand out.
- Clearly source quotes or third-party information, particularly on negative mailers.
- Provide clear references for further engagement by sharing websites and social media.
- Provide an explicit call to action for voters.
- Invite young voters to share information with their family and friends.
- Use images of candidates in authentic, real-life situations.

Beyond Millennials, these tips could be applied to all campaigns and organizations seeking to influence the 2016 election season. Campaigns are increasingly sophisticated in their ability to reach every voter and deliver specific, customized messages thanks to advanced data-mining techniques. This means voters can connect to the issues they care about most, and in turn, advertising dollars are spent more efficiently.

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One of the most useful and indispensable communications tools for campaigns of all sizes remains direct mail. Let us help you get the highest positive return on your political direct mail.





For more information,  
please visit:

**[DeliverTheWin.com](http://DeliverTheWin.com)**



## **AAPC STATEMENT:**

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The AAPC and the USPS are pleased to be working together on improving processes and exploring new and innovative products. We have held listening sessions with AAPC members and executives from the USPS in Austin, Chicago, and Washington, DC. Throughout this process, both sides have learned from and educated the other, developing a mutually beneficial long-term relationship.

We both look forward to many collaborative years ahead, including sharing resources and research on the efficacy of political mail.

i USPS and Summit Research conducted a national online survey among 1,156 U.S. adults from March 18-23, 2016.  
By utilizing an oversample, total sample size for Millennials = 671.

ii <http://www.federalreserve.gov/econresdata/consumers-and-mobile-financial-services-report-201503.pdf>

iii <http://www.gallup.com/poll/182261/four-americans-look-forward-checking-mail.aspx>

iv The DMA 2015 Statistical Fact Book, USPS Household Diary Study, 2014, p. 61.

v <http://www.civicyouth.org/youthvote2016/>

vi <https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p20-573.pdf>



