

NO MORE JUNK MAIL GUIDE

What's The Problem?

Many people find unsolicited advertising mail, or junk mail, irritating. Not only does junk mail invade our privacy and waste paper, the ceaseless promotions may tempt us to buy things we don't really want or need. Fed by advertising, our desire for acquisition of material goods results in excessive resource consumption in a finite world.

The US Environmental Protection Agency reported that in 1995 the quantity of catalogs and other advertising mail in the US was 5.3 million tons, which took 90 million trees to produce. Nearly half is discarded unread. Recycling junk mail does reduce garbage, but only 15% of this paper is recovered for recycling. Even when recycled, junk mail can only be used for low quality products because of the inks, glues, plastics, and variety of paper types, not to mention the occasional shampoo sample or CD ROM disk. Very little of it finds its way back into new junk mail, which is predominantly made from trees. Paper production, whether from recycled or virgin fibers, uses significant quantities of energy and water and produces waste sludge which must be landfilled, not to mention the vehicle emissions from trucking all that paper around.

The most effective way to reduce the environmental impacts of junk mail is to reduce the quantity produced. Marketers will only stop producing so much junk mail when it is widely rejected by consumers.

Why Do I Get So Much Junk Mail?

There are numerous ways your junk mail can proliferate. When you enter a contest, write a check, subscribe to a magazine, sign up for a credit card, fill out a warranty card, join a professional association, make a donation, buy a house or car, or have a baby, your name may be sold or traded. Getting hold of your name and address is big business, as junk mail comprises 12% of advertising expenditures in this country and generates \$1.2 trillion in annual sales.

How Do I Get Rid of It?

Believe it or not, not everyone's mailbox is overflowing. You, too, can limit access to your name and address so that it won't be traded, rented or sold to companies who send you unwanted mail. This guide offers you a three step strategy to prevent new junk mail from finding its way to your doorstep, reduce your current flow of unwanted mail, and recycle the occasional piece that sneaks in.

This approach may seem time consuming at first, but it is ultimately the most effective. It may take several months for deletions to become effective. You must be persistent, and you might have to repeat some of the steps. You won't get rid of it all, but you can substantially reduce the amount of junk mail you receive. Whenever possible, tips are offered that make the company sending you the unwanted mail bear the cost of getting your name off their mailing list.

Direct marketers actually benefit when you get off their lists, as it saves them printing and postage costs and improves the targeting of their lists to potential customers.

STEP 1: PREVENTION -- Stop Junk Mail Before it Starts

These preventative actions will keep junk mail from new sources out of your mailbox. If you do nothing else, register with the Mail Preference Service and the national credit bureau Opt-Out system (first two items below) to remove your name from many national mailing lists of companies who send you catalogs, sweepstakes entries, credit card offers, and other personally addressed advertising mail.

Mail Preference Service

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) is the largest trade association in the direct marketing field with more than 3,600 member companies. Their Mail Preference Service (MPS) provides consumers with a way to opt out of receiving most personally addressed national advertising mail. Send your name and address to the address below (a pre-addressed card is included in this guide). Include all variations in spelling that appear on mailings that you receive-even misspellings! For example, Linda Ann Brown might also receive mail as Linda Brown, L.A. Brown, or L. Brown. A consumer's name and address are maintained in the file for five years, at which time you have to register again. The DMA only complies with signed requests sent by mail.

Direct Marketing Association, Mail Preference Service, PO BOX 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008

When you register with MPS, your name is placed on a "suppression list" which is made available to marketing companies four times a year. Conscientious direct mailers get the suppression list and merge it with their mailing lists to delete all those names. It may take several months to see an effect.

Registering with MPS will not end all advertising mail. You will continue to receive mail from companies with which you do business on a regular basis, or from charitable or commercial organizations which do not choose to use MPS. In addition, you may continue to receive mail from many local merchants, professional and alumni associations, political candidates and mail addressed to "occupant" or "resident." Business mail is not affected by registration with MPS.

The payoff from registering with the Mail Preference Service should multiply by July 1, 1999, the effective date of DMA's Privacy Promise, which requires its members to use the suppression lists and give customers clear and repeated notice that they have a choice not to have their contact information rented, sold or exchanged (up to now these ethical standards have been only recommended).

Opt-Out From Credit Card Solicitations

Credit card issuers jam the mailboxes of US consumers with approximately 3 billion solicitations annually, according to Consumer Reports, October '98. Federal legislation that took effect in 1997 enables consumers to remove their names from the lists that credit bureaus provide to credit-card issuers. There is now a single number for consumers to call to get off these mailing lists. The new toll-free number is: 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (888-567-8688).

Consumers are asked to give their name, address and social security number in order to have their name removed. If you are reluctant to give out your social security number as a privacy concern, keep in mind that the credit reporting agency, which keeps tabs on your credit history, already has access to your social security number. They already compromised your privacy by selling your name to the financial institutions offering you credit.

Calling the Opt-Out number will get you off all credit bureau marketing lists for two years. You can request a form that will allow you to take your name off these credit bureau lists permanently. The three big credit reporting agencies in the US that are participating in the Opt-Out system are Equifax, Experian and Trans Union.

Junk Mail You Want To Get

Almost by definition, "junk" mail is mail you don't want. You probably do want to keep getting certain magazines, newsletters, and special catalogs, so there are some mailing lists you want to stay on. If you are not sure the organizations maintaining the lists you want to stay on know your privacy concerns, call or write their customer service departments and ask that your name be kept on an "in-house list" only. List exchange is common among non-profits as well as businesses. Be sure to contact your mail-order companies, membership organizations and magazines. Contact each institution issuing you a credit card, as there is no central customer service bureau for Visa or Master Card. Don't forget your long distance telephone carrier, cable TV company, or airline frequent flyer programs.

Post Office Change-of-Address Cards

Filling out a change-of-address form when you move is voluntary, but the Post Office won't forward your mail without it. The official Mail Forwarding Change of Address Form (Postal Form 3575) is now privately printed and packaged in a booklet of advertisements. Even the Post Office gets into the promotional spirit by sending you "valuable coupons" about your new neighborhood. The Postal Service sells names from change-of-address cards-some 40 million annually-to mailing list companies. Updates are theoretically provided only to those who already have your name and old address, but list brokers are under no such restrictions when they resell the lists.

As an alternative to filing the change of address form, send out your own postcards announcing your new address to those whose mail you want to receive. You can also ask your old post office to hold your mail for pick up until everyone knows your new address.

The Telephone Book

If you are listed in the White Pages of the telephone book, your name, address and phone number are, for all practical purposes, public record. Mailing list companies collect this information and sell it to marketing firms and also compile directories organized by address and phone number rather than by name. These "street address directories," also known as "reverse directories" or "city directories," are often used for marketing purposes. Such directories are also one of several sources of information used by emergency response agencies.

If you are concerned about keeping your name and address private, consider having an unlisted number. Or request that the local phone company publish just your name and phone number and omit your address. Ask the phone company to remove your listing from its "street address directory." If your name is unlisted in the phone book, it will not be sold. Otherwise, call or write to the major independent directory companies and request that your listing be removed. As these companies compile many types of lists, specify that you want your name excluded from city directories. At the same time you can ask to be removed from their mailing and telemarketing lists.

-- Haines & Company, Inc., publisher of Criss-Cross Directory (800) 562-8262

-- R. L. Polk & Co., Opt-Out Program (800) 873-7655

Political Mail

During election season we all get lots of extra mail. While informing the electorate is a worthy goal, some campaigns carry on their mudslinging to voluminous extremes. The voter rolls are public records, and that's where the campaigns find your name. While failing to register would eliminate some junk mail, the consequence of giving up the vote would be counterproductive. Better to retain your constitutionally guaranteed voice in shaping public issues of concern to you such as reduction of junk mail. Note that listing your phone number on your voter registration form is optional.

Warranty Cards

The main purpose for warranty cards is to provide demographic and lifestyle information about you to marketers. Your warranty will still be valid if you keep proof of purchase, even if you don't fill out a warranty card. The only thing you might miss out on is news of a product recall. If you want to return the card for that reason, only provide your name, address and product serial number. Be sure to check the opt-out box on the card if there is one, or write a note saying you don't want your name used for marketing purposes. Demographic information is compiled by the Polk Company, a DMA member, so registering with the Mail Preference Service should eliminate mail from this source. You may also call Polk's Opt-Out number listed above.

Supermarket Scanners

Supermarket "buyers club" cards do more than give you a discount. They allow the store to find out your buying preferences so they or other businesses can more effectively market you. To preserve your privacy, don't use the card and forego the discount.

Eternal Vigilance

The price of liberty from unwanted mail is being vigilant whenever you give out your name and address. Special cases to watch for are included in the Prevention section below. When signing up for a credit card, making a donation, ordering an item through the mail, joining an organization, or subscribing to a publication, tell the organization or company not to release your name to anyone else. (Mail-back notes are included with this guide for this purpose.) However, they often ignore the initial request, so contact them again a few weeks later.

STEP 2: DELETION -- Get Off Current Junk Mail Lists

As soon as you receive an unwanted piece of direct mail-especially if you have seen one like it before-contact the mailer to see that you don't get any more. Tips in this section offer help in getting off lists for specific types of mailings. If you continue to get the same mail for more than a few months, be persistent. Contact the company again and insist that they delete your name. If all else fails, file a Post Office Prohibitory Order, below.

Mail Order Catalogs

Catalog mailing lists are perhaps the easiest to get off. Call their 800 number-many have 24-hour operators-and ask to be removed from their mailing list. Most companies courteously comply, and they pay for the call. Unfortunately, these are among the easiest lists to get back on.

If you are a customer of one mail order company, you are likely to receive offers from other companies, as firms commonly rent their mailing list to other businesses. So, if you subscribe to a cooking magazine, you may find yourself receiving mail order catalogs for kitchen supplies and food specialties. Registering with the DMA Mail Preference Service (see above) should stop the exchange of your name among DMA member companies.

Surveys

Issue oriented non-profit or political organizations sometimes mail out a survey that gives you the impression that you are registering your opinion with government decision makers. The survey is, of course, accompanied by a donation request. Even if you return the survey without a donation, the fact that you responded in any way makes your name a valuable commodity for trading.

Sweepstakes

Don't enter, and don't be tempted to buy their products. A contest that sounds too good to be true probably is. Sweepstakes mailings account for roughly one billion pieces of mail each year in the US. DMA studies show that 11 percent of Americans bought products or subscribed to magazines in response to sweepstakes promotions, believing, incorrectly, that the purchases would increase their chances of winning. The odds of winning are incredibly low (published odds of winning the \$1 million prize in the 1998 Reader's Digest sweepstakes: 600 million to 1). However, the odds of getting on other solicitation mailing lists are almost certain.

The major nationwide sweepstakes mailers are members of the DMA, so MPS registration should keep you from getting this type of mail. If you are receiving their sweepstakes mailings, call to have your name removed from their lists.

- Publishers Clearinghouse 800/645-9242
- Readers Digest 800/234-9000
- American Family Publishers 800/237-2400

Refusing & Sending Back Mail

The Postal Service is required by law to deliver mail if proper postage is paid. However, you don't have to accept

it.

Some unopened mail may be sent back. This works for all first class mail and any bulk mail marked "Address Correction Requested" or "Return Postage Guaranteed." Cross out your name and write "Return to Sender-Refused by addressee-Remove Name from Mailing List." The mailer pays the postage for the return trip, so they get the message.

If a postage-paid Business Reply envelope was included, send it back with the card that has your name and address printed on it. Write a note next to your name such as "Please remove my name from your mailing list." While you are at it, you can stuff all the paper they sent you back in the envelope, too. They pay the postage and get to deal with their waste. Business Reply postcards also let you contact the company at their expense. Refusing bulk mail is also allowed by the Post Office. Write "REFUSED" on unopened junk mail and leave it in your mailbox, flagging your carrier for pickup. Unfortunately, all the Post Office will do is pick up and toss out refused mail (at best, recycle it), but the company that sent it will never know, and they will keep sending more until you communicate with them directly.

Dear Occupant

Advertisers can reach everyone in a town or neighborhood with a "saturation mailing" addressed to "Resident" or "Occupant" at a discounted postage rate. Advertisers buy mailing lists of street addresses from list brokers, who regularly obtain updated information from the Postal Service.

Here are opt-out options for some common "Occupant" mailings received locally:

-- ADVO Mailbox Values (a postcard, often with a picture of a missing child, that accompanies a bundle of unaddressed ads similar to newspaper inserts) Deletions Department (510) 505-6500 ext. 523

-- Val-Pac Coupons (a fat envelope full of coupons, distributed by Carol Wright/Cox Direct). Address Information Department (800) 237-6266 ext. 3362

-- The Sentinel Neighbor (free local weekly newspaper). Circulation Department 458-0111

-- AdWorks (local coupon mailing). Mail your address label to AdWorks, 3601 Caldwell Dr., Suite B, Soquel, CA 95073.

-- Quality Coupons (local coupon book mailing). Mail your address label to Quality Coupons, 2851-C Research Park Dr., Soquel, CA 95073.

These last two will forward your label to their list supplier for deletion. Caution: This action will delete your address from all "Resident" lists the supplier prints for all clients, including city, county recycling, and water district newsletters. In spite of what they say, the deletion is probably not permanent, and you will have to repeat this step if the coupons return.

Rural Routes and Box Holders

Residents on rural routes or with P.O. Box addresses face a greater challenge than most in getting off lists addressed to "Occupant" or "Resident." Since the mailing companies like ADVO are allowed to use a simplified address that only identifies the postal carrier route without the specific box numbers, the mailers cannot delete specific addresses. In this situation, after notifying the mailer, a resident must also call on the Post Office for assistance in stopping the offending mail. The Post Office complies by having the mail carrier put a notice on the inside of the mailbox specifying which mailing is not wanted, such as "No ADVO." The Postal Service Prohibitory Order (see below) is available if your Post Office seems reluctant to assist you in stopping a mailing.

Prohibitory Order

As a last resort, if you cannot stop mail from a particular non-governmental mailer, the ultimate tool is to formally enlist the help of the Post Office by filing an Application for Prohibitory Order, Postal Service Form 1500, at any Post Office. While the Order, established by Federal law in 1968, was initially designed to stop sexually

provocative advertising, court cases have held that the determination of what constitutes offensive material is at the sole discretion of the recipient. For example, if clear-cutting of virgin forests to produce glossy advertising strikes you as obscene, you can use the Prohibitory Order to stop the mailings if other methods have not been successful.

"Every man's mail today is made up overwhelmingly of material he did not seek from persons he does not know. And all too often it is matter he finds offensive," Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote for the majority in the 1970 US Supreme Court case, *Rowan v. US Post Office*. "A vendor does not have a constitutional right to send unwanted material into someone's home."

Form 1500 is free and only requires your name and address and the sender's. Turn in the form with a copy of the offensive mailing. If the mailing doesn't stop in 30 days, it is the Postmaster's responsibility to send a certified letter to the sender and enforce the law. The prohibition is for a specific mailer, so you can't say you find all junk mail offensive and want it stopped.

STEP 3: RECYCLE -- What to Do With the Junk Mail You Get

Some unwanted mail will undoubtedly get through, so please recycle it. Junk mail can be recycled as "mixed waste paper."

Curbside Pickup: Mixed paper is accepted in the City of Los Angeles curbside recycling program. Please contact (800) 773-CITY.

Most Post Offices in the county offer mixed paper recycling to patrons. Nationally, the Postal Service is making pencils out of undelivered mail.

Support Waste Prevention & Reuse

- Eliminate duplicate copies of catalogs or publications you want to receive by calling their office.
- Cancel some subscriptions if you find you don't have the time to read all the magazines you are receiving.
- Patronize mail order catalogs which are printed on recycled paper, offer products made from recycled materials, or contribute a portion of their proceeds to environmental causes.
- Reuse paper printed on only one side for notes or scratch paper.
- Save envelopes included in junk mail for reuse. When reusing envelopes, be sure to cross out or cover the pre-printed address and bar code. Address labels printed with "Re-Use Envelopes-Save Trees!" and made from recycled paper are available from: Friends of the Earth (202) 783-7400 <http://www.foe.org>

Future Steps

Why not a single toll-free number for opting-out of all lists? Better yet, an opt-in system in which you must consciously choose to be on a mailing list, with privacy of personal information as the default. There is a growing national groundswell-your individual action is adding to it-which has led to some legislative successes, primarily in the arena of privacy protection. Let your elected officials know you support legislation to stop unsolicited junk mail.

Other Resources

Contact these organizations for more information on stopping junk mail and related topics-telemarketing, spam (junk E-Mail), and junk faxes.

- No More Junk Mail Forever-Telemarketing & Spam, Too (28 page booklet) Good Advice Press (800) 255-0899
- EcoFuture (Internet site with good tips & links to other resources) <http://www.ecofuture.org/ecofuture>
- The Direct Marketing Association's Telephone Preference Service reduces telemarketing calls. To register, mail the card included in this guide.

SAMPLE POSTCARD IDEAS FOR REDUCING JUNK MAIL

(CARD 1)

Direct Marketing Association
 Mail Preference Service
 PO BOX 9008
 Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008

Please register me with the Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service. I want to reduce the amount of unsolicited mail I receive, reduce waste, and save resources.

I understand you will keep my name on file for 5 years.

Name: _____ Alternate Spellings: _____

Phone Number: (_____) _____

Address: _____ Apt.: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(CARD 2)

Direct Marketing Association
 Telephone Preference Service
 PO BOX 9014
 Farmingdale, NY 11735-9014

Please register me with the Direct Marketing Association's Telephone Preference Service. I want to prevent my name and home phone number from being used for telemarketing purposes.

Name: _____

Phone Number: (_____) _____

Address: _____ Apt.: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(CARD 3)

I want to reduce the amount of unsolicited mail I receive in order to save resources and reduce waste.

Please take my name off your mailing list, and do not sell, rent, or exchange my name. Thanks.

(affix your mailing label here)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

SAMPLE NOTES

Mail-Back Notes

Use the note below to keep your name from being released for marketing purposes. Send a note along when you make a donation, join an organization, subscribe to a magazine, make a mail-order purchase, etc.

To:

From:

I am instructing you to NOT RENT, SELL, OR EXCHANGE my name to any other organization. I want to reduce the amount of unwanted mail I receive and save the paper and resources which are wasted producing it. If you cannot honor my request, please return my check. Thank you.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Printed on the blank side of used paper to save resources)

Note: This document may be reproduced in whole or part without restriction for not-for-profit purposes only. Information in this guide was compiled and checked for accuracy in January 1999 by the County of Santa Cruz Department of Public Works. Additional local information was added by the City of Los Angeles Solid Resources Citywide Recycling Division, (213) 473-8228, E-mail: SRCRD@san.ci.la.ca.us. For further information about recycling and environmental issues call EPA Recycling Hotline at (800) CLEANUP.

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Background information: do not print.

Department of Public Works

County of Santa Cruz

701 Ocean Street, Rm. 410

Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Waste Reduction Program

(831) 454-2373

E-MAIL: recycle@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

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Do **not** add SCE-mail and voice mail for LA distribution as they have a very small staff to answer any questions.