

## Finishing to Enhance VDP – DMN March 07

By Frank McPherson

When marketers think of VDP, they think about data, as well they should. But did you know that there are traditional finishing techniques that, especially when combined with personalization, can enhance the response rate of direct mail projects, too? One recent test bolstered response rates by 50% over traditional methods!

Although there are a variety of techniques that can be used, we'll look at three of them here: "spot coating," custom die-cutting, and the use of clear envelopes. While these techniques are not necessarily personalized (although, in the case of die-cutting and spot coating, they can be), the point is that they create attention and therefore increase response rates. The more attention the piece generates, the higher the response rate will be.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

**1. Clear envelopes.** Clear envelopes are eye-catching, and because they are not commonly used, your direct mail piece will stand out from all others by virtue of using clear envelopes alone. Even if you don't *need* to put your personalized direct mailer into an envelope, you might want to consider doing so just for this reason.

If you are using personalization, the clear envelope has an additional benefit, as well. First, the recipient can see the piece, including its marketing hook, through the envelope (thereby avoiding one barrier to response up front). Second, by getting them to take the second look, it gives them yet another opportunity to see the *variable* element in the piece, enticing them further.

Clear envelopes do add to the cost of the piece, but because they tend to create higher return rates, this often outweighs the additional cost. In a recent comparison between the use of clear envelopes and regular envelopes, both containing personalized materials, the clear envelopes resulted in approximately 50% increase in the response rate.

**2. "Spot coating"** Spot coating is another way to grab recipient attention. Not all digital presses offer spot coating capabilities, but some, such as the HP Indigo 5000, do. While static spot coating is available for digitally printed pieces using offline processes, *variable* coating can only be produced by the press as part of the print process.

Say you want to highlight someone's name by spot coating around it, or you want to spot coat around any of a number of images that vary in size and shape (or even position) based on information in the customer database. Using personalization, the size, shape, and location of the coating can be married to the personalization in the piece itself.

Variable spot coating can add approximately 10% to the cost of the job, but as with clear envelopes, this cost is often justified in higher response rates. It's also recommended that you use it in such a way that maximize the use of the coating. You might want to highlight not only the name but aspects of the design, as well, such as making stars shine more brightly or adding more reflection to the water.

**3. Die-cutting.** Just as pieces can be spot coated to match the personalized images, they can be die-cut to match, as well. Say you want to die cut around the image(s) of any number of elements whose size and shape varies. Now you can match the die-cuts to those images, even if they vary from one piece to the next. Or you might want to die-cut around the recipient's name, which might vary in height and length. Perhaps you might simply want to highlight the first initial. You can do whatever it takes to grab attention.

In years past, one of the problems with die-cutting variable pieces was that, if the design wasn't good, it was difficult to be able to keep the registration tight. The earlier presses simply didn't have the registration capabilities that they do today. This, along with other advancements, now allow some die-cutters to be able to handle this exciting technique.

VDP and 1:1 targeted marketing have entered a new era. Personalization offers tremendous potential for catching customer attention and driving up response rates, but it no longer has to do it alone. There are lots of features that can be used to draw attention to the personalized elements in direct mail pieces (and other personalized documents) that were not available before. In this case, innovative use of what we tend to think of as "traditional" finishing and packaging techniques can take what is already a powerful marketing tool and make it even more so.