

## Advertising Mail and the Environment >>>

### Myths and Realities

Direct mail has an environmental impact - but what is a myth and what is reality? Knowing the facts helps consumers, businesses and organizations formulate more informed opinions about the value of the communications in their mailbox.

**Myth:** Trees are being destroyed to produce catalogs and direct mail pieces.



**Reality:** Direct mail is not trees, it is printed communication. Thanks to sustainable forestry practices throughout North America, the amount of forested lands has grown significantly in recent years, providing for a steady, responsible supply of fiber used to make paper. Trees are harvested and replanted on a continuing basis. Today, we have more forests in the United States than we did 50 years ago, and about the same forestland in the United States as we had 100 years ago (U.S. Forest Resource Facts and Historical Trends). Old-growth forests are not harvested to make direct mail paper, and the marketplace is beginning to "certify" paper that originates from sustainably forested lands.

**Myth:** Catalogs and direct mail cannot be recycled, or are difficult to recycle.

**Reality:** In 2007, the Federal Trade Commission gave direct marketing businesses and organizations clearance to begin including "recycle please" messaging on catalogs and direct mail pieces. That's because a super-majority (65%) of U.S. residents now have access to local recycling collection options, such as drop-off and curbside pickup. Discarded catalogs classify as "old magazines," and are highly valued for the long, strong fiber that they contain - making discarded catalogs (and magazines) a perfect candidate for reuse as recycled paper in office papers and newsprint. Discarded direct mail most often classifies as "mixed paper" and is recycled as tissue papers here at home and exported abroad. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 35.8% of discarded Standard Mail was recovered for recycling in 2005 - a near seven-fold increase since 1990, and an 11.9% increase since 2003 (2005 Municipal Solid Waste in the United States).



**Claim:** Discarded mail is filling up America's landfills.



**Reality:** Discarded direct mail represents just 2.4% of municipal solid waste, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the recycling recovery rate has grown nearly 700% since 1990. As a result, while direct mail volume in the United States has grown 57% in 15 years, the amount of discarded mail sent to landfills has remained virtually unchanged (2005 Municipal Solid Waste in the United States).

**Myth:** The production and disposal of mail is a wasteful use of energy.

**Reality:** Is the generation of commerce and consumer education a wasteful use of energy and print communication? More than 4 in 10 Americans make shop-at-home purchases - participating in the "Largest Carpool on Earth" (MediaMark, 2006). By shopping (and donating) direct, these consumers and businesses use the convenience of their home and office to research and make purchase decisions, and rely on courier companies and the U.S. Postal Service, as they make their appointed rounds, to deliver the goods - creating a highly efficient distribution of goods and services. Consumers also use direct mail to make targeted trips to retail locations, rather than impulsive ones.

**Myth:** Direct mail volume is growing out of control.

**Reality:** Direct mail growth reflects U.S. economic growth. So, why is direct mail growing, even in the digital age? Because it is more targeted than ever - and by measuring response, companies and organizations know that direct mail works. It is among the most efficient forms of advertising -- typically, response rates to today's targeted direct mail campaigns are measured in whole, single and double-digit figures. Direct-response advertising in magazines and newspapers generate response rates measured in the hundredths of a single percentage point and broadcast media response rates are measured in the

thousandths of a single percentage point of total audience reached. Even permission-based e-mail response rates rarely surpass that of targeted direct mail (Direct Marketing Association, 2006).

**Myth:** Americans throw much of their direct mail away unopened.

**Reality:** The average U.S. household receives less than three pieces of direct mail advertising per day. According to the USPS Household Diary Study (2006), 16% of households choose not to read their mail - the vast majority, 81 percent read or scan the direct mail they receive. Almost all mail eventually is discarded, thus it is vital to have recycling options available for Americans at the community level.

**Sources:**

U.S. Forest Resource Facts and Historical Trends - [Click here to visit source](#)

2005 Municipal Solid Waste in the United States, Facts and Figures, U.S. EPA - [Click here to visit source](#)

updated: Monday, December 15, 2008 9:56 AM