

Direct mail or junk mail?

Direct mail is an industry on to itself, with an association (Direct Marketing Association) and a whole class of direct marketing specialists. The idea is that direct mail is the ultimate targeted medium. It is also ultimately invasive. Who does not get letters and catalogs overflowing the mailbox? Of course, some of this direct mail comes from organizations (usually nonprofits) to which you have contributed or otherwise been involved with. Some catalogs come from stores you have shopped in. Although not solicited, these items seem to be less junk than other junk. What is junk, in my mind, are the thousands of unsolicited credit card applications and circulars that we get. Those aren't targeted at all. Especially not the circulars (although I am sure there is a circular manager out there that will argue they are targeted by zip code and all that). But as a writer, there is a difference between convincing an existing or former donor to consider giving again to a charity and a mass mailing for window blinds or steam cleaning services. For the latter, direct mail is just another form of advertising. It is basically the same as their electronic or print advertising, and may even be part of a package (newspapers often sell this as an added value...advertise in the newspaper and we will add you to our weekly circular to zip codes you choose, etc.)

The trouble is many people just toss out all direct mail, especially circulars. Thus the garbage can is really the targeted audience. Also, the amount of paper these mailings generate has become the target of many environmentalists out there. Yet the mailings keep coming. I was just in Australia where many mailboxes carry the sign "no junk mail." Unfortunately, we don't have this here in America. And, from what I understand, the mail carrier is required by law to deliver the circulars and other mail to your box.

It would be better for both the direct mailer and the direct

mailee if there were choice involved. If I choose to receive a mailing, I may pay attention to that mailing. If all I do with unsolicited mail is throw it out, the message is not being heard and there is actual harm being done to the environment.