

# Direct Experience

Distributors name lack of expertise as the No. 1 reason for not selling direct mail.

BY KRISTIN QUINN

**W**hen Eileen Hoffman joined Innovative Print and Media Group Inc., Phoenixville, Pa., in 2002, she brought with her what President Rob Whitman describes as “deep and dynamic” experience in direct mail.

Since then, direct mail has grown to be the largest single offering of Innovative’s business at 30 percent, with Hoffman leading a four-person, direct mail team. This year, Whitman says he expects that percentage to rise to 50, as the company recently won a multimillion dollar direct mail program contract.

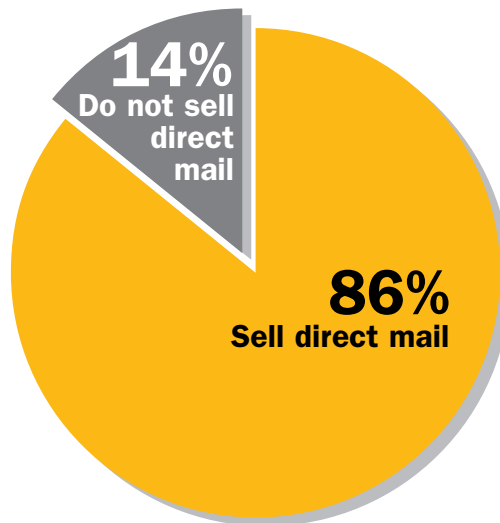
“We’ve been selling a variety of direct mail related services for years, but our business really grew dynamically when we improved our resources associated with our consultant experience and expertise on staff,” Whitman says.

Innovative’s direct mail team is one example of how some distributors are going the extra mile to not only sell direct mail but also generate profits for their clients. It also demonstrates what distributors who don’t sell direct mail say they need: more knowledge on staff.

In a survey of distributors conducted by trade manufacturer Colortree, Richmond, Va., and *Print Solutions*

Magazine in June, nearly 40 percent of distributors who don’t sell direct mail named lack of expertise in marketing, mailpiece design and mailing as their reason for not doing so.

## How Many Distributors Sell Direct Mail Components?



According to the Direct Marketing Association, direct mail sales reached \$54.7 billion in 2008 and accounted for 26.6 percent of all direct marketing tactics. These numbers are reflected in the survey, with nearly 86 percent of respondents noting that they sell direct mail.

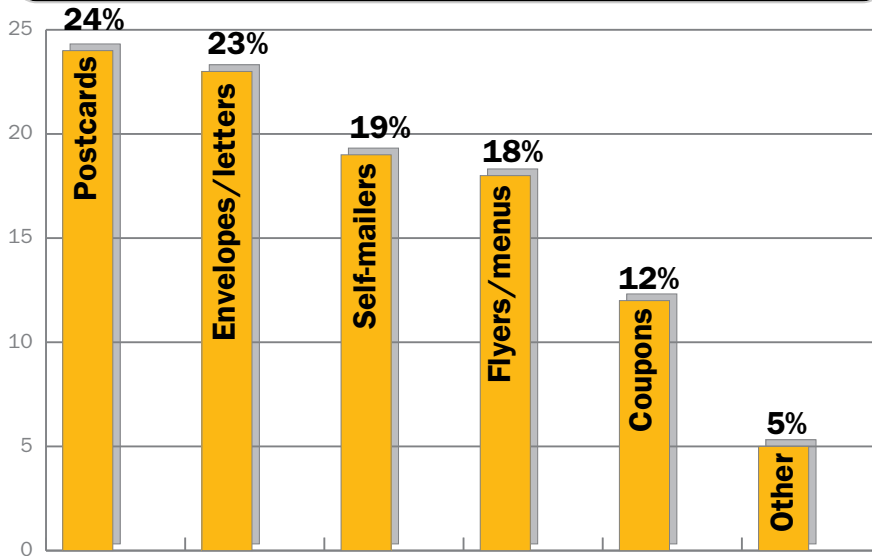
**Mike Rudnicki**, president of **KMR Partners Inc.**, Wilmette, Ill., says he was surprised that so many distributors sell direct mail, but warned that the number may be deceptive. “If someone does one postcard mailing a year, they’re going to tell you they do direct mail,” **Rudnicki** says. Survey respondents named postcards as the direct mail product they sell the most at nearly 24 percent, with letters and envelopes a close second at just more than 23 percent.

**Rudnicki**, whose company specializes in direct mail solutions, says the key is not to find out how many distributors are selling direct mail, but what percentage of their business is direct mail. He added that many distributors who want to try their hand at direct mail sell postcards because they are the easiest. However, the more complicated a mailing gets, the more necessary and valuable mailing expertise becomes. Therefore, even distributors who already sell direct mail such as postcards may have a need for continued education.

“If a brochure gets out a week late, usually the world isn’t going to end,” **Rudnicki** says. “But if a direct mail date is set, you need to make sure that the mail gets out on time.” Strong project management through production and postal optimization, data management and security, inventory management, variable data approval, marketing consultation and fulfillment all play a role

This story is based on results of a survey sponsored by ColorTree, Richmond, Va., and administered by *Print Solutions Magazine*. The survey was completed by 245 people in June 2009. The purpose of the survey was to gather information from print distributors regarding their perspectives on selling direct mail.

## Types of Direct Mail Products Distributors Sell



in the success of a direct mail campaign, **Rudnicki** says.

Whitman agrees that there is a lot more to consider when it comes to direct mail. "The direct mail business is much more consultative than traditional printing and needs more techni-

cal expertise," Whitman says. He adds that good distributors can learn from experience with small to medium-sized print jobs, but for larger direct mail projects, it may be essential to have production managers with previous direct mail experience. ↵

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**Rob Whitman, President  
Innovative Print and  
Media Group Inc.,  
Phoenixville, Pa.**



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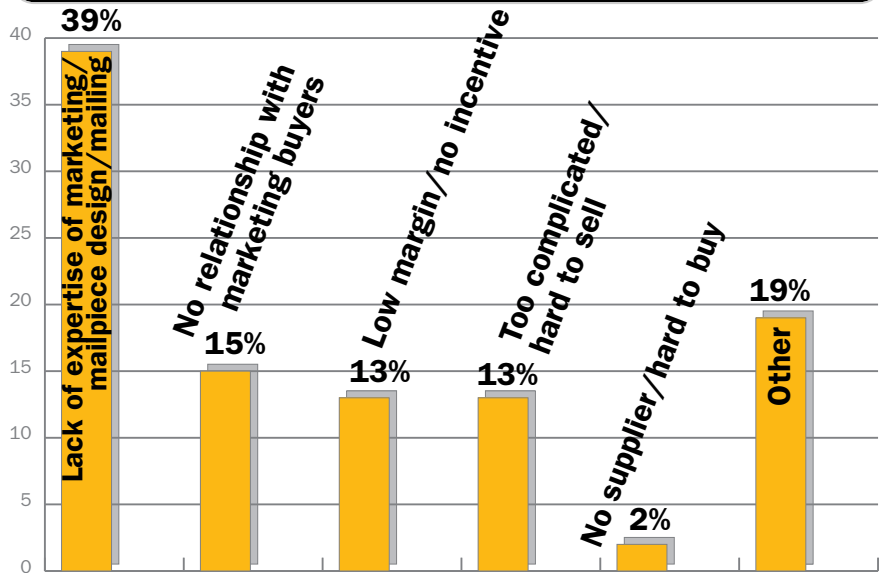


Rudnicki says his direct mail business is more than just taking orders—it is about helping clients achieve results through value-added services. For example, if a client wants to send a one-time, direct mailing to 50,000 people, he may suggest they do three to five mailings to a more targeted audience of 15,000. Or if a client requests a direct mail piece on 9-by-12-inch paper, his team might work with them to redesign it using 8.5-by-11-inch paper to save on the cost of printing.

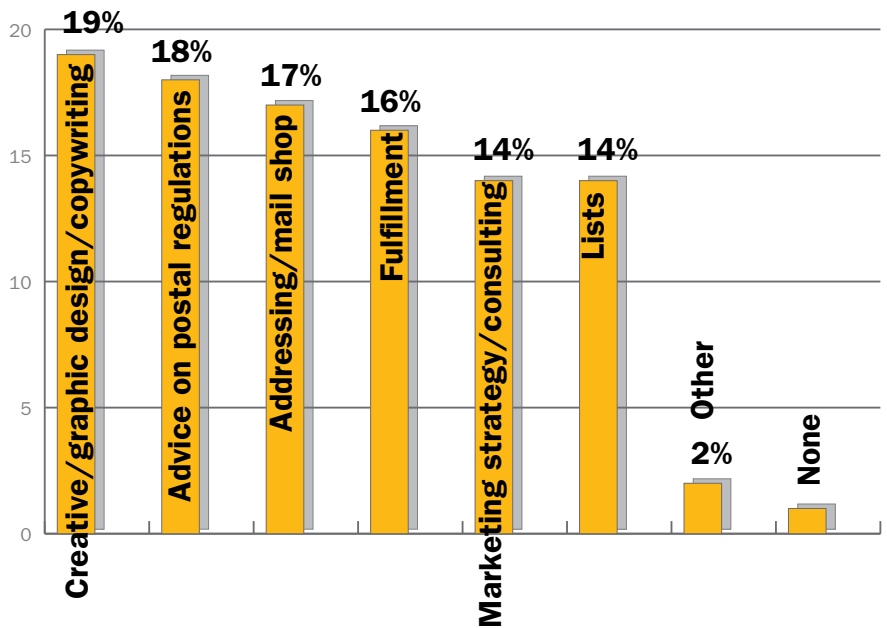
Colortree Marketing Director Ed Glaser says the company conducted the survey to gain distributor perspectives for a new direct mail product it is developing. Glaser says while the survey was useful because Colortree learned that distributors are selling direct mail and desire more direct mail knowledge, he wishes they had asked distributors to list what specifically they wanted to learn about direct mail.

“We wanted to determine what those reasons were so that we could offer them some sort of education that would get them over the hump and they’d be able to sell,” Glaser said.

**Reasons Some Distributors Don’t Sell Direct Mail**



**What Value Added Services Do Distributors Provide with Direct Mail?**



Paul Edwards, CDC, president of FormStore Incorporated, Fenton, Mo., says, “One of the simplest ways to learn about direct mailing is to do it yourself.” Edwards says sending out their own direct mailing will allow distributors to experience the process firsthand, from conceiving the idea and the design to developing a mailing list and goal. **PS**

**Interested in Learning More about Direct Mail?**  
Attend “Direct Marketing Applications That You Can Sell to Your Customers” at the Print Solutions 2009 Conference and Expo Oct. 13 to 15 in Chicago. Turn to page 34 for more information.

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