

# Same Words, Different Message

-Bob Salvas, *Success Mail*

One recent afternoon (we are in June as I write this) my son, who is in high school, came bouncing into the house smiling from ear to ear. “Dad, there’s only 10 days of school left!” he shouted. Later that same day, my daughter (middle school), slowly walked into the house looking somewhat depressed. I looked at her as she began to speak. “Dad,” she said slowly, “there’s only 10 days of school left...” Same words. Different message.

This event reminded me of the way that I look at the differences between e-mail and hard-copy mail. The words you put in either medium can be exactly the same but that message can be looked at very differently.

For example, last month did you send or give your mother (or someone close to you who is a mother) a card or gift on Mothers Day? Chances are you did. Why didn’t you consider just sending an e-mail? Even though the words may be the same, the vehicle ‘says’ a lot more about what you are trying to communicate, doesn’t it?

The idea that the medium affects the message is not a new idea:

“**The medium is the message** is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan meaning that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived. The phrase was introduced in his most widely known book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964.”

-Wikipedia



**Marshall McLuhan**

Mr. McLuhan’s work predates electronic mail, but I think the general idea that the message is affected by how it is delivered is very applicable today.

Certainly electronic communication is not going away nor would I imply that it should (hey, you are probably reading this article via electronic messaging right now!). But the fact is that many businesses are relying too heavily on this mode of communication in the area of marketing and building customer relationships.

Let’s consider marketing. All one has to do is look at the e-mail you receive daily from people or companies that you don’t know or don’t know well. More seem to come each day and it is causing tremendous clutter resulting in quick deletions and strong anti-spam programs. This clutter may be causing many consumers and businesses to be more responsive to regular mail than they were before. A recent survey by **DMNews** sited hard-copy mail as the number one preferred method for consumers to receive promotional materials (78%) compared to e-mail, which finished second. Two thirds of those surveyed said they are examining their mail more closely than they did a year ago. And the really interesting part of the survey was that 52% of the age group 18 to 39 reported greater satisfaction examining their hard-copy mail than their e-mail. Apparently it is not exclusive to baby boomers.

Beyond marketing messages, it is important to communicate certain relationship-building messages for clients via hard copy mail. The most obvious one to consider would be the THANK YOU. If you are not thanking your customers for their business and referrals, you are missing a huge opportunity to retain and grow your business. In days gone by, this was common practice. Today's fast-paced electronic world is missing the human touch that comes from the simple sending of a thank you card.

“In business, as in love, sometimes you've got to be thankful-and be willing to show it. And, as anyone with any romantic experience will attest, when it comes to displaying affection, cards and gifts beat e-mail every time.”

- *Deliver Magazine May 2009*

It is a business fact of life that you will lose customers over time and the number one reason they will leave is because of 'indifference'- they think you do not care about them. Everyone wants to be appreciated. As a business person, you need to show that appreciation and an e-mail is simply not going to be enough.

If you are too busy to hand-write thank you cards, services like *SendOutCards* (which I use and I am a distributor for) allow you to go online and the company prints and mails the cards for you at a low cost. So there is no longer an excuse not to do hard-copy cards.

The bottom line is that hard-copy mail should be a part of your communication mix. It is a key ingredient to building good relationships. E-mail is great when you have information to send to someone with whom you have an existing relationship. But when you are trying to emotionally connect, e-mail is lacking. We need to emotionally connect to someone to get them to consider our product or service at the beginning and we must periodically connect with them while they are our customer to let them know we care. Remember that the medium we choose to send these messages can make a big difference.

Maya Angelou said it best:

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

