



ELIMINATING JUNK MAIL

Not only is junk mail annoying and distressing, the creation of junk mail represents an enormous use of natural resources. According to 41pounds.org, the average American receives 41 pounds of junk mail yearly, 44% of which goes to a landfill unopened. More than 100 million trees are destroyed and 28 billion gallons of water are wasted to produce and recycle it annually. On a personal level, the average adult wastes 70 hours dealing with it each year. Last, but not least, your municipality uses your taxpayer dollars to pay for the waste and recycling costs associated with junk mail.

Junk mail is the direct result of being on someone's mailing list. It starts when you purchase an item, register with a company, donate to a charity, apply for credit or enter a contest. All of these organizations are guilty of selling their mailing lists to other organizations. Even the U.S. Postal Service sells its lists!

Eliminating junk mail does involve an investment of your time but the dividends start paying off within 12-16 weeks. By that time you should notice an 80-95% decrease in your junk mail volume.

Listed below are multiple steps you can take to ease the junk mail burden. The limitations of each approach are also included. So grab a cup of coffee, take a deep breath and get started!

- **Direct Marketing Association**-Representing 3,600 companies around the world, the DMA is the leading trade association for businesses and non-profits that send direct mail. Go to DMAchoice.org to learn more and create an account that will allow you to select which mail you do and don't want to receive. The online registration is free but if you prefer to send your information by mail, a \$1 fee applies. Your request is good for five years. This option only reduces mail sent to you from its member organizations. For a more complete approach, read on.
- **Catalogchoice.org**-This non-profit was launched in 2007 by the Ecology Center of Berkeley and is independent of the direct marketing industry. Two levels of participation are offered. The free service allows you to control catalogs, coupons, phone books, fliers, circulars, newsletters, and other unsolicited mail from their list. A **\$20 yearly** donation will enable Catalog Choice to contact third party marketing services that trade your name and personal information based on your buying history and behavioral characteristics.
- **41pounds.org**-Founded in 2006, this private company contacts 20-30 direct mail companies on your behalf. Pre-addressed postcards are also mailed to you since some companies require your personal signature. Other members of your household can also be included in the process which stops most common junk mail such as credit card offers, coupon mailers, sweepstakes entries, magazine offers, insurance promotions,

plus catalogs and charities you specify. The cost for this service for all household members residing at the same address is **\$41 for five years**.

OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- **Phone books**-If these do not stop with either Catalog Choice or 41 pounds, take the time to locate and contact the customer service number listed in the first few pages. Since opting out options vary with each company, you must ask questions. The effect may last for several years or forever, requiring you to opt in at a future date if you wish to receive phone books again. Keep track of the date you opted out and whether you will need to contact the company again after a certain period.
- **Credit card companies**-Each year, your credit cards are required by law to send you a mailing entitled "Your Privacy Rights". Located within that trifold paper are instructions for opting out of other mailed offers, like the preprinted checks for balance transfers. Make sure you opt out if you don't want that unsolicited mail or having your information shared with other companies. This opt out usually is good for five years but be sure to check with your company. Again, keep track of the date you opted out.
- **Penny Saver**-Sorry, but this opt out is only available for Florida and California residents!
- **Valpak**-If these offers continue to arrive despite using a service, you may contact the company directly via the number listed on the envelope.
- **Managing mail for a deceased or dependent relative**-Information is available on the Direct Marketing website, DMAchoice.org, for stopping mail directed to a deceased relative or one for whom you are the caretaker.
- **Prescreened offers of credit and insurance**-Prescreened offers, sometimes call "preapproved" offers, are based on information in your credit report that indicates you meet certain criteria. You may opt out of these offers for five years by calling toll-free 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (1-888-567-8688) or visit www.optoutprescreen.com. You may also begin the permanent opt out process at the same online address.
- **Moving?**-Never fill out a permanent change of address form with the U.S. Postal Service. Permanent COA information is provided to third parties. Instead, complete the temporary (10 month) form and notify companies and others on your own.
- **Charities, contests and raffle tickets**-Always speak or write the phrase "please do not rent, sell, or trade my name or address", when donating to a charity or providing your name and address to an organization, such as when you purchase a raffle ticket.
- **Warranty cards**-Most warranty cards only serve to provide your name, address and demographic information to those wanting to buy your information on a mailing list. Check first to see if the information is really necessary to preserve your product warranty.
- **Never "return to sender"**-The fact that you responded usually means that the company that purchased it will use your name and address again. Instead, contact the company directly and ask that your name be removed from their mailing list.
- **Be vigilant!** -Successfully reducing junk mail takes effort that will be well rewarded with an empty mailbox and more time on your hands. Most importantly, the environment will benefit.