

# THE **VALUE OF MAIL** IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

**AUGUST 2017**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in uncertain times, where there is constant social, economic and political change, and consumer trust has been eroded by 'fake news' and an unprecedented volume of commercial messages.

As marketing decision-makers, we need to address this issue as a matter of urgency. We need our marketing communications to deliver both trust and believability.

That's why Royal Mail MarketReach has undertaken a number of initiatives to explore the reassurance and credibility delivered by various marketing channels – key components in measuring trust.

The findings strongly indicate that mail can work alongside traditional broadcast channels and digital media to deliver stronger business outcomes.

As we examined the data, we found that mail scores very highly in the key components of trust – better yet, the medium itself can impact positively on the perceived trustworthiness of the communication itself.

In fact, positive scores for mail are increasing. 70% of respondents said that mail makes them feel more valued (up from 57% in 2013) – and 70% said that mail gives those who receive it a better impression of the organisation (up from 55% in 2013).

**Crucially, in these times when uncertainty seems to have become 'the norm', the research also shows that 87% of people consider mail believable.**

To provide context, only 48% consider email believable. Mail is also seen as more likely to grab the attention of the recipient and be perceived as more secure and important.

The increase in trust in mail may also be the driver behind an increase in claimed behaviours in response to mail. For example, in the year between 2015 and 2016, the proportion of the total sample claiming to have bought something as a result of receiving mail in the past 12 months has risen from 26.7% to 36.1%.

We firmly believe that mail has a unique set of qualities that can help marketers to build trust in their brands and this report clearly demonstrates those qualities.

Read on and we think you'll agree that you should be seriously considering mail as part of your marketing mix, especially in these uncertain times.

# INTRODUCTION

At a time of social, economic and political change, it's important that every single message you deliver is trusted.

As a media and marketing professional you are probably seeking urgent solutions to the levels of uncertainty that we are experiencing.

And the need for an urgent response is unsurprising, with Edelman Trust Barometer (2016), showing that in the past 12 months 48% of global consumers have chosen not to buy from a company because they don't trust them.

Naturally, building and maintaining brand trust is a challenge for every part of an organisation – not just the marketing department. Trust comes from every single touchpoint a consumer or prospect has with the brand. And the more trusted your communications are, the more engagement and traction you will gain. Align trust with engagement and you will be well on your way to delivering higher levels of ROI.

To succeed in this, your marketing department needs to employ every possible method at its disposal. And that includes your choice of media.

So, can a media channel help build trust in your brand?



# OUR APPROACH

Over the last four years, MarketReach has published the results of numerous research projects, which have clearly illustrated the importance of the role of mail in the marketing mix.

Our work spans qualitative, ethnographic and quantitative work, including specialist investigations into different mail types, such as catalogues, and specific sectors, such as government and democratic mailings. This report comprehensively aggregates all of those findings to draw its conclusions. You will find extensive details of the sources and materials we have utilised in the appendix to this document on page 17.

What we have set out to understand in this report is how the unique qualities of mail can help to build trust, a quality that is ever more important to brands in our current climate of doubt and distrust.

To support our own new and existing research on mail, we have also looked at material from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) TouchPoints and additional qualitative research from multiple sources to better understand the key characteristics of mail today and its value in building reassurance and credibility.

# THE ROLE OF MAIL IN BUILDING TRUST

Consumers today are exposed to an ever increasing number of advertising messages. It's getting harder for brands to cut through the noise and clutter and to reach the right audience at the right time.

Mail has always had an important role to play in the marketing mix. To support broadcast brand messages in above-the-line channels, marketers have traditionally used below-the-line channels like mail and email to build a more personal, one-to-one relationship with their customers.

In today's uncertain climate, these more direct, one-to-one communications with customers – and their capacity to deliver more personal, customised messages – offer marketing people a valuable opportunity to help brands build trust.

And mail in particular has a unique set of characteristics that can help marketers to build reassurance and add credibility to their brand's message.

## **MAIL IS SEEN TO BE PRIVATE AND SECURE**

In a 'post-truth', internet-mediated world it should come as no surprise that when something has been printed, and perhaps signed, it is perceived to 'embody truth'.

We still use the phrase 'signed, sealed, and delivered' as a way of communicating that an agreement is absolutely real, and there are still many situations in which a consumer or business person will only accept a 'hard copy' of a particular document as proof of its validity.

Now, however, our lives are inherently digital. But this doesn't mean every message is necessarily best delivered through a digital channel.

A June 2017 research paper commissioned from Ipsos Connect showed that 57% of adults agree that 'brands should be more careful where they place their advertising' and found that 63% of consumers claimed they 'would respond more positively to a social media ad if it appeared in a more traditional channel'.

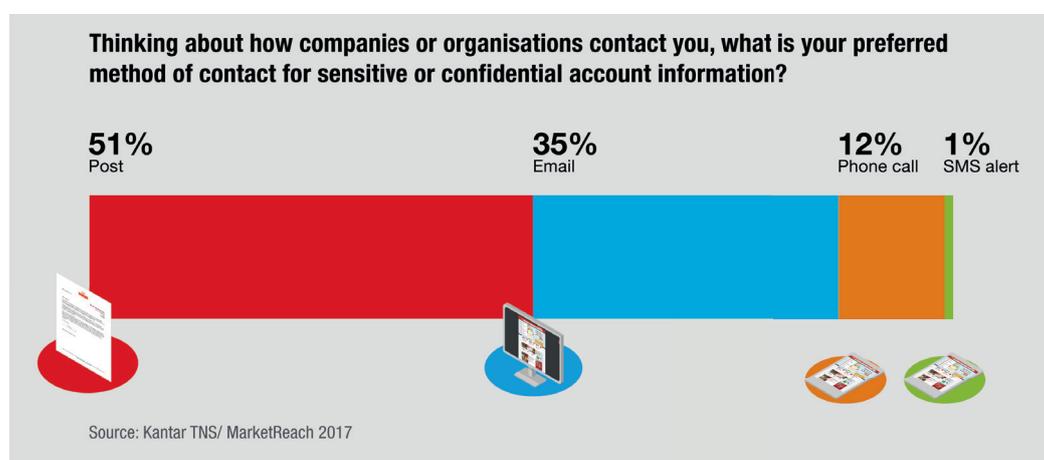
The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) has also cautioned the industry about using email in the right way. In their 2016 report, Rachel Aldeighieri, MD of the organisation, voiced her concerns that customers' "faith in the channel has been shaken" thanks to "too many emails, too many irrelevant emails, and too many emails from companies they don't recognise."

Email is here to stay and is a crucial element of the marketers toolkit, but this noticeable change in the way digital communications are perceived has contributed significantly to the current climate of consumer uncertainty.

It comes as no surprise therefore, to find that mail is particularly valued when privacy is deemed to be important.

People seem to feel that mail and other printed communications are intrinsically more trustworthy, perhaps because they are tangible and cannot be erased with the swipe of a finger.

In fact, we seem 'hard-wired' to believe what we see printed – in a way that we are not when it comes to pixels on a screen.



In May 2017 we asked global research company TNS to examine perceptions of mail across a wide range of characteristics. The findings showed that when people are sent 'sensitive or confidential account information', mail really stands out, especially in preference to email, with 51% preferring to be contacted by mail and only 35% preferring email [with the remainder preferring to hear by phone (12%) or text (1%)].

**This preference for mail when it comes to sensitive or confidential information is not surprising when we consider that 65% agreed with the statement 'I am confident that the contents of my mail are private'.**

In an online world, the immediacy, convenience, low cost and 'normality' of digital communications, combined with better use of data and new technological innovations, will continue to drive the electronic ecosystem onwards and upwards. And this can only be good news for marketers.

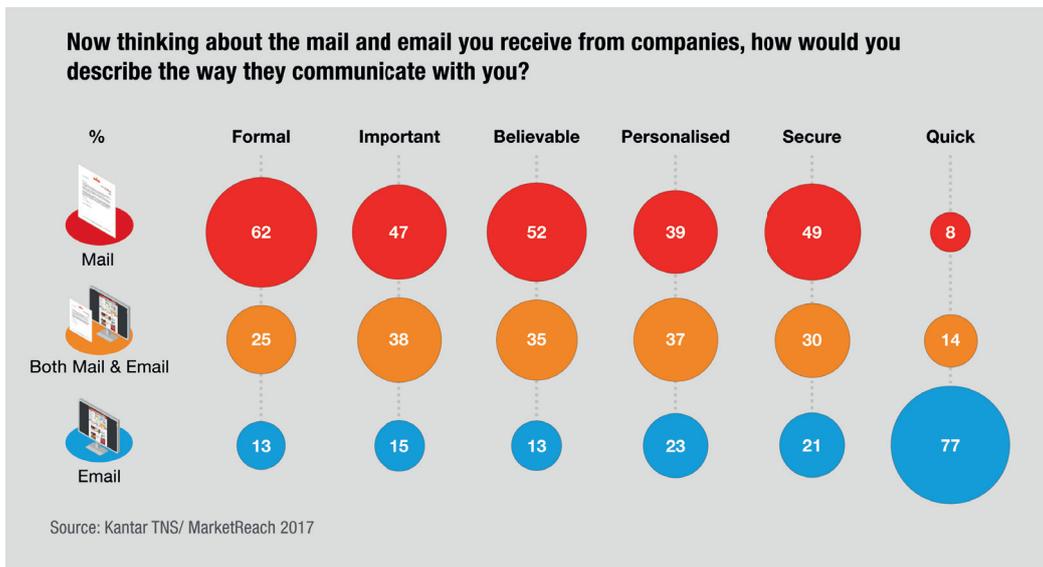
However, when sensitive or confidential information needs to be communicated, mail delivers reassurance that the message is credible and secure. And in these uncertain times, that power to build trust is all the more important to organisations of every kind.

## MAIL ADDS A BELIEVABLE ELEMENT TO THE MIX

To understand the characteristics of mail as a medium, it's helpful to compare it with what is often seen as its replacement – email. Both are one-to-one channels which can be data driven and highly personalised.

But in 2017, is the message conveyed to consumers by each medium the same?

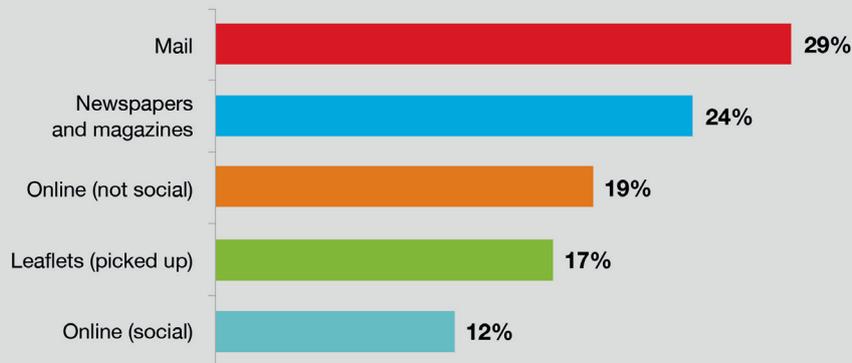
We asked respondents about the mail and email they receive from companies. The results show that consumers have very different perceptions of each.



The data suggests strongly that mail is more powerful than email in fostering factors that engender trust. While email is seen as quick, mail is seen as more important, more secure and more believable.

This ability of mail to convey believability has also been reflected in some recent research into communications relating to the 2017 election. When we asked participants which medium they felt tended to be best at reflecting the real views of the sender, mail came out on top. Although another channel in print – newspapers – was not far behind.

**Which of the following forms of communication would you say it is most true that:  
'It accurately reflects the sincerely held views of the author/sender'?**



Source: Election Research, Illuminas/ Royal Mail Marketreach 2017

If the message is important or worthwhile and you really want the consumer to be sure to open, read, and engage with that message, and believe it, then mail is almost certainly the way to deliver it.



**I actually enjoyed reading it. I sat down and I read all of it and I ended up sharing it with my mum as it gave the information better than I probably could.**

Anissa, Mid-20s



## **THE EXTRA VALUE OF MAIL IN AN ONLINE WORLD**

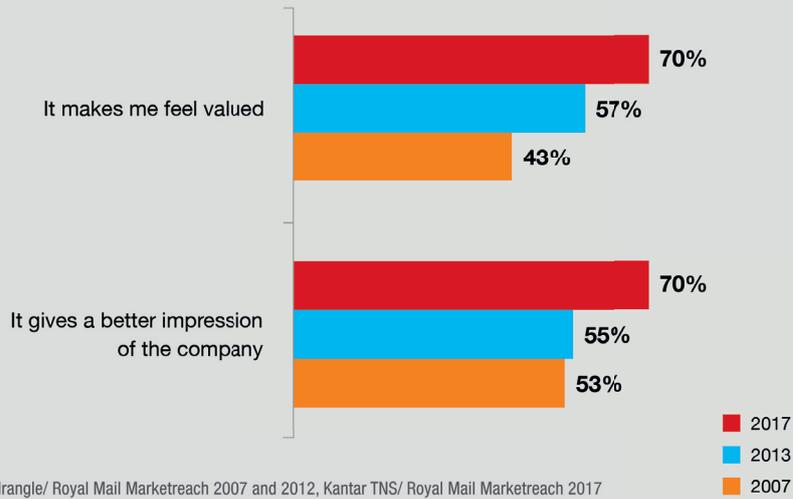
In an increasingly digital world where the volume of email has continued to grow, it's unsurprising that email's dominance is helping to shape the emotional value of mail. Quite simply, the more rare that 'physical' mail becomes, the more highly it is valued.

And the comparison between mail and email has always been of interest: after all, both are direct, one-to-one channels that can be personalised and are seen as powerful ways to build trust and value with the consumer.

We first looked at the difference between mail and email back in 2007. And we have continued to ask one identical set of questions from that exercise right up to this third programme of work. These are the questions that address emotional engagement – how mail makes people feel about the organisation that has sent it, and what it implies about how that organisation feels about them personally.

In a ten-year period, the results show that the percentage of people stating that mail 'makes them feel valued and gives them a better impression of the company' has increased to 70%.

**Do the following statements relate mostly to mail or email you receive from companies?**  
The responses below show the proportion of each sample that said 'mail'.

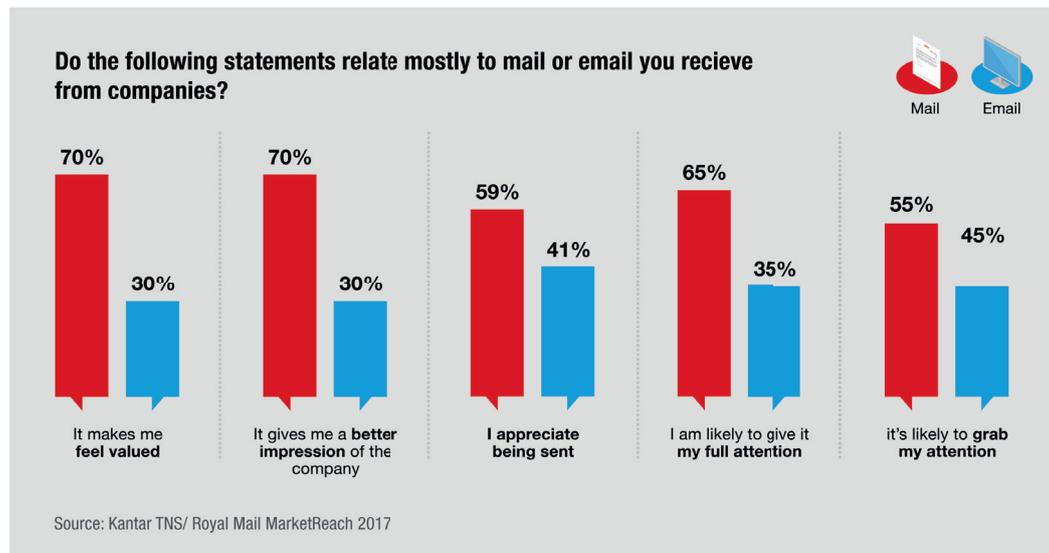


This uplift may be the result of improvements in the quality of mail, or in better use of data. It may also be that the comparative rarity of mail in relation to email is a key factor in the changing perceptions of mail.

These results offer key insights into the positive and important role that mail can fulfill alongside digital communications by building trust with customers.

Beyond the perceptions of the brand it evokes and the attitude towards the customer that it implies, there seems to be an even deeper value to an item of mail.

In our most recent survey we asked consumers:



What's more, our Local Government mail research supported the finding that mail is a more valued form of communication. Out of all mail formats, leaflets and brochures received by post were significantly more likely to make recipients feel positive about, and valued by, local authorities.



**...it's more the thought that goes behind it. If you're sending something through the post you physically had to go out and do something for that person...**

Susan, early 50s



And because mail is valued it is also remembered. 61% of our respondents recalled getting addressed mail from local authorities in the last 12 months – that's nearly three times as many that can recall communications in any other medium, and six times as many that can recall them from email. Interestingly too, Local Authority mail is kept for an average of nine weeks.



**I think that's the thing with post... I personally think there's some value in it because people actually look at it.**

Jack, Mid-20s



These findings show that mail is not only valued and appreciated, but that it also engages a customer's full attention. The characteristics of mail make it stand apart from 'multi-screening behaviour', where consumers are simultaneously paying attention to two or more digital or video devices at the same time.

**Reading an item of mail is an active process that demands the dedicated attention of the viewer. In our recent research, 65% of respondents said they gave mail their full attention, compared with only 35% who said the same for email. Even if they opened it, 72% of people said they often read and review some of their mail at a time when they can give it their full attention.**

This echoes IPA TouchPoints 2016 findings that show 90% of people say that they open at least some of their mail immediately.

Mail conveys a sense of importance that ensures that consumers read and review. A recent study we carried out with research consultancy Murmur showed us that because mail is valued, it is given more attention.



**Whether I know a brand or not, if I get a letter either way I'm going to open it because I don't know what's inside.**

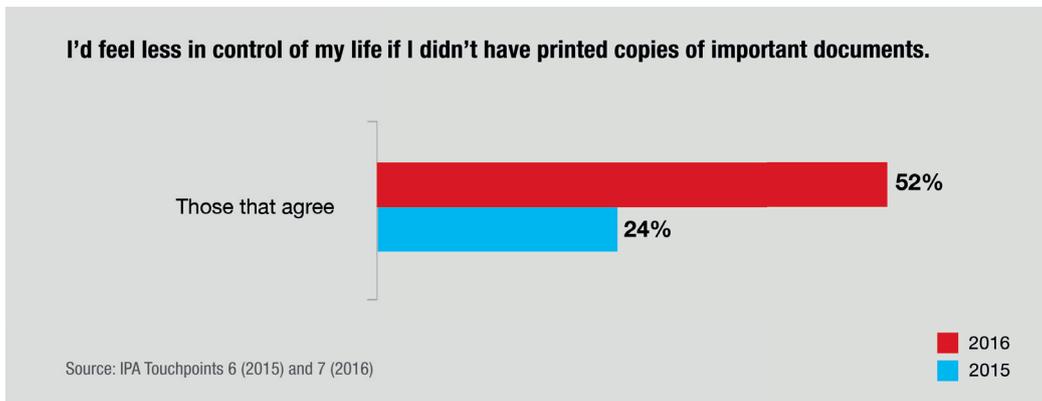
**I'd never just throw an envelope away if there's something in it. I'd be concerned I might miss something, even mail without my name on it, it could just be an error my name's not on it, the message could be important.**

Jaime, Mid-30s



Collectively, these results clearly show that mail is likely to gain a recipient's full attention. If a communication is serious and important enough to engage the consumer's full attention, it is well on its way to earning their trust.

Interestingly, the latest IPA TouchPoints survey suggests that the power of printed material is growing.



We know that mail also stays in the home, giving people multiple opportunities to reread the item, and engage with it more deeply:

- Addressed advertising mail stays in the home for an average of 17 days
- Door drops stay for an average of 38 days
- Bills and statements for 45 days

Furthermore, ethnographic research has shown that mail is also often displayed and discussed. It's even taken out of home, with 64% of people stating that they have carried an item of mail out of their home in the last 12 months.

Mail is a part of people's lives and therefore builds trust in both the messaging and the sender. To quote one respondent from our study with Murmur:



**Mail means I exist.**

Lindsay, Mid-30s



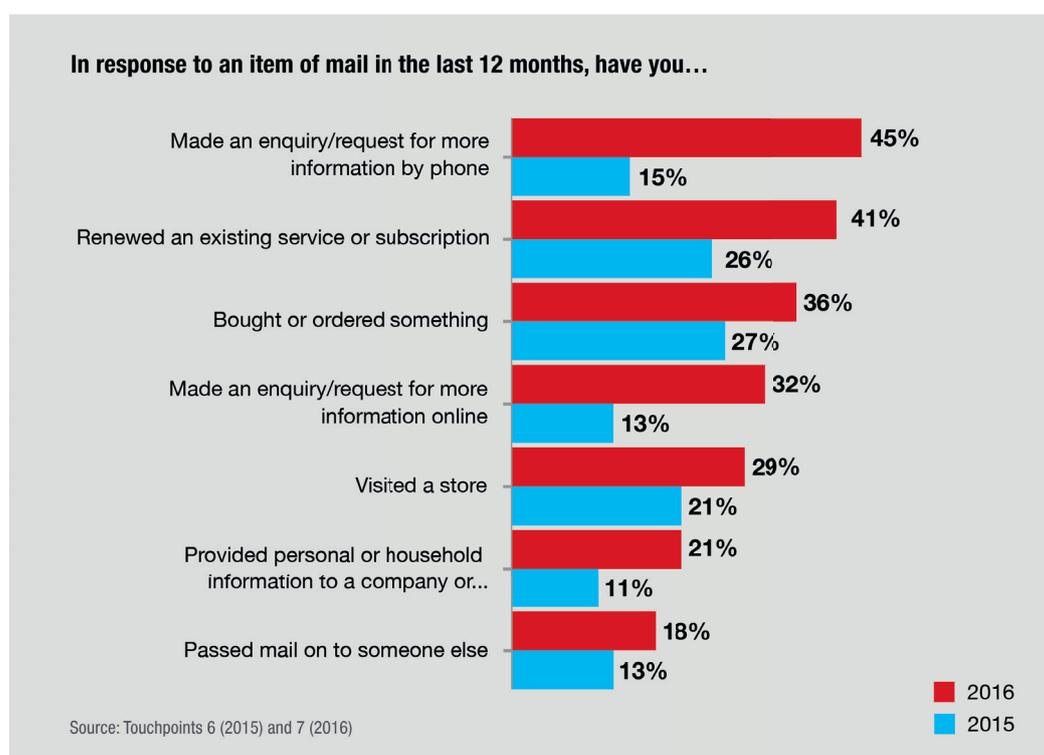
At a crucial, fundamental and human level, mail delivers important social and physiological truths. Quite simply, words printed on paper – the medium itself – can build and maintain trustworthiness.

# FROM TRUST TO PROFIT: CHANGING RESPONSE TO MAIL

We believe that the value of mail as a medium, that's able to build and maintain trust in 2017, can be clearly demonstrated.

But as a direct medium, it must constantly and repeatedly prove its effectiveness in driving short-term, profitable customer behaviour.

It's good to see therefore that evidence from TouchPoints underlines that the likelihood that consumers will respond to an item of mail is growing.



The IPA TouchPoints survey tracks the range of responses indicated by consumers when receiving mail. It demonstrates that mail drives a range of commercially relevant responses: driving enquiries online or by phone, encouraging store visits, purchases and prompting service renewals. All of these actions have seen an upward trend in the past year.

So the improved performance of mail is not limited to thoughts or feelings: active responses to mail are improving too.

When we investigate the specific actions customers perform as a response to mail, we can see a significant drive to online channels. Reinforcing the complementary nature of mail and digital.

Perhaps most importantly, we know that mail generates profitable activity.

**A Brand Science review of multi-channel campaigns concluded that when mail was included in the marketing mix, campaigns had 12% bigger ROI than those without mail.**

The current uncertainty in the market and in business means it's more important than ever that your marketing mix is driving a strong ROI, and including mail in that mix can be an important step in helping you to achieve the results you need.

# CONCLUSION

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

Economic forecasters suggest that uncertainty is going to be with us for a very long time. So the world of marketing needs to adapt and evolve in order to survive.

New online channels will emerge, traditional broadcast channels won't disappear – and the number of marketing messages received by consumers will only continue to multiply.

In this new, uncertain, increasingly cluttered media landscape, 'real world' mail is growing in credibility and importance.

The solid, tactile, printed nature of mail, the fact that customers can hold the communication in their hands, feel it, store it, share it, come back to it – gives mail a level of credibility and believability that few other channels can even approach.

Mail possesses an intrinsic 'trustworthiness' that is to do with the fact that it exists in the real world in both tangible dimensions and over time.

And its difference from other channels means it is valued and appreciated, especially when it is delivering important or sensitive information.

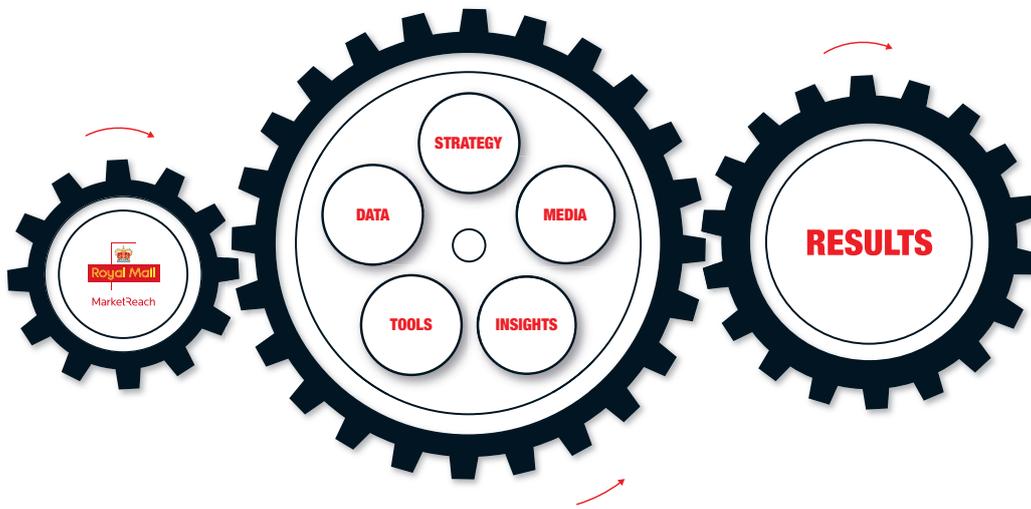
These characteristics are amplified by the continually increasing ability of mail to drive commercially valuable behaviour.

Mail drives response and profit.

If you want your customers to believe, value and respond in a profitable way to your communications – especially in uncertain times when credibility and value are increasingly compromised – you should seriously consider mail as part of your marketing mix.

# ABOUT MARKETREACH: HOW WE CAN HELP

We're a dedicated team of specialists with a unique set of skills, tools and free services to help you make money. Our data planners and media specialists are on hand to enhance your marketing strategy through mail. So your campaigns get the best results possible.



## **DATA, STRATEGY & MEDIA**

Our team works with brands and their agencies to boost mail performance as part of the media mix.

## **INSIGHTS**

Our ongoing research seeks to understand why mail delivers more powerful one-to-one relationships. What is it that makes this a pivotal moment in the customer journey, and how can marketers benefit?

## **TOOLS**

We have access to insights, creative and planning tools, all of which help you to generate the best results for your campaign.

**PICK OUR BRAINS FOR FREE. CALL US ON 0800 014 2363  
OR VISIT [MAILMEN.CO.UK/TRUST-MAIL](https://mailmen.co.uk/trust-mail)**

# APPENDIX

## SOURCES

- **Royal Mail MarketReach, Kantar TNS, Mail in Uncertain Times, 2017**  
Online survey of 1269 nationally representative respondents
- **Royal Mail MarketReach, Illuminas, Local Government Mail, 2017**  
Online survey with a nationally representative panel of 2861 individuals, a face to face survey of 200 local residents, and qualitative interviews with 16 consumers
- **Royal Mail MarketReach, Illuminas Democratic Mail, 2017**  
Tracking 1,500 politically engaged voters multiple times over a three week period, along with qualitative interviews with 9 consumers
- **Royal Mail MarketReach, Murmur, 2017**  
Ethnographic research and co-creation with 12 consumers from a range of ages and life stages

## SUBSCRIPTION AND THIRD PARTY SOURCES

- **IPA TouchPoints 6/7, 2015/2016**
- **Direct Marketing Association, 2016**  
Consumer Email Tracking Study 2016
- **Edelman Trust Barometer, 2016**
- **Ipsos Connect, 2017**  
For Trinity Mirror 'When Trust Falls Down', 2017

In addition, we have used material from ethnographic research we have had conducted previously with Trinity McQueen and BrandScience analysis, both of which were previously published in 'The Private Life of Mail' and 'The Lifestages of Mail', are available online at [mailmen.co.uk](http://mailmen.co.uk)



We have a team of experts to help you apply these learnings to your organisation.

To discuss how we can help you, call us on **0800 014 2363** or visit **[mailmen.co.uk/trust-mail](http://mailmen.co.uk/trust-mail)**

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