



Sick of junk mail? Opt-out strategies reduce mailbox waste-invasion

Green Quick Fixes

Andrea Fox

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Have you ever considered how much wasted energy and resources your mailbox witnesses and must manage? It's an absolute powder keg of used energy and resources.

According to the U.S. Postal Service, annually it delivers more than 90 billion pieces of direct marketing — including advertising and other promotions. All this unwanted mail accounts for more than 4 million or 5 million tons of solid waste, depending on the source cited.

Of course, it's better if you recycle junk mail, and I'm sure it takes up your entire recycling bin to do so. But if you prevent receiving it to begin with, you will reduce the energy and resources required to make it, mail it, and recycle it.

A serious household carbon footprint reduction, taking the time to opt-out is not only a planet-saver, but a time- and money-saver. There will be less unwanted mail for homes and businesses to manage and recycle, and it can reduce spending by removing temptation to impulse-buy consumer catalog goods.

Copious catalogs

Have you ever heard of Victoria's Dirty Secret? The lingerie company's 395 million catalogs produced annually used to be printed on virgin pulp from Boreal Forest in Canada. Victoria's Secret became the target of a massive deforestation campaign in 2004 by the Canadian watchdog group ForestEthics. By 2006, VS announced a new environmental policy and turned a new page by using mixed-use sources of recycled content and product from managed forests.

As ForestEthics showed, action causes reaction. To prevent unwanted mail from arriving at your home or business, there are several simple steps you can take. The following Green Quick Fixes will help you reduce your mail-derived waste stream:

Remove your name(s) and company name(s) from corporate marketers registered with various opt-out services.

To remove your name from some lists, and keep your name listed with others, go to the Direct Marketing Association Web site at www.dmachoice.org/. Also try ForestEthics Do Not Mail tool at <http://donotmail.org/form.php?id=50> and the California non-profit Catalog Choice at www.catalogchoice.org/.

After speaking with some professionals in the direct marketing field, they assured me that the DMA registry is no ruse for data collection, though it takes 30-90 days for your opt-out to go into effect.

I went to this site and took a few minutes to opt out of 264 catalogue options. If I see these items in my mail after Christmas, I pledge to inform the DMA, and I'll share my letter with you, my fellow consumers!

Contact non-DMA subscribing corporations directly by e-mail, telephone, or by letter.

Coupon books, weekly supermarket circulars, and other clearinghouses that either have your name or send mail to "current resident" can be dealt with. Call the number listed (dial *67 first and block your telephone number from being shown on a marketer's caller ID box) and ask that your name and/or address be removed from the mailing list. ForestEthics also has a list of telephone numbers for the larger advertisers at <http://donotmail.org/article.php?id=50>.

If you still receive junk mail and catalogs 90 days after contact, rat out the non-subscribing advertisers to DMA by logging on to DMA's Mail Preference Service <http://www.dmachoice.org/>, go to your "Manage My Preferences" tab, and type in the advertiser name. When the search responds that the name does not match any in the database, click "Why has my opt-out choice not been displayed?" and provide DMA with the offending advertiser's information. Here DMA says that it will contact organizations with a regular pattern of non-response.

Encourage your workplace to take steps to remove former employees' names from marketing lists.

The Ecological Mail Coalition helps businesses large and small with reducing or eliminating the large waste stream sent to former employees. According to the Coalition Web site, if 20 former colleagues are still receiving mail, the company mail room must sort and dispose of more than 300 pounds of their junk mail. Go to <http://www.ecologicalmail.org/> for more information.

Be conservative when sharing contact information. When you must provide personal data, write "Do Not Sell: Not for Marketing Purposes" next to your name.

Each time you provide your information to enter a contest, return a warranty card (which is usually not required), order goods by mail or telephone, and subscribe to magazines, your name and address can be placed on a mailing list and sold.

When you receive first class junk mail, put an "X" through your name and address, and write "Refused: Return Sender." Note: Bulk mail does not get returned, unless it says "Address Correction Requested."

If you rent your home and the former resident did not fill out a Post Office Change of Address Card, fill one out for him or her. Write "Left No Forwarding Address" as the new address. Sign your name and write "Current resident, your name, and agent for the above," and hand this form directly to your carrier so he or she can approve it.

The U.S. Postal Service recommends shredding unwanted junk mail and using it as packaging for shipments. For more information on the U.S. Postal Service's green efforts and other green mailing tips, go to <http://www.usps.com/green/welcome.htm>.

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Andrea Fox, a Beverly resident, has been writing about environmental sustainability and eco-topics for eight years. She is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists and a watershed protection advocate in Salem Sound Watershed.

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