t's no secret that personalized print communications have helped marketers develop powerful and intimate relationships with customers. Using data to convey clear and impactful messages, personalized print offers the opportunity to learn more about a customer's behavior and interests— something the campaign world shouldn't lose sight of in an era increasingly marked by online outreach to voters.

For all the focus on digital electioneering, the mailbox not only remains capable of delivering results, the power of variable data printing (VDP) offers real targeting value. Customized marketing mail of all shapes and sizes used to be the hot product, but it's no longer adequate to grab the attention of today's voter. Now, it's VDP mail. It's a form of on-demand printing that allows you to customize text, graphics and images from one printed piece to the next, without stopping or slowing down the printing process. One voter can be thanked for a contribution in a letter acknowledging interest in early childhood development, and on the next piece of mail—printing seconds later—another can be thanked while mentioning healthcare.

Instead of mass-producing single mail pieces, VDP allows you to customize the messages represented on each mail piece. It's also a faster and more economical way to print. Until recently, it was only available on small run, sheet fed type digital presses. Now, with the emergence of digital web presses from HP and Oce, large volume mail campaigns can more easily take advantage of VDP. The efficiency of a web press plus the technology of a digital press can transform a static mass mailing into a highly customized one-to-one marketing campaign.

Some things to consider when weighing whether VDP is right for your next campaign:

Customizing and integrating voter data drives response. Depending on the level of voter data, the targeting options are just about limitless with VDP. Integrating campaign data into print messages will resonate personally with audiences and it's proven to up response rates. You might incorporate a voter's name into a graphic element—an image of a yard sign or banner, for instance—tailoring the mail piece so everything on it is a hot-button for that voter.
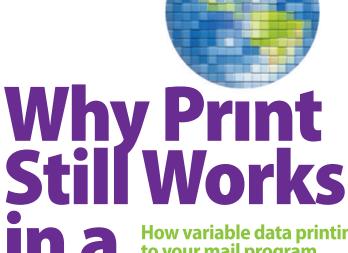
Richer data can make targeting easier. There are many online options to pair personalized direct mail with Internet integration and the result will be richer data for your campaign. Quick response (QR) codes provide one of the best options for targeting voters with smartphones. With VDP, QR codes can be tailored to each voter, directing one person to the campaign's issue page on healthcare and another to the jobs plan.

Personalized URLs, or PURLs, offer an added layer of customization. You can convince voters you know who they are while simultaneously capturing additional information that can be used to help understand the voting population in a single county, district or state. By logging onto the PURL, information from the database creates a tailored web page.

Increasing effectiveness means saving money. You can use personalization to plan and implement smart fundraising strategies, too. If a donor gives $200 through a direct mail solicitation, you can personalize the next solicitation by starting with a $200 ask and going up from there. Response rates with VDP are generally much higher than with static mail, so you can mail smaller quantities and achieve better results. According to a study from the advertising and marketing company Vertis, 66 percent of adults surveyed said a customized name makes a difference when deciding whether or not to open a piece of direct mail.

VDP by no means replaces other marketing methods, but it can certainly complement other forms of targeted outreach. Today's campaigns are a convergence of television ads, social media, yard signs, bumper stickers, campaign buttons and more. But with VDP, campaigns can add a fresh element to their direct mail plan that helps bring home valuable data and more votes.

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Why Print Still Works in a Digital World

How variable data printing can add value to your mail program.

By Gary Reblin