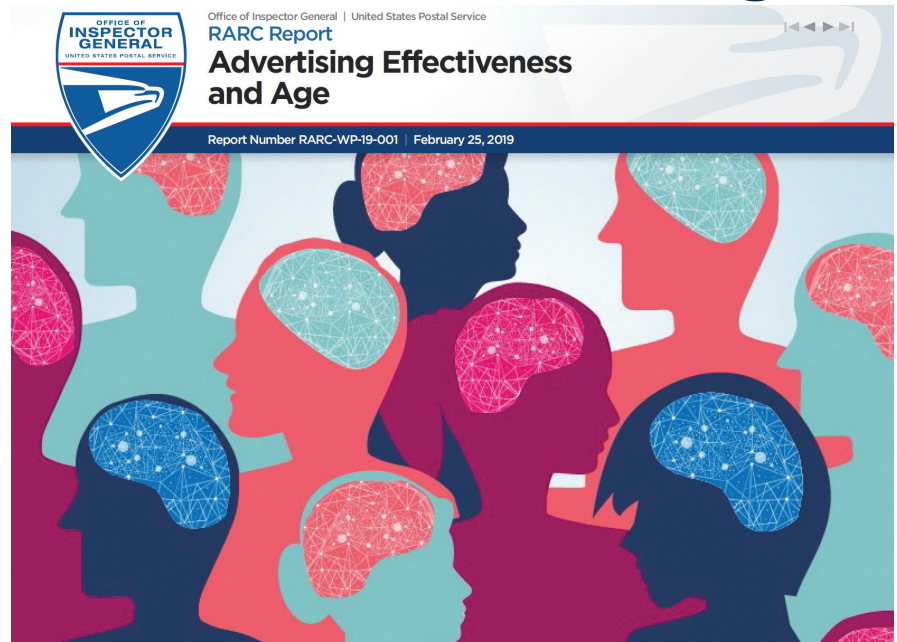


Print ads most effective for all ages

If you want to make a lasting impression with advertising, make it a print ad, not online—even when targeting young, internet-oriented customers. So says the USPS Office of Inspector General (OIG), which found that physical ads such as print ads sent by mail stay in the minds of potential customers longer, regardless of their age.

The OIG's study, conducted in partnership with Temple University, tested 60 subjects ranging from age 18 to 68. Unlike a survey of opinions, which would require a larger sample size, this study used "neuromarketing" brain-scanning techniques like those used in medical studies. Neuromarketing is a method for investigating consumers' mental and psychological responses to advertising to provide advertisers with a scientific understanding of the best ways to persuade and deliver their messages to potential customers. It pairs traditional measures of ad effectiveness with tools to scientifically test consumers' reactions to advertisements, such as functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), which captures images of changes in blood flow to different parts of the brain to measure brain function.

The study found that while potential customers remembered print ads for a longer time, all age groups processed digital ads more quickly than physical ads, which could be advantageous for businesses trying to reach customers who have limited time or a limited attention span, the study found. But there was another side to this finding, the OIG noted: "It is noteworthy that the younger participants 1) voluntarily chose to spend more time with the physical than the digital ads and 2) spent longer with physical ads than their older counterparts. Perhaps a greater novelty of physi-



cal advertisements for younger participants required and/or piqued an interest to spend more time with the physical ads than the digital."

A previous OIG report found that millennials, the generation born between 1981 and 1996, defy conventional wisdom by responding more positively to mail ads than to online ads (see the October 2018 issue of *The Postal Record*). This study expands on the understanding of differences in advertising effectiveness by age.

The OIG/Temple study did find an important age difference: Younger adults (ages 18 to 41 among the test subjects) responded better to ads that stressed the emotional appeal of a product. For instance, an ad for a luxury car might stress the joy of driving the car or the feeling of pride related to owning it.

On the other hand, the older category of adults (with ages ranging from 47 to 68 among test subjects) responded

better to ads that helped them understand the practical functions of a product rather than the emotional connection. For them, ads that explain how the product would save them money or provide an important service—think of a vacuum cleaner ad that explains how the machine works better than the competitors—has greater appeal.

Both age groups responded positively to a third kind of message: metaphorical ads that compare the product to something unrelated but symbolic of the brand's value to the customer, such as selling orange juice as "sunshine in a bottle."

"Companies need to understand their target audiences and find effective ways to communicate with them," the OIG said. "As advertising mail is an important source of revenue for the Postal Service—\$20 billion in Fiscal Year 2017—it is also important that USPS understand mail's effectiveness across age groups." **PR**