

# An Insider's Guide to Direct Mail Envelope Design



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## INTRODUCTION

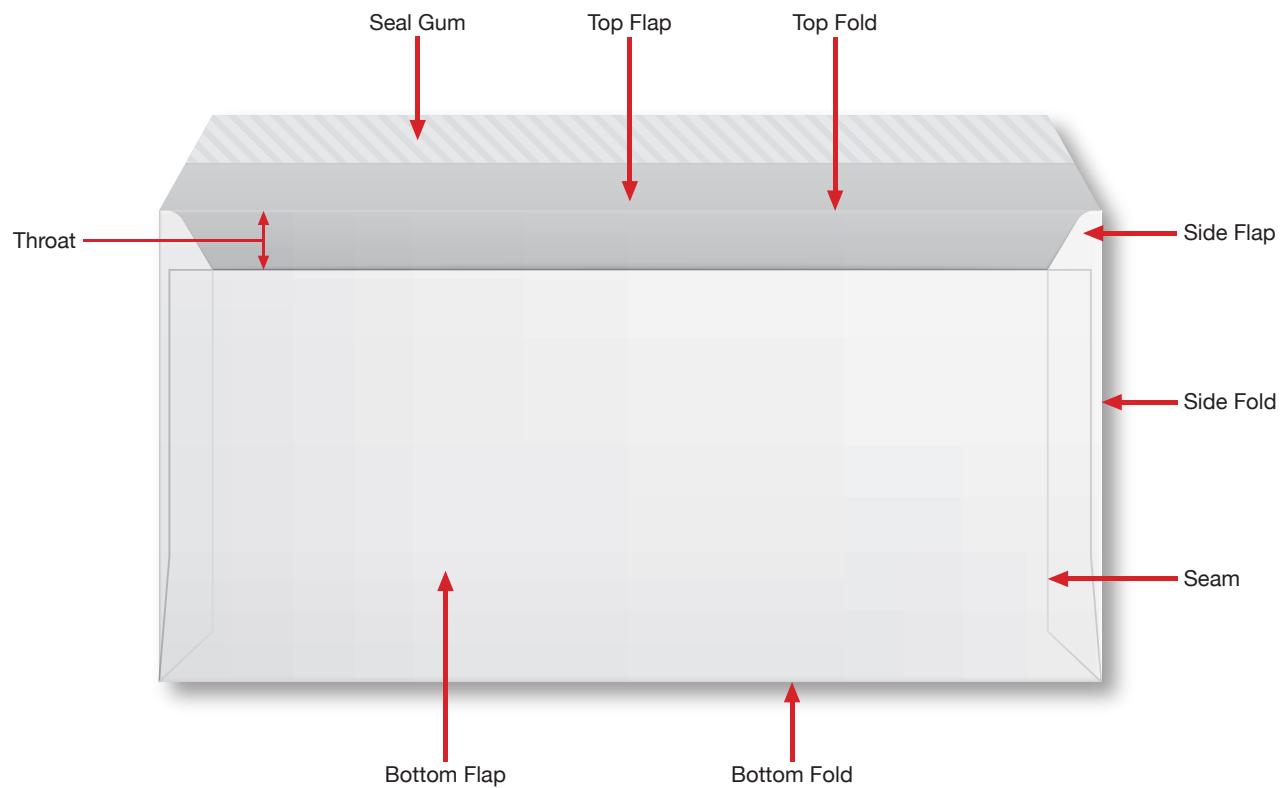
Imagine checking your mailbox and finding a plain envelope from the cable company addressed to “Current Resident.” You already know it’s just another boring flyer asking you to sign up for a service you don’t need, so it goes right into the trash without even being opened. Why didn’t that piece of mail work? Maybe it’s because you aren’t part of the company’s target audience, or the plain white envelope made you mentally check it off as junk. Perhaps the worst part was the company didn’t even bother to learn your name. How rude. This, my friends, is *not* how to design a direct mail envelope.

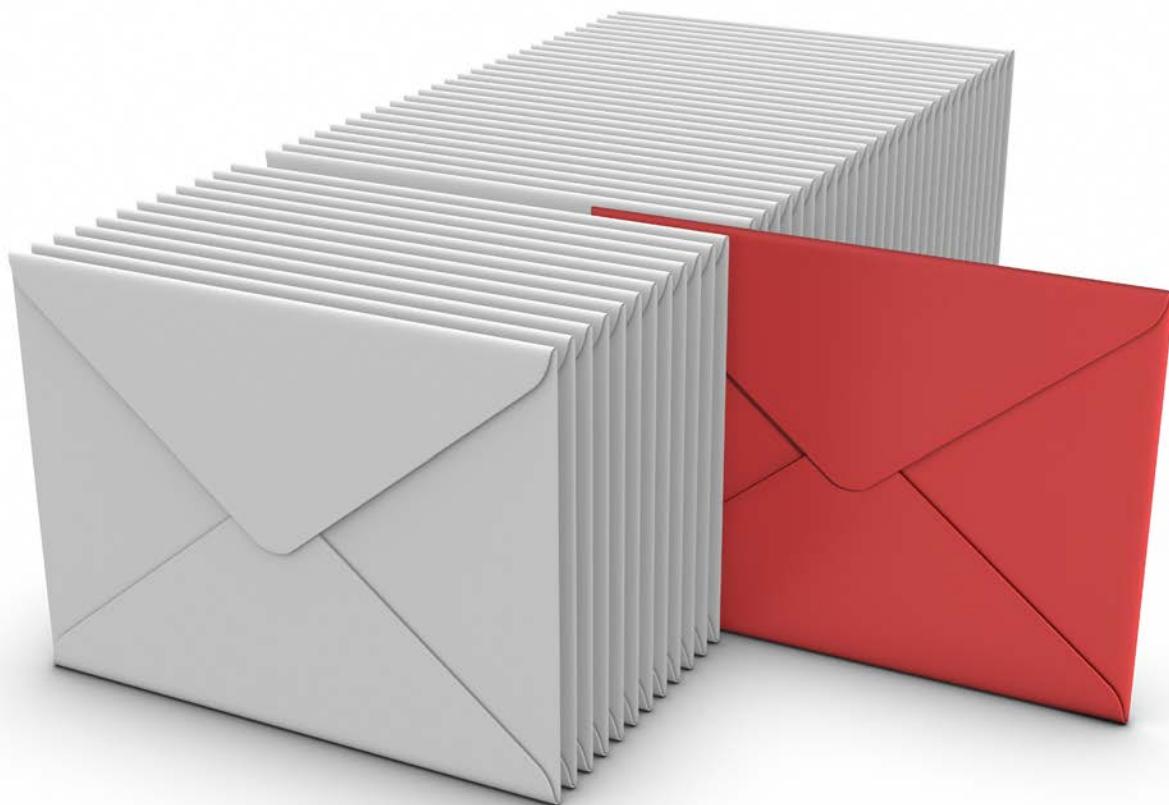
Businesses tend to spend massive amounts of time and effort on the contents of direct mail, but little time on what the consumers see first: the envelope.

That important first impression goes down the drain. Envelopes are often seen as an underrated paper product that's been around for centuries, and yet is more valuable than most people realize. The envelope should get just as much attention, if not more, as what goes inside because if unopened then the great offer, creativity, and strategy won't pay off.

We at NextPage know all about direct mail and are here to give you some pointers on what will get the envelope opened instead of thrown out.

### Envelope Anatomy:





## CHAPTER 1: **Envelope Colors**

If you had to pick an envelope from the picture above, which one do you choose?

If you picked the red one, you're right. COLOR means everything! Don't use a white envelope if you want your direct mail to get noticed. We get enough of those already and it's a turnoff. Make it stand out and show that it's not another bill, but something that can really help you.

A good direct mail envelope has excellent copy, design, and color. But color is what people notice about the envelope first, even before they see who it's addressed to. In the 90 seconds it takes to form an opinion of that object, 80 of those seconds will be about the color. 90% of consumers make quick judgments about products based on their color and 84% say color is the main reason they buy it. Why do you think cars come in so many colors? They create a psychological response that everyone subconsciously associates with a particular emotion or memory.

Every good brand has a distinct color scheme. Coca-Cola is red, Facebook is blue, McDonald's is yellow, and so on. Believe it or not, lots of strategic thinking goes into choosing brand colors.

Here are the common emotional associations Americans make with each color:



**RED** gets you excited, whether in a good or bad way. Sure, it's the color of danger and rage. But it's also the color for warmth and excitement. Either way, it grabs your attention and increases your pulse. Red is the best color to use if you want your consumers to make impulse decisions. Coca-Cola's main color is red because its brand is all about happiness and togetherness.



**BLUE** is for coolness. Studies have shown that blue actually calms the mind and improves concentration. Most people say it's their favorite color. Although it can be associated with sadness, like when people ask "why so blue?" it's also the color for peace, trust, and safety. Many I.T. and social media companies use blue in their branding because it helps establish connectivity with the target audience.



**YELLOW** makes you happy. When you think of the sun, springtime, sunflowers, or SpongeBob, it's all beautifully yellow. It represents confidence, promptness, and creativity. McDonald's colors are yellow and red, yellow for its speediness and red because it's delicious. Clever, right? With direct mail, yellow acts as a highlighter for advertisements so consumers can easily spot them.



**GREEN** represents new life. It symbolizes growth and good health. Funny enough, it seems to be used in lots of movies as the color of evil, like the wicked witch of the west. But in marketing, it's a good color choice. Any product or service that claims to be environmentally friendly always uses green. Whole Foods Market has a green logo because it sells natural and organic products. No other color would make sense. Green is also used for many financial companies because it's the color of money.



**ORANGE** means inspiration and creativity. It is literally a softer version of red. The color generates warmth and provides a sense of affordability. Orange is the main color for Payless Shoes and The Home Depot. Now it all makes sense.



**PURPLE** is the color of fantasy. It stands for extravagance, richness, and dreams. No wonder it's the color of Queen Elizabeth's royal crown. Purple is great for direct mail for high quality brands to expose its richness. It's also a nice seasonal color for springtime, just look at Cadbury eggs.



**BLACK** signifies power and control. It's sometimes represented as a scary color, like for Halloween. In marketing, however, it shows dignity. It's good to combine black with lighter colors to demonstrate your company has fun with the product or service, but also takes it seriously. At NextPage, our logo contains black and red. Our brand poster reads, "Black demonstrates leading and driving forward from a position of power, strength and authority. Red produces an emotional intensity and demonstrates a pure determination for success."

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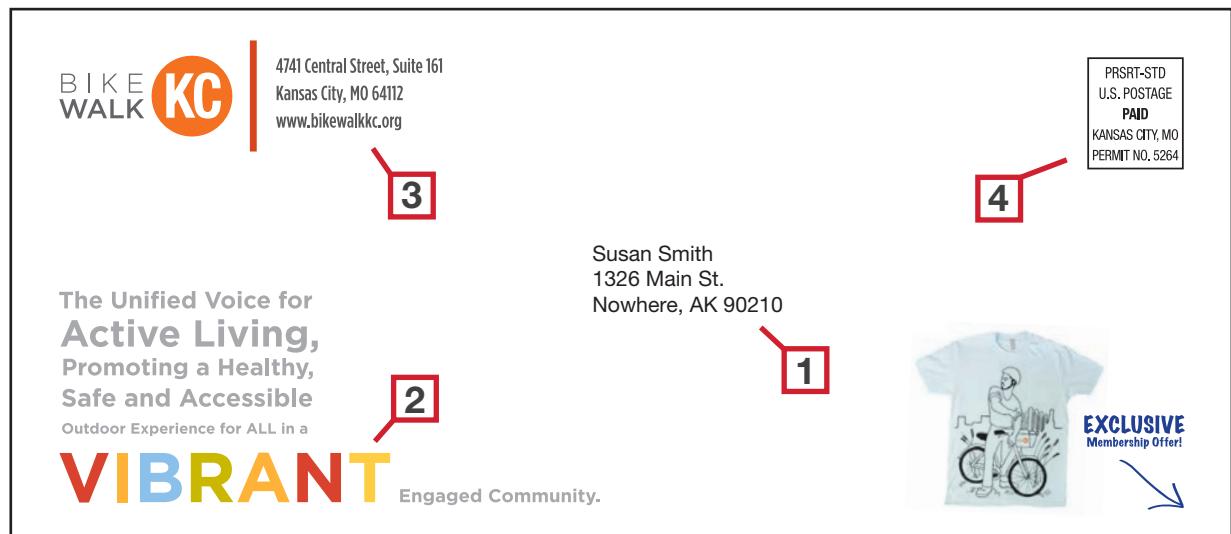


## CHAPTER 2: Envelope Design

Envelopes should have copy written on them. You're probably thinking, "I thought all the writing went *inside* the envelope." Most of it does, but those key points are useless if the envelope doesn't get opened. After you've successfully caught the consumer's attention with the colors, they then examine what's written on the envelope. This could make or break their decision to open it.

You have just over three and a half minutes for the envelope to do its magic, called the 3:33 rule. You have 3 seconds for the envelope to catch the recipients' eye, 30 seconds to engage them enough to open it, and 3 minutes for them to read the contents. If they keep the mail after this and respond to your call-to-action, you can call it a success!

Research shows that consumers' eyes examine **four distinct parts** of an envelope in a particular order when they receive direct mail. First, they check the address to see who it's for. If it says anything but their name such as 'current resident,' then you've already lost them. Second, they look at the teaser copy. Next, the eyes go to the return address and then finally end at the postage. They are merely scanning to see if the mail is interesting or relevant to them. It goes without saying, but always be sure the recipient's name is spelled correctly and uses the proper title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Dr.) or risk losing credibility.



**Teaser copy** is big and bold pieces of writing on the envelope giving a clue as to what's inside. It follows the same rules as a headline, to generate curiosity with a provocative statement. A good teaser takes craftsmanship to be effective, so just saying "open me" isn't good enough. It contains the kind of language your target audience uses. For example, if you are selling *Star Wars* merchandise, then a good teaser might say "Exclusive offer for a true Jedi inside." Teasers should urge the reader to open the envelope immediately and not toss it aside for later. Make them want to know more about it.

The envelope pictured previously from Bike Walk KC has two teasers. The first one states, "The unified voice for active living, promoting a healthy, safe, and accessible outdoor experience for all in a vibrant community." Just look how beautifully it uses

colors to express the word ‘vibrant.’ It’s hard to miss. The second teaser hints at a chance to win a free t-shirt and emphasizes the word ‘exclusive,’ giving a compelling reason to open it. It’s important for teaser copy to use catchy adjectives like exclusive, free, new, or valuable. If your offer has a deadline, then make sure to mention it in the teaser. If it’s for an event, give the date.

Creativity counts when trying to grab attention. Below is a sample that uses both sides to convey the message and engage the reader in the envelope’s four target zones.



**Side A**



**Side B**

The teaser has its own side of the envelope and gives the date of the event. Everything else is on the back. This provides the chance to create a bigger, more elaborate design. You don’t know, however, which side the consumers will see first, so they both have to be somewhat appealing. That’s why side B has the “RSVP Today” teaser just to be safe. The mail is for a formal dinner, so they made it green to demonstrate good health. A picture of food looks tastier with a light-colored background.

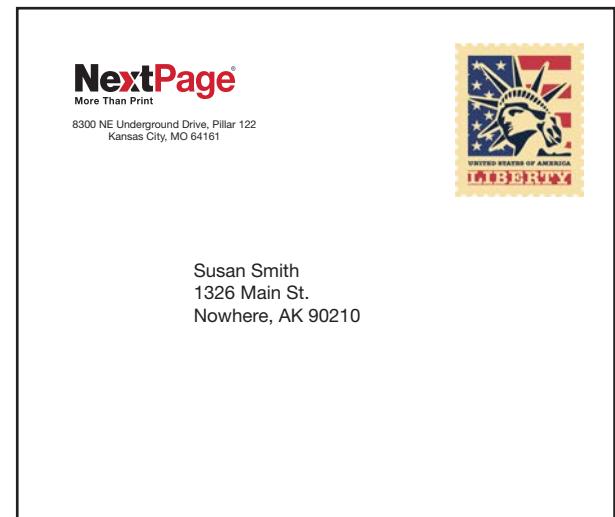
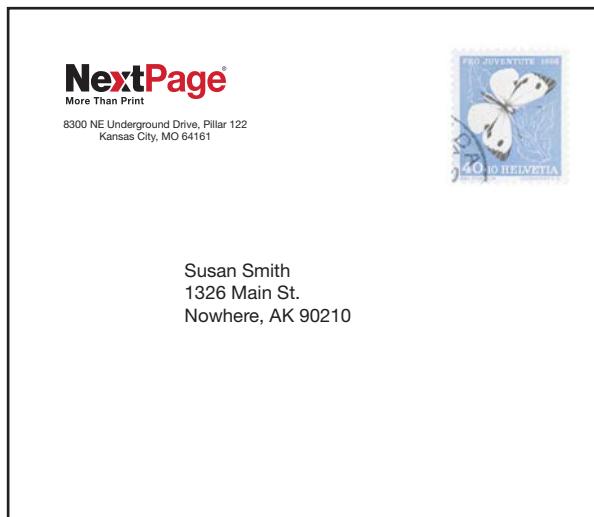
**Photos** and graphic designs are great to give the envelope a nice visual appeal to support the teaser copy. Take a look at this one from Children's Mercy Hospital:



The envelope appeals to emotion by using a picture of a young cancer patient achieving his dream of being a cowboy, and the entire design is blue to emphasize trust and loyalty. This charity directly benefits people and therefore a photo is necessary to give a sense of human interaction. It makes you want to donate, right?

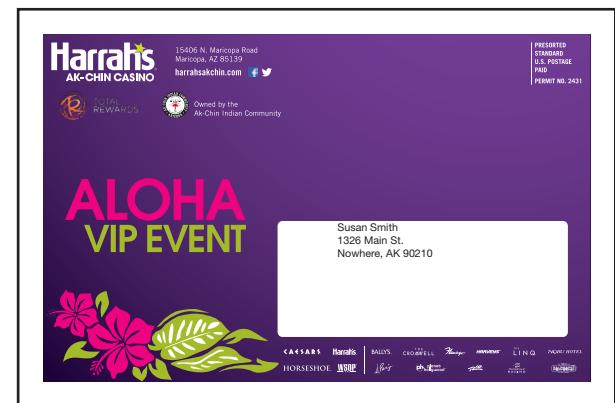
The **return address** should always be a street address, never a P.O. Box. Consumers should be able to look up the address online and find the company's location on a map. You may also include your company logo next to the return address to show its authenticity.

**Postage** is important not just because you can't deliver mail without it, but because it indicates the message's significance. Take a look at the next two samples. They are identical except for one feature. Which one do you think looks more professional?



If you chose the one on the right, you're correct! A butterfly stamp may be appropriate in a letter from a friend, but not from a business contact.

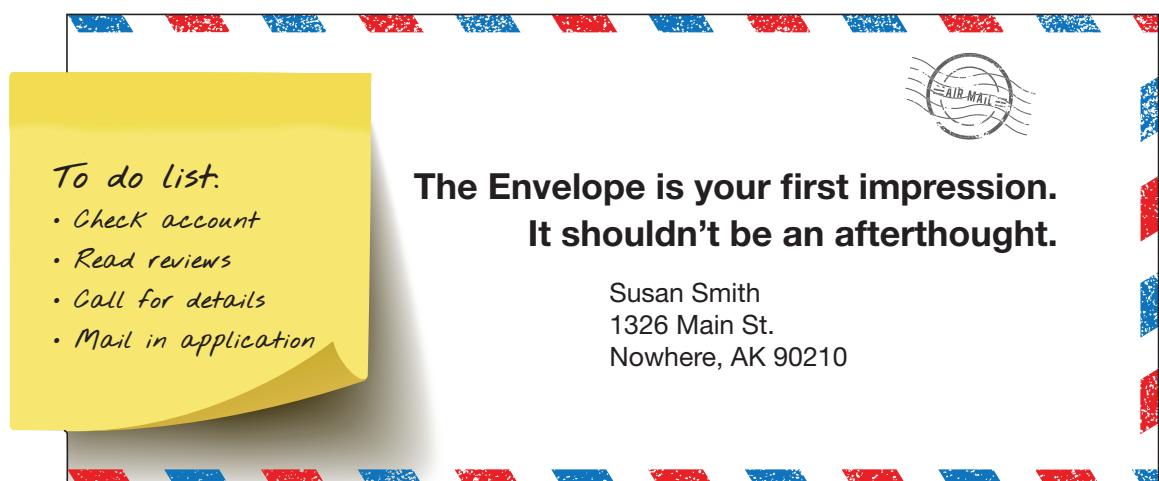
Designing a direct mail envelope can be a work of art. Check out these extravagant pieces from Harrah's Ak-Chin Casino in Maricopa, Arizona.



Look how much information is packed onto one side without being too overwhelming. They both beautifully utilize color and graphic designs to make the envelope pop and reveal the event's theme. The teaser copy says that it's a VIP event, which makes the reader feel special because only a select few are invited. The first envelope has a reflective black photo to foreshadow the event's elegance and the second one heavily uses purple to demonstrate its extravagance. The return address includes the casino's physical address, logo, website, and social media elements. This, my friends, is how you *should* design a direct mail envelope.

## CHAPTER 3: Shape-Cut Envelopes

Want to give your mail a one-of-a-kind visual effect? Go outside the box, literally. Take the envelope's graphic design or photo and have it trail off the edge. There is a special USPS-approved way you can do this and still have the envelope qualify for full automation rates.



You can't buy envelopes like this in stores. They are made especially for your direct mail campaign. It gives you the chance to be extra special with your envelope and gain more attention. Special envelopes must be tested and approved by the U.S. Postal Service. If there are no issues with stacking or jamming the automated machine, then you're golden.

The criteria for an approved shape-cut envelope are as follows:

- The basic envelope must still be rectangular with four 90-degree corners and straight edges.
- The shape cannot exceed the top or bottom of the envelope.
- There must be at least 1/8 inch between the shape and the corners.
- The shape must be trailing off the left edge.
- Both the envelope and the shape have a maximum height aspect ratio of 2.5.

Add that 'wow' factor and go the extra mile for this special appeal. You could have an envelope people want to hang on the wall.

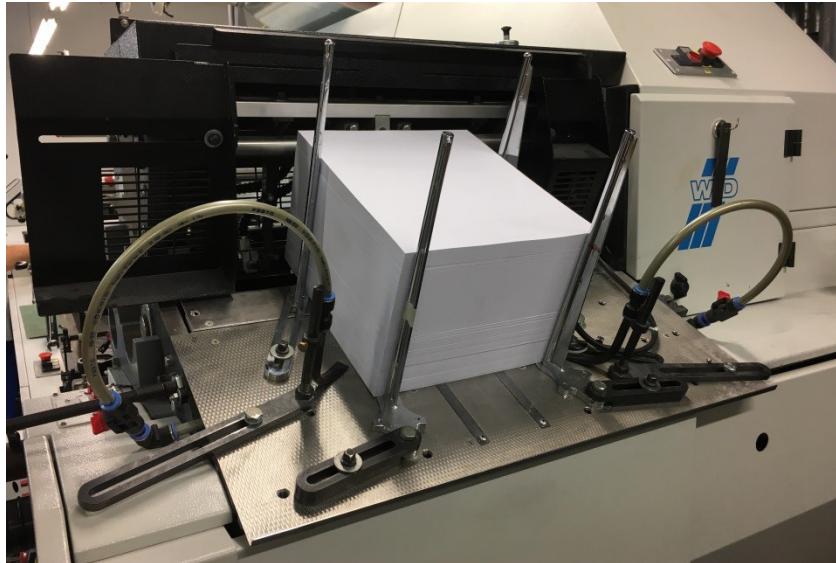


## CHAPTER 4: **Envelope Manufacturing at NextPage**

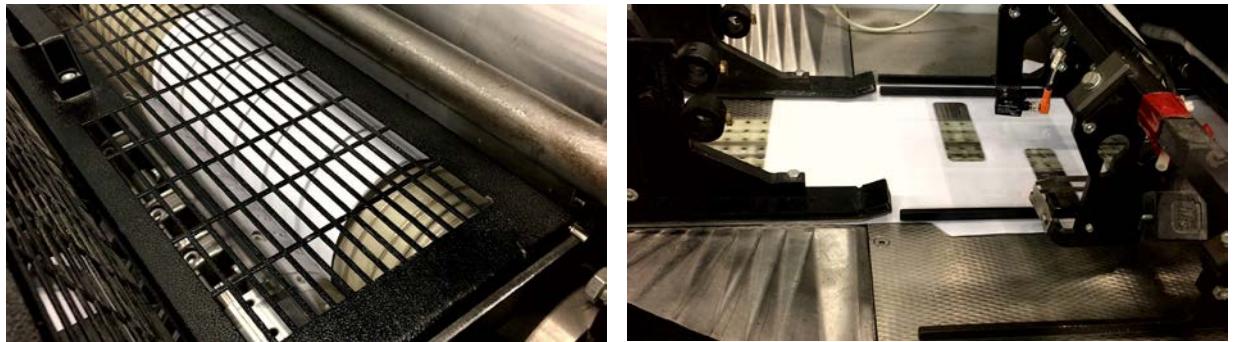
At NextPage, we believe envelopes are so important that we manufacture them ourselves. We don't mean just printing on a pre-made envelope, but actually designing its structural integrity and printing them on select papers using special techniques.

Here's how they're made:

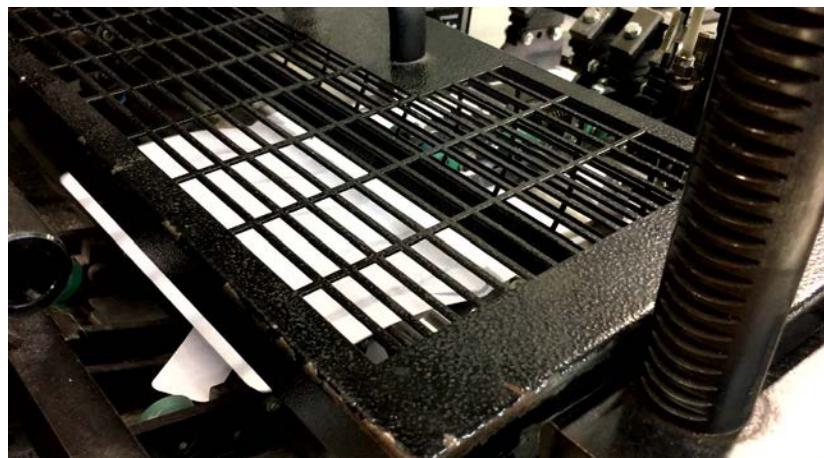
First, we print an amazing design on our 8-color Komori offset press or our HP Indigo digital presses. These designs are typically printed on a large sheet of paper and then cut into individual envelopes.



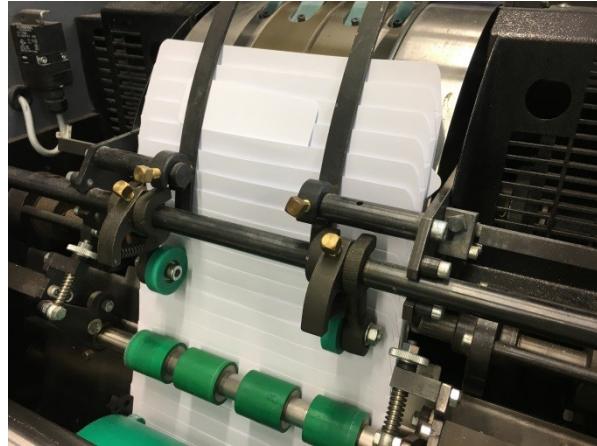
The press uses a die to cut through the paper, like a cookie cutter, and creates the envelope blanks. It can also cut out a window, like the one in this photo.



Envelope blanks are processed through a folding machine where rotating blades make the creases on the sides, applies glue, and folds the envelopes together. Remoistenable gum is also added to the envelope flap for sealing.



Voila, now we have brand new envelopes ready to use.



Let's be clear, almost all printing and mailing companies print envelopes. Some will print on flat sheets and then send them to an envelope converter to cut, fold, and glue. NextPage, however, is one of a very few printing companies that has the equipment and expertise to design, print, cut, fold and glue envelopes in our own plant. This ensures the tight timeframes and high quality standards required by our clients are met.



## CHAPTER 5: **History of Envelopes**

The first envelope ever in the world dates back to 2,000 B.C. in ancient Babylon. Messages were written on clay tablets and then baked until hardened. Then the hardened tablet was coated with more clay and baked again. That's right - the envelope was baked like a cookie. Clay envelopes protected deeds, mortgages, bookkeeping forms, financial accounts and, of course, letters. Recipients opened the envelope by literally breaking the outer layer of clay. It was a secure method of sealing documents, but very high maintenance. After this era, people made envelopes out of animal skin and leaves. Envelopes as we know them now did not begin until long after the invention of paper.

Papyrus is the earliest form of paper, manufactured in 3,000 B.C. in ancient Egypt. It was made from long strips of a fibrous material found inside a grassy aquatic plant called Cypris papyrus. In 1200 B.C. China, paper was made from reeds and

rice. As papermaking progressed, they used a mixture of mulberry, wood fibers, hemp, rags, and fish nets. Papermaking slowly spread from west to Europe and America. By 1,000 A.D., it was customary to simply fold the paper and seal it with wax without an envelope. But by the middle ages, the paper envelope was born.

Paper envelopes in the early days were not designed like they are today. They were diamond-shaped pieces of paper that had to be folded by hand around the document and sealed with wax at the intersection. Louis XIV of France popularized using this as a cover to protect the privacy of letters. He folded his own envelopes when he sent documents to his court. Benjamin Franklin is considered the founder of the postal service in America. He set up distribution cases with pigeonholes where letters could be dropped off at common destinations. He also laid milestones on the roads, which helped the postmen because they were paid by the mile.

During this era, the cost of postage depended on the number of sheets and then extra for the envelope, which only the wealthy could afford. This was then changed to weight and distance, making it affordable to more people. By 1851, a letter could be mailed coast to coast in the U.S. for only three cents per ounce. The demand for envelopes grew after universal postage and folding every single envelope manually was time consuming. British inventors Edwin Hill and Warren De La Rue solved this issue in 1840 by creating and patenting the first mass-producing envelope folding machine.

Hill and De La Rue's invention inspired future envelope-making machines that further improved the process. While their machine could produce sealed envelopes quickly, it was still hand-operated. In the 1850's Russell L. Hawes invented the first automatic envelope folding machine that could produce 2,500 envelopes per hour. Then, in 1876, Henry and D. Wheeler Swift remastered a design from James Green Arnold and created the self-gumming envelope machine. Their contraption had a brush that applied gum to the envelope seal, which was previously done by hand. No, it wasn't the kind of gum you chew and blow bubbles with, rather a gum paste derived from a tree. The glue that holds the rest of the envelope together is a stronger substance made from starches of corn, wheat, potatoes, rice, and other plants.

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