Benjamin Franklin created the first American mail-order catalog in 1774. It sold scientific and technical books.

Aaron Montgomery Ward sent out the first modern mail order catalog in 1872. It consisted of a single sheet of paper with a price list and merchandise for sale.

In 1888, Richard Sears published his first of many mail order catalogs. It advertised watches and jewelry for "The R.W. Sears Watch Co."

Philadelphia pharmacist Asa Candler invented the coupon in 1895 by offering free Cokes in a local newspaper.

Between 1908 and 1940, Sears Roebuck and Company sold over 70,000 homes by mail-order. They were shipped via railroad boxcars and included all materials needed to build a sturdy and well-designed house.

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) was founded in 1917 to represent the direct mail community. Today, the association has nearly 3,600 members and is the leading global trade association for all direct marketing tools and techniques. This year, direct mail represented 34% of the total advertising and marketing revenue for direct marketers.

In 1959, the U.S. Post Office and the Navy experimented with using guided missiles to deliver letters quickly and efficiently.

In 2005, nearly $200 billion in contributions were collected though direct mail for good causes – from charities supporting the poor to foundations conducting important medical research.