THE ULTIMATE
Direct Mail
Handbook

Lynndell Epp

*How to Get the Highest
Response Rates at the Lowest Cost
for the GREATEST Profits*

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Ways Your Business can use Direct Mail

Overview

Reaching customers through direct mail is big business. Currently, over $41 billion dollars are spent annually on direct mail marketing in the United States. Because of the one-to-one nature of direct mail, you can target specific individuals who have a need for your product- increasing the likelihood of making a sale. You can also build lasting customer relationships that result in repeat business.

If you include a reply device, you'll promote immediate response. Of course, you can use the number of responses to help measure the success of your campaign. Direct mail is the perfect way to reach selected prospects. And it can be a complement to your overall Marketing mix. A direct mail package can be designed to make an instant sale, open a dialogue between the potential buyer and seller, or simply inform the potential buyer about a particular company's products and/ or services. Whatever the desired outcome of a direct mail effort, one fact remains: direct mail is a proven way to reach customers.

Direct mail can be focused.

Mass media is more of a shotgun approach to a large, diverse universe of potential customers. Direct mail, on the other hand, can be targeted to a single individual, at a single address. The degree to which that individual is a potential customer, meeting a specific set of criteria, is a function of the lists you use.

Direct mail sales can be predicted with accuracy

By carefully testing and tracking responses on a small scale, you can effectively predict the revenues resulting from a large-scale campaign. In addition, the results of a direct mail campaign can be measured with precision.

Direct mail allows you to take your product or service to the customer

Direct mail can make it easier for a customer to make a purchase in a number of ways. For example, you can alert potential customers to new products or sale items before they come into the store. You can also include an order form and complete the entire transaction through the mail.

Direct mail is economical

Depending on the magnitude and complexity of a given campaign, direct mail can be a cost-effective vehicle to reach a sizable audience of potential customers on an individual basis.

Direct Mail is Versatile

Direct mail is a powerful marketing medium not only because you can use it to precisely target your audience, but also because it can be used effectively to achieve a variety of marketing objectives, including:

- Prospecting for new customers
- Generating qualified sales leads
- Establishing and maintaining relationships
- Cross-product selling to existing customers
- Building brand recognition
- Enhancing results from other forms of advertising

Not all of these objectives apply to every business. Here are some specific ways that certain types of business can use direct mail to achieve their marketing objectives.

Retailers
- Give advance notice of a sale by mailing postcards to preferred customers
- Mail flyers or brochures to all nearby addresses announcing new product lines, monthly specials, new seasonal hours, etc.
- Raise awareness and effectiveness of other advertising by mailing a postcard asking customers to watch for other advertisements.

Service Companies
- Mail a periodic newsletter informing customers of new developments in your industry and providing helpful tips relating to your service.
- Turn your current customers into a sales force by mailing a "tell-a-friend" promotion offering premiums or discounts to customers who refer new business to you.
- Prospect for new customers by swapping lists with a company in a complementary business. For example, a pet groomer could exchange customer lists with a local veterinarian.

Manufacturers

- Announce new products or prices to customers and distributors. Notify buyers of one product about the availability of other products you offer.
- Alert customers to the availability of upgrades and accessories to products they have purchased.
- Send or offer small product samples to qualified sales leads.

Professionals

- Mail cards to clients announcing changes in staff at the firm.
- Raise awareness of your services by alerting the community to special events related to your service.
- For example, a health clinic could mail a flyer promoting Heart Health Awareness Week.
- Mail a periodic newsletter informing customers of new developments in your field and providing helpful tips relating to your service.

Price Testing

Consider testing a few mailings with two different prices. Randomly send half of your prospects a direct mail package with one price, and send the other half an identical mailing with a different price. If you receive a similar number of orders from both campaigns, you can select the price that results in the higher net profit.

Generate Web site traffic

Do more than just mention your URL in your letter or list it with your toll-free number on your postcard. Create an entire mail piece—including the offer—to drive customers and prospects to your Web site. A search engine may get them there, but why not test direct mail?

Direct people to a unique landing page or personalized URLs

Don't create a mail piece that sends people to your homepage, and expect them to remember how and why they got there. You may lose them and the opportunity to measure response to your original mailing. Use a landing page or personalized URL to tie your offer and customer to your mailing.

Make a one-step sale

Even though most solos and self-mailers selling products and services don't generate mail-in orders, they're very effective at generating one-step online and phone transactions.

Generate qualified leads

Direct mail is a powerful and personal tool for providing just the right amount of information to get people to raise their hands and say, "I'm interested." Then you have the choice of following up in person, by phone or e-mail. Make sure to track and compare your direct mail efforts with those done by phone, online and from referrals. In addition to tracking initial response and close rates, make sure to measure and compare the lifetime value of leads from all sources.

Provide ink-on-paper sales messages and product benefits

There still are customer and prospect segments that prefer to receive your message printed on paper and delivered by mail. For these audiences, direct mail is more memorable and can be retained more easily for later decision making. If you are tracking, measuring and analyzing results from all media, all sales channels, you'll know how much of your business is affected by this.

Support broadcast, space and Web-based advertising

Turn on the TV, then look in your own mailbox and email inbox for examples of how astute marketers integrate media to present a common brand message. A postcard or solo mail piece should be just as effective at communicating your brand as your Web site, TV spots or product packaging.

Can you market your product of service through the mail?

Direct mail is a proven means of getting customers into your store and of taking your store to the customer. Experts agree that just about any product or service can be sold by direct mail if you use the right elements, such as price, list, package and advertising copy. However, the most important thing to determine is whether the product or service can be marketed through the mail profitably. To better understand your product's chances of direct mail success, consider the fallowing points before making a decision to launch a direct mail campaign.

Product Uniqueness

Many successful direct mail campaigns involve unique products or services, or at least unique features. If your product is not actually exclusive, you can make it seem novel by highlighting important features and benefits.

Mail Order

The following checklist may help determine whether mail order makes sense for your company:

- Are your competitors selling similar products through the mail?
- Who is your audience? Are there lists available to reach these potential customers, and what will the lists cost?
- Will the price of your product be competitive?
- Will you accept credit cards/COD/checks/ installment or deferred payments?
- Will shipping costs significantly affect the cost?
- Is your product or service one that will be reordered often? .Can multiple items in your product line be sold to the same customer?
- Will selling your product through the mail require toll-free phone numbers or service hotlines? Can this be done profitably?

Measuring Performance

How to Measure Your Direct Mail Campaign's Success using Return-On-Investment Tools

Customer acquisition is a critical factor in a company's growth, and requires even more forethought and strategic action during an economic downturn. Tight marketing budgets and managing costs are the game plan when sales are slow. Even under such trying circumstances, direct mail can play a huge role in getting and retaining customers.

Direct mail is one of the most cost-effective ways to bring in new customers. *According to a DMA study conducted last year, direct mail averages $10 in sales for every $1 invested.* Another study by Pitney Bowes found that Direct Mail generated a higher percentage of Internet sales than Internet advertising, TV and radio.

The best way to guarantee the success of your direct mail campaign is to measure the resulting increases in sales and profits. Campaign success is measured as ROI, or return-on-investment.

Other standard measurements such as cost-per-piece or cost-per-lead are helpful but will not provide the "big picture" view that ROI analysis will. The most accurate ROI calculation takes into account a customer's lifetime value, or the amount of sales generated by that customer over time.

Direct mail allows you to control your campaign and direct spending against those targets that are most likely to purchase your product or service. The first step is to run small test mailings to get a feel for your baseline response rates. Subsequent mailings can try different things such as a different mail piece design, modified copy or new mailing lists. When you are confident of your results, you can extend your campaign to larger groups and be relatively assured your ROI will be positive and the close to your test results. A large quantity of names will cost you in production and postage so it is important to make every mail piece count!

When conducting a test mailing, the first step is to decide how many pieces to send. Too large a mailing is unnecessarily expensive, whereas too small a mailing will not have enough responses to accurately determine your response rate. A good rule of thumb is to test between

1000 and 5000 pieces to start. That way you will get a sufficient number of responses back from your mailing to determine what your response rate will be.

Your response rate will vary depending on your product, industry, target market, and other factors, so no general rules apply. For instance, a sub-0.2% response rate is common in the credit card industry, whereas some nonprofit companies experience response rates as high as 50%. This should not discourage you; rather, it highlights the necessity of tracking your response rate for your mailing. If you fly blind, you will only have a vague idea of your campaign's success and you risk wasting money and losing sales.

To increase the response to your next mailing, pay attention to these important factors:

Campaign Goal

What is the goal of your campaign? Do you want to generate leads? Close sales? Raise awareness? Drive traffic to your store or Web site? Once you decide on your goal, establish a baseline and track responses against that baseline. For example, determine the average number of calls that you receive per month, and compare that number to the number of calls you receive immediately following your mailing. Alternatively, if you take orders through your Web site, your mail piece can ask customers to enter a discount code when placing their orders by which you can track the sales associated with your mailing.

The Mailing List

Who are your best customers? Identify who they are and then get lots more exactly like them and market to them. The list can account for up to 60 to 70 percent of your response rate.

Identify the unique characteristics of your customers. Are they male, or female? Where do they live? How much do they make? The answers to these questions can be used to build a targeted prospect list to gain more customers.

The Offer

Whatever your direct mail campaign offers the target audience - a free information packet, an instructive Web seminar, a gift for visiting a trade show booth - concentrate on selling the benefits of responding and receiving the offer. Remember that the goal is to get the person to respond so that they can purchase your product and increase your ROI.

If you can get someone interested enough to respond to the offer, then you have the chance to get them to buy.

The Mailing Format

Here is where testing really plays a crucial role. Without testing your mailing list, your offer, or your mail piece design, you will never know if the campaign's success was due to a compelling offer, eye-catching graphics, and enticing copy with a strong call to action, or a great list. Conversely, without testing, you will not know which aspect of your campaign needs improvement if you receive a less-than-desired response.

Campaign Cost

Take the total cost of your mailing (including creative, printing, postage, and labor) and divide that figure by the revenue generated from an average sale. That will tell you how many sales you'll need to make in order to break even and cover the cost of your mailing. For example, if the cost of your mailing campaign is $550, and your average order is $50, you will need to make 11 sales in order to recover the cost of your mailing. In some cases, however, you may be willing to send out a campaign without breaking even or showing a profit if it means generating qualified leads to whom you can sell again and again. Don't forget the lifetime value of a customer.

House Lists & Prospect Lists

There are three key elements to every direct marketing campaign: the list, the offer, and the creative. Experts seem to agree that the single most important element is the list. In fact, many direct marketing professionals claim that the relative ratio of importance is: 70% list, 20% offer, and 10% creative. It is ironic, because this is also the element that is least well understood by business owners and most often over-looked.

Before you start it is important to understand the intent of your campaign and develop a direct mail marketing campaign. Two common goals for small businesses are to either (a) convince existing customers to buy more (customer lists), or (b) convince new customers to purchase for the first time (prospect lists).

Mailing to your Customer List

The value to your business of any particular customer is known as Lifetime Customer Value – this represents the sum of all purchases that customer will make from your business over the lifetime of the customer. It almost always easier to convince an existing customer to buy more of your products or services, assuming satisfied customers, then to sell to new customers. In fact, repeat sales are essential ingredient for realizing lifetime customer value (LCV).

Regular customer mailings seek to maximize LCV by building an ongoing rapport with existing customers. Imagine the local realtor who sends a monthly newsletter, the neighborhood garage that sends out a note when it's time for a regularly scheduled oil change, or a local retailer who sends out invitations several times a year for private sales events for "preferred" customers only. These are all examples of customer mailings designed to create loyalty.

To do a successful program of this nature it is essential to know who your customers are. Most businesses keep a list of current customers – this is called a house list. The most basic list will include a name and contact information (e.g. address, phone number, email address, etc.). However, the more detailed information that is available the more useful the list will be. For example, it is simple to see how purchase history, income level, gender, and personal data can all lead to more targeted marketing. The more targeted a program the better the chance of success.

Given the importance of repeat purchases, and the role that loyalty programs can play in driving those sales, it is important to gather information on your existing customers. Some businesses routinely gather this information (e.g. auto mechanics, plumbers, and appliance repair people require a completed work-order for every customer). For other types of businesses, a little more creativity may be required (e.g. the "club card" that Safeway offers, or a weekly lunch give-away by a local restaurant for those customers willing to put their card in a fishbowl).

When building this type of list be sure that it is "opt-in". This means to tell your customers that you will be sending them information periodically and get their permission. Most customers will give you permission willingly if they know you will periodically send them offers or information that are valuable to them (e.g. coupons, special offers, the weekly menu, etc.)

> **No matter what type of business you are in, building an accurate and detailed house list is essential for maximizing lifetime customer value.**

As we will see, it is also an important first step in driving new sales.

Sales Prospecting:

Even with the most loyal customers there is a natural attrition among existing customers. In fact, this attrition may not be the fault of your product or service – customers move, customers die, lifestyles change, and so do personal preferences. The bottom line is that sales' prospecting is an essential part of maintaining business growth.

One of the most effective tools available for sales prospecting is direct mail. According to the Direct Marketing Association, on average, direct mail returns ten dollars for every dollar invested. However, as noted earlier, the most pivotal element to direct marketing success is having the right list. What does it look like? Where does it come from? Where do you start?

If you are prospecting for new customers you will probably not have their names. But, names of qualified prospects are available through list compilers and brokers. However, to buy mailing lists it is essential to know what your best prospective customers look like. That's where your house list comes in handy. Scanning through your house list you can identify the traits that are common among your best customers.

For example, you may find that your best customers live within five miles of your business and have incomes of more than $75,000. This demographic information will help you purchase a list of customers that will buy.

There are two main types of lists that can be purchased: compiled lists and response lists.

Compiled mailing lists are comprised of information from public records and sources such as the phone book, courthouse records, bankruptcy filings, mortgage deed records and more. On the other hand, *response mailing lists* consist of individuals who have responded to an offer either through the mail, phone, television, or through other means of mass communication (e.g. a magazine subscription list, a catalog mailing list, etc.).

These types of lists must be understood – each has a set of unique characteristics that enables it to achieve specific and distinct objectives. The key to success is to understand when it is most appropriate to use each kind.

Compiled list are ideal for those businesses that need special demographic selectivity to target a well-defined market, for instance targeting auditing companies specializing in bookkeeping, manufacturers with 50 or more employees, or families with household incomes of $50,000 who live within 10 miles of your store. All of these examples are likely to do better with a compiled list than a response list. This is good news if you understand the demographic profile of your customers since compiled lists are generally less expensive than response lists – costing between $40 and $70 per thousand versus $90 to $125 per thousand for response lists.

Response lists are the best choice if you need to cover an entire market of prospects with similar characteristics. For example, if you are selling a specialized software engineering tool, or to every Certified Public Accountant in the State, there are lists available from publications that serve these markets. Often information is even available on how frequently these prospects typically respond to offers they receive. Response lists, especially among those who are shown to respond, can produce higher response rates – thus justifying the higher price.

Both types of lists are not always available for all audiences. So a little research may be required to determine what is available for your target market.

Once the correct type of list is determined the next step is to decide how many names are required. This comes back to your direct mail marketing plan. First, decide how many customers you are trying to acquire.

The answer is not as simple as "as many as possible". Consider how many responses you can handle. If the goal is to have customers call you, and you only have one person to answer the phones, then you probably don't want 10,000 prospects calling you at once. It is a simple rule of marketing that the further you get from the initial point of contact with your prospects the less likely they are to buy. Thus, you only want as many prospects as you can service at any given moment in time.

Similarly, if you have a restaurant that only has seats for 100; it doesn't make sense to attract 1,000 new customers to your doorstep on any given day. If you have the chance to acquire a new customer you may only have one chance. Another simple rule of marketing is that it is ten times easier to get a new customer to try your business the first time, then it is to get them to try it again if they have a bad experience; plan to acquire only as many customers as you can service – and serve them well. In the long-run this is a far more powerful plan.

With your target in mind just work backwards. For example, if you are trying to attract 100 new customers, and you believe that 2% will respond to the promotion, of those 50% will buy, then you will need 10,000 names (10,000 * 2% * 50% = 100). Response rates will vary depending upon the accuracy of the list and attractiveness of the offer. Direct mail professionals often use a 2% response rate as the benchmark for a successful campaign. However, much higher response rates are possible with a targeted and attractive offer.

When using a response list the vendor can often provide you with target counts. These may or may not be enough to meet your goals. You may need to combine several response lists to get the list counts that are required.

With compiled lists the trick is to configure the demographic selects appropriately to produce the size list required. For example, if you

need 10,000 names, and you request all females within ten miles of your business, and the initial list count is 100,000 names, then you may have to tighten your search criteria – possibly by adding another select (e.g. income level). In a similar fashion, the demographic criteria can be relaxed slightly if the name count is not high enough.

In addition, this is not a strictly compiled or response list decision. If both are available, and the counts are sufficient, then it may be appropriate to do some small test mailings to determine which produces the best results for your business, whatever type of list you choose. It is always best to do test mailings to a particular list, hone your message, and then mail to the larger list.

Summary

There are two types of mailings that should be used to drive any successful marketing effort: customer mailings and prospect mailings. The best results are achieved for customer loyalty programs when a detailed house list is available. For prospect mailings, lists must usually be purchased – a detailed house list can also be incredibly valuable for purchasing the correct list.

There are two primary types of lists available for prospect mailings: compiled lists and response lists. The correct choice revolves around the type of customer you are targeting, geographic and market reach, and total list counts that are available. The best choice is based on a well thought out direct mail marketing plan and realistic targets.

Mailing Formats

Which pulls the best response, a postcard, a self-mailer or a letter? The answer, you'll be irritated to know, is clear. It depends.

Over the years we've learned how well a direct mail program performs depends on the chemistry of three elements—format, offer, and list—and whether or not you have designed the program with enough frequency and follow-up triggers built in.

The success of your mailing depends on who you mail to (your list), what you promise (your offer), when you mail (your timing), and what you mail (your format and creative). Here are a few questions to ask yourself to decide which format is likely the best one to use for your next mailing.

Letter

Does your sales message need to come from one person by name? Does it need to be addressed to a person by name? Is privacy or confidentiality a concern? Then a sales letter inside an envelope is the way to go.

Postcard

Is your sales message short and simple, and designed to motivate your prospect to visit your website to hear your full pitch (and place an order)? A postcard is a good option.

Self-mailer

Do you need to illustrate your sales message while keeping printing and mailing costs down? Then try a self-mailer (a document that mails without an envelope, such as an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of card stock, folded once on itself and sealed with a tab).

Classic direct mail package

Do you have things to say that do not really fit in a letter (technical specifications, for example)? Is your sales message longer than 600 words? Does your prospect need to mail back a check or order form? Then a classic direct mail package is your best choice, consisting of a mailing envelope, letter, brochure, business reply card or order form, and business reply envelope.

Catalog

Do you have a lot to sell? Do you need to show the color, shape or quality of your product? Mail a catalog.

Flyer

Do you have a message that needs to reach everyone in a given geographic area, such as a business park, for the least amount of money? Consider mailing a simple 8 ½ x11 sheet with copy and design on one or both sides.

Direct Mail Formats for Maximum Impact

Postcards

This relatively inexpensive direct mail format is best used when your program goals are to a) build brand awareness, b) extend a transactional offer (i.e. discount, free gift), or c) drive prospects to your web site for further qualification (to download an article, etc.). Due to very specific postal guidelines, space is limited so your creative and copy must be compelling and brief. Postage rates can be as low as .23/unit, so it is wisest to choose postcards when targeting a larger, less qualified prospect pool.

Standard postcard dimensions are as follows: 4.25" x 6", 6" x 8.5", and 6" x 11". When planning your mailing, keep in mind that 4.25" x 6" is the largest size that still falls within first class postcard postage rates, and all other sizes will be charged at higher postal rates.

#10-sized Letters

Letter mailers are best suited to marketing **a)** more complicated offers, **b)** long-term commitments (subscriptions, memberships), **c)** personal products, and d) upscale products or audiences. In fact they should be mostly used when qualification has already occurred and only carefully used on cold lists (for example, they have already attended a seminar or webinar of yours, downloaded something from your website, etc.). To improve your open rates, write out addresses by hand. While more time-consuming to complete, hand written addresses create a more personal connection with your contact and pull a nearly 100% open rate. Once opened, your letter has 2 to 4 seconds to grab the recipient's attention. So tell them why you are contacting them and how you can help them in the first few sentences of your letter-you won't get another opportunity. Remember, most people are slow readers, so once you have captured their interest break your copy up into small, easy-to-digest paragraphs and use 12 point type or larger. Never end a page with a period, unless you want your reader to stop reading at that point. Finally, always include some value added content with your letter (i.e. case studies, articles, etc.).

US Priority Mail or FedEx Packages

These campaigns can be very effective, but like the #10 -sized letter, only when you have already built awareness with the recipient through prior marketing programs. Remember opting to send direct mail pieces with US Priority Mail or FedEx (or a similar service) ensures a higher open rate, but can cost upwards $4.75+ per unit. Make sure it is worth

the cost by targeting only your most qualified prospects for these types of mailings. Then create a compelling enclosure—one that clearly matches your offer to your audience and your key marketing objective.

Note that you don't have to send a free gift or odd-sized enclosure to justify this expense. Many companies will simply send their brochure and a handwritten note via FedEx to ensure their hottest prospects sit up and take notice just one more time.

Self Mailer

Reduce costs with a self-mailer. It offers low cost and a quick read, good for quickly recognized content. It also helps speed response because it's not as in-depth as a full package and looks more urgent and newsy. To make a self-mailer work at peak efficiency, combine elements of a standard direct mail package and a print advertisement. Include a strong headline in bold type, copy in easy-to-read sections, strong visuals, clear offer, reply card, toll-free number, message or mini-letter printed near the recipient's address, feature list, testimonials, guarantee, and other elements as needed.

Invitation

Signal exclusivity with an invitation. To make an offer special, you can issue an invitation in the appropriate format, usually a smaller envelope and letter on high quality paper. This works best for offers targeted to high income prospects, professionals, and executive level positions; for events such as conferences, meetings, and presentations; or for offers that need a quality feel.

Telegram

Add urgency with a telegram. This is a good idea that is, unfortunately, wildly overused. It can be little more than an envelope design, such as "Urgent Gram," "Speed Gram," or some variation. Or it might be an envelope and letter combo resembling an actual telegram printed on yellow paper with tractor-feed holes down the sides of the letter. One way to make this format work is to create your own urgent-looking envelope for fulfillment materials. This allows the envelope to get noticed and assures that the contents will be relevant and interesting instead of boilerplate.

Snap Pack

Create an official look with a snap-pack. This format is often used for official notices or statements, so it gives your ad message the same feel. And because the recipient has to rip open the edge of the envelope and

pull out the contents, it creates involvement. It's good for generating inquiries or for organizations with recognizable and trusted names. It has been used with particular success in the nonprofit sector to deliver what appears to be an urgent, cheap appeal for funds.

Lumpy Mail

What is LUMPY Mail? Lumpy mail is a mailing strategy that incorporates promotional products and/or gadgets that make your mail (your envelopes or other packaging) look and feel lumpy. "Lumpy Mail" doesn't look or feel like your standard flat and symmetrical mailer. Lumpy mail arouses curiosity and gets your envelopes and packages opened. This is not theory. It's a proven strategy that often gets amazing results.

What exactly are promotional products and gadgets?

Promotional products are items such as pens, key chains, giant paperclips, mugs, coins, magnets, hats, shirts, and a million other items that can have your company name or marketing message printed on them. You probably have a couple promotional items at home or in the office from vendors yourself.

Gadgets are basically variations of promotional products. Gadgets are items such as coins, funny money, fake jewelry, candy, band aids, and just about anything else you can think of that you can attach to your sales letter or marketing package to make it lumpy.

Helpful Hint: Do not simply drop a gadget or promotional item into your direct mail package for the sake of using it. They key to effective direct mail, or lumpy mail in this case, is to tie your gadget or promotional item in with your marketing message. For example if you use a bag of peanuts you may want to consider this approach…

"Are You Making Peanuts For Profits When
 You Could Be Making Real Dollars?"

Or if you choose to use a miniature magnifying glass in your marketing you can try this approach…

"Discover How To Magnify Your Cash Flow Without Spending A Dime!"

If you simply put in a bag of peanuts, a magnifying glass, or a pen with your company name on it and you did not explain why you did so,

you are wasting a marketing opportunity and your prospect may not take your offer seriously.

Since getting the attention of your prospect is the most important step, focus some of your energy on testing creative strategies for accomplishing this in your direct mail and marketing efforts. It can really pay off.

Using gadgets, grabbers, and promotional items in your marketing and using them effectively can dramatically increase your response rates. In my experience response rates have as much as tripled. But this was after considerable market research including comprehensive list selection, writing, and testing. Studies conducted by the Silver Marketing Group on a significant cross section of businesses in the United States show that response rates increased by 50%.

Copywriting

Direct mail letters are not correspondence, though they may borrow some of its elements such as the salutation and the signature. The rest of a direct mail letter is quite different as we'll see in this brief tour of a typical letter. Not every letter will have every feature, and these apply to sales letters only. Lead generation letters, especially to top management, follow some different dynamics. You should have most of these elements if your letter is to sell—not just convey information.

The Headline
Money making headlines are about the reader, not you .

Successful direct mail writers get their prospects' attention by focusing on the prospect's needs and making them feel that the letter was written just for them. The most effective headline, by far is "Sally Jones (or someone the prospect knows) thought you would be interested in this product." It immediately establishes a relationship and gives you credibility. If you can't get a person's name in a piece, use a club or establishment the prospect is familiar with that you can use as a referral. "Hog (Harley Owner's Group) thought you would be interested in this new chrome cleaner."

Personalize your mailing. When you personalize a mailing by using the prospect's name, the odds of getting a solid lead are five times greater than if you send your piece to a "title" in the company, or "recipient" in a household. A really good hook on an envelope is "I need your help." People love giving advice, but make sure your letter reinforces this message.

Here are some guidelines to make your headlines worth the price of postage:

Use odd numbers. Odd numbers have been shown to outperform even numbers. Odd numbers appear more scientific and legitimate. "93% of users say our product out works better than the competition." It's more believable than saying "everyone says our products are better."

Keep your headline straightforward and simple. Remember, the reader is going to keep your mailing or throw it away in five seconds. The reader should understand your message (and the benefits behind it) as soon as he or she looks at her mail.

Use strong words. They conjure up strong emotions. Some strong headline builders and cover letter openers are "I invite you …" "In next few minutes you're going to discover…" "Congratulations!"(Don't forget the exclamation point — hokey but it works), "You've just won..."

Put the benefits in your headline and use "absolute" terms. "Seven ways to increase your income" is much stronger than **"How to increase your income."** Highlight specific benefits, not simply product descriptions. **As I mentioned, it's not about you, it's about them!** To increase the motivating power of a headline, increase the reward promised by the headline.

For example, instead of "7 Ways to Decrease Your Debt," you might say "7 Ways to Eliminate Your Debt." "Decrease" is vague. "Eliminate" is absolute.

Create a sense of urgency. Use deadlines, like, "Respond by March 31." Notice every infomercial says "order now." They do this because if the viewer doesn't take immediate action, he or she probably won't take any action at all.

Market from the heart. Think about your current customers and remember you're contacting people with the same worries, problems, dreams and goals as you might have. Address the problem you hope the reader has and that you can solve. If you have an accounting firm, you might lead with "Are you paying too much in taxes?"

Use gimmicks to beef up your headline. Studies show that an ad headline draws 28% more attention if framed in quotation marks! The ad appears much more important because it gives the impression that someone is being quoted. This makes it more riveting, and more likely to be read.

You'll almost never write the perfect headline the first time out

Headlines can make or break a direct mail piece, so don't settle for your first attempt. Try writing 30 headlines first time out. Wait a day, analyze all. Add, delete and modify the ones that best seem to deliver on consumer benefits. Wait another day and pare down to the best

ones, then make them stronger. If you can, try to run tests on the best ones by using different headlines in comparison mailings.

The Opening

The opening is the first sentence or first two sentences following the salutation. "I am writing to you about…" or "I want you to know about…" are not openings. The reader, frankly, doesn't care what you want. He cares about himself. This is a key place to say something about him or his needs which your product will gratify. (The documentary film, "The Ad and The Ego," makes the point that the purpose of all advertising is "the production of discontent" in the reader or prospect. Advertising seeks to "develop an inner sense of Conflict" in people which the product, of course, promises to resolve. We do much the same in direct mail, but we address ourselves to one person, not multitudes. Your opening should, therefore, seek out the reader's "hot button" or major problem and begin immediately to show how your product or service can solve it.

Most letters are won or lost in the first sentence. The surest way to lose is to begin talking about yourself and your organization.

The phrase I use to keep my head straight on this is, "Talk about my lawn, not your grass seed!" Another famous ditty that speaks to this situation is:
Tell me quick and tell me true, Or else, my friend to hell with you.
Not how this product came to be, But what the damn thing does for me.

Offer Preview

After the opening, I like to make a brief reference to the offer. "…and you can discover it, (prove it and enjoy it) FREE, without obligation with the certificate enclosed." Now the reader knows I'm not going to be asking him/ her for money. Maybe. So he/she can relax. And my early reference to the response device begins to set up the response behavior. It's also helpful to "merchandise" the offer by referring to it at several points throughout the letter. "When you send for your free demo (free trial issue, 30 day no-risk trial, etc.) and get it up and running, you'll quickly see…"

Sell Copy

From the offer preview, get right into the benefits your reader will realize when he/she tests, previews, examines your product. Stay in second person throughout your letter. You're talking to her (one person, not a market) about her, not you, and you're talking about yourself and your product only in terms of what it will do for her. Avoid the first person pronoun (I, we) except when to do so create an awkward phrase. Remember you're selling the offer, not the product. It's much easier to sell a 30-day trial or a free examination than it is to sell the product itself. You'll discuss payment terms later.

Try to lead off sentences and phrases with benefits. "You'll make first hand contact with hundreds of the most active, most involved sales prospects in the industry in just two short days…" "As one of America's elite "Million- Plus" pharmacies, you are in a unique position to increase sales, slash operating costs and grow your business rapidly with xyz…"

Use Subheads to Introduce New Thoughts

You want to avoid eye-glazing, mind-numbing, wall-to-wall copy, so use subheads to introduce new thoughts and to move from one part of the letter to the next.

- Write in short sentences.
- Write in short paragraphs.
- Present a list of benefits or features in list form, preceded by a bullet instead of in a linear paragraph.
- Use words of one syllable as much as possible.

Don't assume that the person you're writing to is as literate as you are. Even if he is, he's distracted, and he's trying to extract the key information he needs, often by just scanning your letter. Which is another good reason to use subheads...bulleted listings...and...ellipses.

Be ruthless in editing out unnecessary words and phrases and "write like you talk," assuming you can talk like a successful salesman. In direct mail, Clarity is more important than literary merit and the ability to sell is more important than the ability to write. When you've fully described the many ways your product will benefit the reader, show him/her how he can acquire this fabulous program/product/service. Or, rather, how he/she can realize these benefits right now.

Spell out your offer in detail. What the reader gets. If you're offering a premium, this the place to sell that a bit, too. You may also feature it in the brochure if you have one, or in a separate premium flyer.

If at all possible, and if appropriate otherwise, date your offer. An expiration date helps to keep your package from going up between the lamp and the tape dispenser for further consideration. Again, agreement doesn't do it. Only acting on that agreement right now results in sales.

The Guarantee

No one wants to make a mistake, especially, not an expensive mistake. Relieve that fear with your guarantee. Mitigating risk is an essential function of successful direct mail. By law you must refund legitimate requests up to 30 days anyway, so why not make it a virtue? Don't worry that your guarantee might somehow shed doubt on your product. The guarantee speaks not to your product, but to you as an honest and fair businessperson they can trust.

But don't hawk it as a "Money Back Guarantee." Or "Full Refund If Not Satisfied". That's negative. A Free (or Risk-Free or No-Risk) 30-day Trial is the same thing, expressed in positive terms. "Examine it, try it, use it for a full 30 days without risk." That's an invitation, not a warning.

Note that under FTC rules governing the use of the word "free," an offer is not "free" if the prospect must pay something to receive it. Then it may be called "risk-free" if you guarantee a refund. Even better, you can extend the guarantee to 60 or even 90 days. Longer trial periods allow prospects to become acclimated to the product. They also get inertia working for you, instead of against you. People forget.

The Call to Action

Even after all that, you can't assume the reader will do what you want him/her to do, right now. But that's what he/she must do. So spell it out. Does he detach and complete a reply card, call a toll free number, complete a questionnaire, check a box? Punch out a token? What? Is there a postpaid or self-addressed reply envelope to use?

Ask him/her to do all that right now because that expiration date will be here before he/she knows it. Because he really wants to try this, but if he lets it go till "later," he'll forget.

The P.S.

Punctuate the call to action with the signature, and then add a P.S. After the headline and first sentence, the P.S. commands the highest readership in the letter. Use that important space to repeat a key benefit, or add a twist or another idea to something you've already said. Also repeat your call to action here, in slightly different words. The mnemonic for the basic function of all direct marketing, but especially for letters, is AIDA. Get Attention. Arouse Interest. Stimulate Desire. Prompt Action. And it *ain't* over until the fat lady mails the order form.

Personalization

Direct Mail Personalization works by using data elements in such a way that the prospect, customer, subscriber or donor feels recognized. From the simple "Dear Mrs. Williams" in the salutation line of a new customer solicitation, to an association renewal reminder of prior participation levels, these touches can boost response by double digits. Seven in ten consumers want you to personalize the direct mail you send them. Are you giving them what they want? According to Cap Ventures' study of personalization, more than 69% of consumers prefer highly personalized direct mail offers over non-personalized offers.

Smart direct mail marketers personalize their mailings because personalization works. Personalization boosts response rates, sometimes by double digits. And it boosts orders.

Personalization works because it tells your clients that you know them and recognize their uniqueness. If I have to sales letters on my desk, one addressed to "Dear Homeowner" and the other addressed to "Dear Alan," I know which letter will receive more of my attention.

Today's databases and laser printing provide many opportunities to use personalization in for-profit and nonprofit mail campaigns. Here are some ways to boost your response rates and orders with personalization:
- At the very least, personalize the salutation on letters
- Personalize the salutation on postcards and self-mailers
- Refer to the customer's last purchase, and name the product
- Refer to the customer's last purchase, and name the date of purchase
- Mention the date that the customer's subscription expires
- Mention the product, service or problem that your reader mentioned in a previous transaction
- Handwrite your lift notes
- Give readers the name and phone number of their area sales representative

Needless to say, personalization's new frontier is the online campaign. But note that the basic common sense needed in print personalization must be enhanced with careful attention to virtual marketing's cultural and legislative environment.

Strategies & Tactics

Frequency

One direct mail strategy is so simple, so obvious, and so important, that it can be summed up in a single word: *Frequency.* In other words, mail often. If you mail 25,000 solicitations of one kind or another, and, after the dust settles, you see a profit; you can actually sit back and say, "This was a profitable business activity." So, if it was profitable once, why not do it again? And why not do it *often?*

After all, if you are covering the cost of merchandise, the cost of the direct mail promotion and any other costs associated with that promotional effort — and have a profit left over to show for it — that seems to be the perfect reason to mail more often. Sometimes, though, businesses do not mail as often as they would like or think they should because they feel like it is too time consuming.

Vary your offer

The second most influential factor in determining the success of a direct mail campaign is the offer – what you will give people for responding and how you present it. Mailers should make sure that they understand what the recipients want. Keep in mind that the offer must match with the list.
Some general tips to improve your offer are:

- Be as specific as possible.
- Offer something unique and valuable to your market.
- Make the offer as risk-free as possible, incorporating a "limited time trial" or "money back guarantee" if necessary.

Be clear about when recipients must respond by; avoid pressuring prospects with too short of a response time, but don't leave it open-ended. Generally, four to six weeks to respond works well.

Know the difference between the features of your product or service and the benefits. It is not sufficient to discuss features alone; you must tell recipients why they need to respond. When in doubt about the distinction, remember that features are inherent to the product, while benefits attach the feature to a customer need.

Tie your offer to your main benefit. For example, "Act now and save thousands of dollars on online direct mailing costs."

Some offer elements worth testing, include price points, quantity of volume discounts, the way you state your offer (e.g. "save 50 percent" versus "purchase for half price"), and the method of response.

Experiment with your mail package

When considering your mail package, begin with the outside, or you could miss out on a valuable selling opportunity. A consumer's interaction with the typical direct mail piece is like their interaction with a door-to door salesman. The key is to "make your pitch before the door is slammed in your face." The average person spends three to five seconds deciding whether to open your direct mail piece, so start selling immediately. Testing outside teaser copy versus blind envelopes can help you determine what's best for your audience.

When testing different mail packages, try to vary the package type (e.g. postcard, letter, self- mailer, etc.) In addition test the use of stamps versus indicia. Even the use of stamps with different designs could produce a noticeable lift in response.

The inside of the mail package should be test also. The following suggestions apply the body of direct mail letters and solicitations:

- **Use a strong lead.** Recipients will likely scan the letter before deciding whether to read it, so seize this important opportunity to make an impression
- **State your offer at the beginning and the end of your letter.** Reinforce what you're asking the recipient to do and why they should do it.
- **Keep the letter short and simple.** A maximum of two pages should be used and avoid busy graphics.
- **Highlight the solutions you can offer.** Appeal to the recipient's problems and daily challenges and offer a way to ease their stress.
- **Use solid facts.** Back up your claims with proof in the form of guarantees and testimonials.
- **Make it easy to respond.** Close with a call to action and include a vehicle to do so (e.g. coupon, response card, 1-800 number, etc.).
- **Test different letter styles, graphic elements, and techniques.** Experiment with different elements of your letter including use of signatures, personalization, bullets, aggressive versus nonaggressive tone, etc., to determine what combination of factors will pull the best.

Seasonality, timing and frequency

When are your customers doing budgets? Will the mailing hit at the end of a quarter, when they have little money to spend? Is it best to market your product or service before or after the holidays? If you're marketing to trade show attendees, how far out from the event do you market? Is it best to send e-mail before or after the direct mail piece to alert recipients of its arrival?

The effects of such factors generally vary by market, and are worth testing to determine the best approach for your product or service as they could have a significant effect on the response rate.

General rules for testing

There are several basic rules of testing to ensure success:

1. *Have a good reason for the test.*
2. *Test one variable at a time.*
3. *Test against a control.*
4. *Make sure the test batch and the control mail at the same time.*
5. *Test sufficient quantities to get an accurate response.*
6. ***Use a Professional Mailing Company.***

Direct mail requires professional support. Direct mail looks easy enough. You print mailing indicia in the upper right-hand corner, get some rubber bands, trays and tags, and have at it. But should direct mail really be a do-it-yourself activity?

The answer is an absolute and emphatic, "No!" Preparing mail properly has always been tough, but now it is tougher than ever thanks to the postal reclassification.

Without the professional services of a direct mail company, you run the risk of losing valuable time and considerable money by trying to tackle the job yourself. Today, efficient, accurate and deliverable direct mail requires up-to-the-minute knowledge of mailing costs, mailing list hygiene, proper formats, automation discounts, carrier routes, bar codes, and much more.

Think about this: You can justify spending a little more to print on a better paper in order to make your mailing look better or use a colorful envelope so that it will not be missed. But the quality of postal delivery does not get better or faster just because you inadvertently pay more for postage, or because you are not familiar with the ins and- outs of the

postal system. Since postage costs can account for half of your entire direct mail budget—and sometimes more—why would you ever want to spend more than you have to?

Direct mail is a science that professional direct mail companies work with every day. That makes them experts. Just as they do not profess to be experts regarding the technology or body of knowledge that you work with in your business, you should not assume that you could do what they do with equal expertise. They do the most good for those clients who put their trust in them, who turn to them as direct mail experts, and who allow them to show them the big picture.

4 Strategies That Reduce Buyer Risk

The winners in the competitive selling arena of the Information Age are those who are the low risk providers, not the low price providers. These four simple solutions will help you reduce your customer's perception of risk.

1. Build solid, deep relationships with the key decision makers. Relationships mitigate risk. The greater the relationship, the lower the perceived risk. That why the salesman with the longer relationship almost always has the benefit of the doubt in a competitive situation. It's not the price, it's the risk.

2. Make ample use of third party recommendations, customer lists, case studies and testimonials. All of these say to the customer that someone else, or lots of someone else's, have used the product or service. That means it's less risky for your customer to buy it.

3. Try to get your customer as physically involved with the product as possible. For example, if you're selling a piece of equipment, try to get the customer to trial the equipment, or at least visit somewhere it's being used. The more your customer can see and feel the actual thing, the less risk it is to them.

4. Finally, work with our company to create offers that reduce the risk. Trial periods, money-back guarantees, delayed billing, warranties, service desk… all of these reduce your customer's perception of risk.

12 Ways to Inspire Confidence without Testimonials

Testimonials are a great way to support and prove the claims in your advertising. They also engage the "bandwagon" effect: the more people doing it, the more acceptable it is. But there's nothing magical about testimonials. The key is to show "other people doing it." So while you should certainly build a collection of powerful and enthusiastic testimonials, there are endless proofs you can use to create confidence. Here are some of the most effective:

1. Use indirect testimonials. For example, list businesses using your products or services. Or you can list the states or countries in which you do business, the industries you serve, the percentage of Fortune 500 companies you work with, the types of professionals who trust you, and so on.

2. Show pictures of people using your product or service. This is usually better than a "still life" of your gadget sitting idle in a photo studio. An action picture can simultaneously show the product, show the kind of people who use it, and show benefits. Seeing is believing.

3. Relay case histories of your best customers. Studies show that tangible case histories can be more effective than impressive statistics. Show how someone solved a problem or derived a big benefit. Before and after descriptions are particularly effective.

4. Mention how long your company has been around. This is a subtle indication of popularity. What is impressive here is relative to your business. If you're a software company, being in business ten years makes you an old-timer. If you're a bank, ten years makes you an infant.

5. Tout the number of products sold. McDonald's built an empire by displaying on their signs a running count of the number of burgers served. It's in the untold billions now.

6. Display the number of customers you serve. It always helps to keep good records. Dig through your sales reports and see what figures you can come up with. You might have to estimate, but make it reasonable and believable. And be sure you have data to support your claim.

7. Warn customers about limited product due to demand. This shows popularity plus scarcity, another powerful human motivator. However, be careful. If you cry wolf too often, people will eventually stop believing you.

8. Announce the speed of your sales due to demand. This combines popularity with urgency. If you're the fastest selling, say it. If you're not, maybe you're the most consistent.

9. Say how long your product or service has been a bestseller. This indicates popularity, quality, and consistency. This can often be more effective than just saying how long you've been around.

10. Cite information on your market leadership. Everyone prefers to deal with a company that's profitable, respected, and well-known.

11. Reveal the seasonal demand of your product or service. Not only does this show public acceptance, it also overcomes inertia and can encourage early orders. A good example is the rush to buy the latest fad toy during the holidays.

12. Show important or well-known people using your product or service. This invokes the "halo" effect by connecting the good feeling people have for the celebrity to your wares. Just make sure you have the required permissions.

Five Simple Steps for Generating Sales Leads

A good lead generation program can lower your sales costs and raise your revenue. Here are five simple, basic steps from Dean Rieck of Direct Creative that should help you get those quality leads pouring in. The basics of making lead generation work for your company.

1. **Offer something free**. This is the key to any successful lead generation program. Whether you use direct mail, print ads, radio, television, or other media, you must offer something free to get prospects to raise their hands and say, "I'm interested in this. "You can offer just about anything: free booklet, free gift, free survey, free sample, free catalog, free inspection, free consultation, or anything else that's related to your product or service.

2. **Help your prospect solve a problem**. Forget positioning pieces and other pomp and circumstance. Give your offer value. For someone having tax problems, offering a "free tax reduction kit" is more appealing and relevant than "a free brochure about the XYZ Accounting Firm." Try to solve particular problems.

3. **Stay focused on getting the lead**. Don't get carried away with the creative aspects of designing a mail piece or ad. Keep your message as simple and lean as possible. The idea is to pique your prospect's interest in the free thing you're offering and get a request for it. Don't talk about your company, then tack on an offer. Focus the whole message on the freebie.

4. **Gather the information you need to make a sale**. The only reason for offering something free is to get a name, address, phone number, and other information to build your database. So make sure your reply device asks for the necessary data. Be careful if you ask for an e-mail response, though, because the prospect may not give you everything you need. And if you want to direct a prospect to your Web site, create a special URL that will ask for contact information first, otherwise your prospect will wander around your site and leave without providing the data you want.

5. **Follow up fast**. Hot leads cool off quickly. When you get an inquiry, send the freebie immediately. Then get the lead into the hands of your sales force pronto.

18 Essential Elements That Can Make or Break Your Direct Mail Campaign

1. A terrific product or service is absolutely essential. Otherwise, people won't return to buy from you again. An important direct marketing concept: the back end is more important than the front end. In other words, getting your customers to buy from you again is most important and you won't get them back unless you have a terrific product or service. If your product or service can stand on its own without a lot of hype, you will get repeat customers.

2. The lists you choose can make or break your mailing. How can you possibly create a successful mailing without knowing who you are mailing to?!? You must know their thoughts, dreams, and goals. Know their demographics (how they are) and psycho-graphics (how they would like to be). And when you write copy to them, write to them expressing the way they would like to be, not how they really are. Most people want more out of life than work and their paycheck. Promise them more in your direct mail piece. In addition, choose lists that can grow with you. Select vital lists that can return repeaters to you and you will do so much better in your marketing.

3. The offer you use can dramatically increase your results. Too many of us use the same offer over and over again. Good offers to good lists are two key elements to the success of a mailing package. Test your new offer even with the lists you've been using all along and your results should go up.

4. In creative work, copywriting skills are vital. Art attracts but COPY SELLS. Concentrate on the correct copy for the appropriate audience. Proselytize them with the appropriate offer and then you've got a good, strong package. Your wording must appeal to the reader by informing, persuading, cajoling, convincing and motivating the reader. There are only three types of people to whom you mail. They are: Those who will buy from you. Those who won't buy from you. Those who might, but they need a little push in your direction. If you get argumentative in your copy, you turn off all those who will buy from you. Concentrate on the in between group with your copy. Inform, persuade, motivate and inspire them.

5. Good design should lead the eye. It should not dominate the display. The design does not sell — even if you're selling Caribbean vacations. Art attracts, explains and enhances, and good art will let the copy make the sale. Write the copy first. Design once you know how long the copy is, when you know the key copy points, and once you know to whom it is going. Design follows copy, and then design gets the reader hooked and leads the reader to respond by using the response form. In all instances, do not have your art display dominate your mailing package. You want the reader to understand everything the first time it is read. If the reader has to read it twice you lost him!

6. Format selection influences the reader's attention. A self-mailer (one not mailed in an envelope) allows for fast decisions. Your prospect may feel a self mailer is a bulletin, an announcement or an annoyance: "Let me glance at this and throw it away." The reader doesn't pick it up with the idea of reading every word but rather ""do I want to get rid of this?" The reader has 17+ pieces of direct mail on his desk each day and he needs to get rid of them. So…

   Produce your self-mailer with a powerful headline and design it in a way that traps the reader. Then, the reader thinks: "Oh, I can make a fast decision." A mailer in an envelope is more complicated. The reader may think: "there's a lot of stuff in that envelope and I don't know if I have time for it." So it may be set aside. Then it gets piled on and the mailing package may never be seen. An envelope mailer is okay, but not when it says to someone, "It's going to take two hours to read this thing!" That's how you lose readers.

7. Proper timing is essential. You need to reach prospects at a time that is convenient for them. Mail to people when they've got the time to read your message and not during their busy season.

8. Budget restrictions can severely hamper results. Saving a few pennies per thousand may mean you create the wrong impression on your audience. What you want to do is test with the most powerful presentation possible. If the test is successful, then the second time you mail, modify the expense on the new package (B) and test against the more expensive one (A). This will help you see if B, at the reduced cost, pulls as well as A, at the higher cost.

9. You must take advantage of A/B split testing. Never, ever mass mail without doing some split testing. The point is to get information back that you can use in the next mailing.

10. Segmented marketing can achieve very high responses for you. Select a segment of names from a database and mail them a given proposition. When you are selling the same product to different groups (clusters) it is important to use a different approach, touting different benefits. Remember to treat each cluster individually.

11. Tailor your mail to an individual prospect. Tailored mail PULLS BEST because it talks to the reader as an individual. When tailoring mail, you must change more than a couple of headlines. The first few paragraphs of the letter could be different to suit a specific reader's interest.

   In addition, tailoring means the order form will be composed with different benefits on it. The outgoing envelope or headline portion of a self-mailer will also speak right to the reader's interests. When you tailor your mail to the specific interests of the reader, you will pull far better.

12. Personalization pays. This includes personalized reply cards and letters which will ALWAYS outpull non-personalized mailings. But, you have to be sure to use personalization in a natural way. Don't personalize so that every paragraph has a personal message. It's a turn off and makes people think you're scamming them.

   If you are personalizing, you must take very special care to talk with your computer programmers and inform them that you are personalizing the mail. Otherwise, mistakes are made.

13. Options put your prospects in a power position. If you don't offer the reader options, you don't pull as well as if you do offer options. Once you get the reader to pick up a pen to choose an option, you've got him. The more options you put in, the more you pre-qualify the recipient.

14. Urgency lifts your total response. If the reader sets aside your mail piece for later, it will not be read again. Give a deadline to force the reader to read it and make the deadline as specific as possible. For contests, sweepstakes, lotteries, or prize drawings in which the prospect must qualify, use the time of day, along with the day and date. The more specific the deadline, the better the pull.

15. Risk relievers, such as guarantees or warranties, build confidence. Your prospects are tired of a rip-off society. Guarantees and warranties need to be highly specific and point out why it is appropriate for the reader to deal with you.

    Double guarantees o pull single guarantees. So, try this *Gnamism:* If one works, try two. If two work, try more. It may increase your response dramatically.

16. Use reinforcements, such as testimonials and case histories, which state your product or service is really the best. If someone else says you're great, that's better than you saying you're great.

17. Benefits are better than features and are more important than features. People buy benefits. They don't buy features. They use the features to rationalize the benefits. And there must be more than one benefit. A smart marketer sets his/her product apart from all others by promoting benefits.

18. The response command. Telling someone to do something works better than assuming the prospect knows what to do. For example, the outside of an envelope should say "Open Now" or "Look Inside." Once inside, tell them to fill out the order form and fax it back. Here's where you need to push a little.

73 Rules for Writing Great Sales Letters

1. Create an offer that's so good, no intelligent person can pass it up.

2. Give away something free.

3. Write about your reader's interests, not your interests.

4. Make your letter read, look and feel like a personal communication from one person to another; not like a mass-produced piece of junk mail that's going to a million people.

5. Persuade your reader with facts and reasons, not fantastic claims and empty hype.

6. Have an attention-getting compelling message that sets you apart from your competitors.

7. Figure out you Unique Selling Proposition (U.S.P.) What makes you different?

8. Know exactly what your readers are looking for before you write.

9. Sell one and only one thing.

10. Raise the level of your proof. (Provide credible third-party testimony to the truth of your claims. Free trial period and free samples are other forms of proof).

11. Craft a great first sentence that creates intrigue. (A question, a proposition, or sometimes a damaging admission is a good tactic).

12. Figure out all the benefits of what your offering, and then promise your most important benefit first.

13. Describe your most important benefit in detail.

14. Include all benefits you can think of somewhere in your package.

15. Include a hidden benefit. (A hidden benefit of Aspirin is that it thins the blood and helps prevent heart attacks). A hidden benefit is like hidden treasure; it's more exciting than the obvious benefit.

16. Explain to your prospects and customers exactly what they will get for their money. (A list and a photo of everything they will be getting is important).

17. Tell readers what bad things will happen if they fail to act now.

18. Ask your reader to give you a "yes" or "no" answer. "Maybe later" is the same as "no." Never allow a "maybe later" answer.

19. Rephrase the most important benefits in the close and other prominent parts of your package.

20. Include a stunning, eye-catching guarantee. I'll sometimes promise buyers a full refund plus some extra money for their trouble if they are not satisfied.

21. Offer and produce instant gratification. (In the age of the internet, people won't tolerate 4-6 weeks for delivery like in the old days. People want it now).

22. Write intriguing, captivating headlines and sub-headlines that emphasize a benefit.

23. Write as people actually speak in everyday life.

24. Write in a warm, friendly, easy-to-understand style.

25. Write a package, not just a letter. (A direct mail package is a like a "show and tell" presentation and should usually include supporting exhibits).

26. Generate emotion with riveting facts and details.

27. Get to the point immediately.

28. Answer all possible objections and questions your reader might have. (Part of this job can be done with a FAQ enclosure).

29. Make it super easy to buy. (Don't make your buyer do lots of paper work and filling out of forms. Your accounting department will resist).

30. Make your order forms look like order forms. (People who decide to buy want to know instantly how to order. This is part of making it easy to buy).

31. Make it clear to whom your reader must write a check. (This should be in bold, not the fine print. This is also part of making it easy to buy).

32. Keep your entire package super simple, clear and focused. If your reader can't figure out what you're selling in three seconds or less, your offer is doomed.

33. Sell one and only one thing. Too many choices can be confusing.

34. Engage the reader in a conversation with thought-provoking questions (that are precisely on point with what your are selling).

35. Propositions are another great way to engage your reader's mind. (People know that nothing is free in life. **"If you do X, I'll do Y"** is a believable offer. People like propositions.

36. Admit your mistakes and shortcomings. This is a great attention getting device that not only builds credibility with your reader, but can also distinguish you from your competitors (who will never admit their shortcomings). **For example:** *"We're not big and established and our offices are modest. We're a brand new firm, so we'll work harder for you. And you'll be dealing with the President of this firm, not a 22 year-old customer service rep."*

37. Short words, short sentences, short paragraphs. Instead of using the word "allow," choose "let." Avoid complex sentence structures. Simple, declarative sentences are best. And no paragraphs longer than five lines.

38. The longer you hold your reader's attention, the better your chance of getting the sale. In other words, make it easier for your reader to keep reading than to skip what you have to say. You do this with fascinating details.

39. Longer letters usually work better than short letters.

40. Your letter should be "scan able" easy to read, easy on the eye. (Bullets, underlining of short phrases, headlines and sub-heads, handwritten notes and other graphic devices help break up copy and catch the eye).

41. Never use humor in your sales letters. (The decision to buy is a serious one).

42. Never use cartoons. Use drawings rarely (almost never). Photos are fine, if they are on point.

43. Make your reply envelope stand out. (Spending time on the reply envelope can boost response 20 percent).

44. The purpose of graphic art is to enhance communication, not appearance. Simple, plain layouts are more effective than fancy, pretty layouts.

45. Learn the 17 top reasons people buy: fear, greed, love, self improvement, desire to win, desire to be recognized, comfort, laziness, quest for a great experience, sex, desire for relationships, anger, desire to make a difference, desire for meaning in life, desire for power, necessity of life, addiction.

46. Deploy both the "avoid pain" and "find pleasure" motives for buying. People buy either to avoid pain or find pleasure.

47. Understand that people buy more often to stop something bad from happening to them than to cause something good to happen. Instead of saying "Save 20%", say "Stop wasting 20% of your money."

48. Understand what it is that you are really selling. (You don't buy fire extinguishers; you buy safety for your family. You don't buy a Black and Decker drill, you buy the holes the drill makes. People don't care about you or your business; they just want to know if you'll fix their problem).

49. The more narrow your focus and the more defined, specialized and unique your list, the more successful you are likely to be: "Narrow is the gate to paradise" in direct marketing.

50. Understand exactly and precisely who you are writing to and what your reader is looking for.

51. The most persuasive word in selling is the word "BECAUSE" . . . BECAUSE people require reasons to believe your claims. "My product is best BECAUSE . . ." is far more persuasive than simply leaving it as "My product is best." People need reasons why to believe your claims.

52. Offer attractive payment options. (i.e. Pay over time; pay later)

53. Use a deadline to increase urgency.

54. Use a cheap lead generation letter for high-priced products and services. Then send those who answer your more costly hard-hitting, high-impact, extensively personalized package designed to close the sale.

55. Design your envelope to get noticed and get opened.

56. Use unusual packaging. (I've mailed direct mail packages in black plastic bags, tubes, clear envelopes, bubble packs, boxes and even pieces of cardboard stapled together).

57. Use teaser copy to tease, not tell. (Create mystery and intrigue)

58. Plain envelopes usually work better than envelopes with teaser headlines.

59. Try making your envelope look like it's coming from the government.

60. Use a low-key, professional envelope for business prospects.

61. Use your sales letter to sell and your enclosures to "show and tell."

62. Make your letter look like a letter.

63. Grab attention in your letter with a short first sentence.

64. Call for action early and often in your letter text.

65. Have a high-authority person sign your letter.

66. Personalize your letter (if your return on investment calculations allows it).

67. Use a P.S. to summarize the offer, reinforce a benefit, and emphasize the response deadline and to add an extra detail.

68. Tables, charts, diagrams, photos, and other visuals help support prove your claims.

69. Know what your reader will read first: Carrier, headlines, the first sentence, the P.S., the order form, and the signature (who is the letter from?). Only if these create interest, will your reader start reading the body of your letter.

70. Understand that all successful sales letters must have these three core elements:
    1. A clear promise;
    2. Proof your claims are true; and
    3. An easy way to order (A Call To Action).

71. A very brief, attention-getting story can help hold your reader's attention and create interest. (i.e. "They laughed when I strapped on a snow board. But their laughs turned to amazement when they saw me speed down the mountain.")

72. If you tell a story, it should not be longer than a few lines. The shorter and more stunning, the better.

73. No story is better than the wrong story.

What to write on a Simple Postcard that will Bring in an Avalanche of Customers

Here is one of the coolest tricks I've ever discovered. It involves using postcards to generate an avalanche of customers for you.

Here's what you need to get started . . . First, you need mailing list of customers and prospects. How to compile your list is not the subject here. I deal with that critical subject elsewhere. And I'll be covering this subject of how to build your list in a lot more detail in the coming weeks and months. The subject here is what to say on your postcard mailing that will produce a flood of customers for you. It's a pretty amazing little secret. Now let's say you're in the real estate business.

All you do is print up your postcards and you write something like:

Dear Friend:
Would you like to learn an amazing secret that will allow you to buy property for 20% below what everyone else is paying? If so, all you have to do is call 000-000-0000 and you will hear a free recorded message that reveals some truly amazing bargains.
Sincerely,
John Smith

Now that was pretty easy. Then write out a telephone script. You practice it a few times. And then you read your script into an answering machine or a voice mail system. And once you are happy with it, you save it.

Your script will say something like this:

"Thank you for calling. My name is John Smith and I'd like to show you a few properties I have available that are being sold by people who are moving out of the area and so they absolutely must sell right away, no matter what. One property must be sold by next Wednesday. Another property I have must be sold by the following Tuesday, July 13th. I have some other fantastic properties in prime locations in the San Diego area that must be sold by certain dates as well because the owners are moving out of the region.

If you'd like to learn more, just call me on my cell phone at 000- 000-0000. I'd be happy to describe these properties to you, and show them to you if this opportunity interests you

Or there might be other reasons you have for why you're able to offer these properties at rock-bottom prices. But my point here is not to give you your reasons or to write your phone script for you, but to show you the formula. You'll have your own story to tell, your own reasons and your own deals to offer.

And this message can be pretty long if you have a lot of interesting things to say. Some of my recorded messages run 10 minutes or more. It just depends. Sometimes short and sweet is best. Sometimes longer is good, if what you have to say is super interesting. Better short and sweet than long and boring. You want to create interest and intrigue so they call you. Don't give them all the details.

Give them just enough, so they'll want to call you and find out more. But give them enough detail so that they believe you.

And that's a big part of effective copywriting and marketing. Tell an interesting story. And the story should be about why you are able to offer your prospect such a great deal. That's what makes you credible.

So once you've recorded your message, you then mail your postcards and wait for the phone to start ringing. And it will ring if you offer something along the lines of what I just described. Your prospects will always be interested in getting a bargain —something at a great price.

The job of your script — and the story you tell on your recorded message is to persuade your caller, your listener, that:
- You really are offering a great price, a bargain they can't get elsewhere;
- You only have a few properties (or whatever you are selling) that fit this special situation criteria. Once the properties (or items) are gone, so is the special one-time opportunity.

Here's why this simple strategy works so well:

- You are offering free insider information on what you know your prospect is interested in.

- Your prospect is more likely to call if it's just a recorded message than if she thinks she's about to be collared by a high-pressure salesman. The prospect knows she can just hang up on the recorded message. So she's much more likely to call.

- When your prospect calls your recorded message hotline, she sees that you are a good guy because you actually delivered what you promised — information on how to buy some great properties at rock bottom prices. And your friendly, casual voice further reassures your caller and puts her at ease.

- You really have shown your prospect that you have a great opportunity for her — but one she'll miss if she does not act now.

And, by the way, the tone of your recorded message is key. Just tell the story and state the facts. You should not yell or scream into the phone or the recorder. You should not sound like a street corner huckster. Just the story. Just the facts. Just the opportunity you are offering. Very matter of fact. Very calm, reassuring and friendly.

I picked real estate as my example. But this formula works for any business. If you are a plastic surgeon, here's some sample copy you might try for your postcard:

Dear Friend,
I'm using a new procedure that can make you look 15 years younger for a lot less than you probably think. Plastic surgery used to cost a small fortune.

But now almost anyone can afford it. And it's very safe. And there's hardly any recovery time.

If you would like to learn more about this revolutionary new xxx procedure just call 000-000-0000 and listen to the free recorded message for all the facts and details. You can call the recorded message anytime, 24/7.
Sincerely,
Dr. John Smith, MD

See the pattern? And notice that I used the old-fashioned courier typewriter font for my postcard. It's more personal looking, more

friendly, looks more like a letter, and is more attention-getting. My tests show that courier still works better than Times Roman or the other desktop publishing fonts.

Here are a few more examples (just the first lines) to get you thinking in the right direction:
- "Would you like to learn how to play the piano in a week?"
- "It takes the schools two years to teach algebra. Would you like it if your child could learn the same material in just two months?"
- "I have a way to get you very high-quality diamonds for less than a jeweler would pay for them?"

Think of your postcard as a teaser, as very much like a headline. If you have knack for writing great, attention-getting, intriguing headlines, you can write great postcards that will generate lots of calls. It's all about emphasizing the big benefit to your reader. What's the big payoff for calling your recorded message hotline?

By the way, you can follow this same formula with your other advertising, not just postcards. You can run ads like this in the classifieds, in the Yellow Pages, and in little newspaper ads. And tiny ads like these are super cheap to buy, unlike full-page display ads. And you can put text like this on fliers you distribute -- even on your business cards, or on signs and billboards. And you can use this formula with your email marketing.

In addition to driving people to your recorded message hotlines, you can send them to your website. But I love the recorded messages because they have your reassuring voice.

I'm sure you now get the formula. It's super easy. You just apply it to your own situation. You can follow the exact same formula no matter what you are selling, and no matter what business you are in.

There is actually a great recorded message service that is designed for exactly this kind of program. It's the one I use and it's called **Automatic Response Technologies**. And you'll find it here: **http://www.automaticresponse.com/**

This service not only makes it a whole lot easier than setting up a recorded message answering system yourself, it will actually give you a report on exactly who called. Even if the caller hangs up and never calls you, you'll know who did that . . . because you'll get a report with the names, phone numbers and the addresses of most of the people who called.

Now some people will block their numbers, so you'll miss those people. But most don't block their numbers. So this is a great way to then build your list of highly qualified leads — that is, of people who were interested enough to call. Make sure to add these people to your newsletter list.

This program fits perfectly into an "Automatic Marketing" system. It's a very low-tech, simple way to automate a big part of your selling — to let machines do the lion's share of your selling for you, to let machines handle the initial sales presentations, to let machines do most of the sorting and sifting of your leads so that you yourself never again have to make a cold sales call. Which leaves you time to only speak to those who are ready to buy from you.

Bringing it all Together— Connecting Offline with Online

Don't forget to link your direct mail efforts to your online media marketing. Building awareness with mail extends the reach of your website. We don't think you need to run out and employ every new marketing tactic out there, but a healthy mix of marketing mediums are needed to get the most out of your marketing budget.

A few online media marketing tools you can use:
- Mobile Marketing with QR codes
- Text Marketing
- Dynamic Landing pages
- PURLs Marketing

Mobile Marketing with QR Codes
Mobile Marketing is an emerging marketing medium. It allows you to connect with customers and prospects who are on the go. Whether you're at a trade show, an event, in your car or even at home, people need to be able to connect with you through their mobile devices. Large percentages of consumers and businesses have "gone mobile" .Believe it or not, there are *5 billion mobile phones worldwide*.

So what can Mobile Marketing do for you? Quite honestly, Mobile Marketing can be used in most every business category and it can drive tons of traffic to a mobile website, your store, your event and much much more.

Here's an example of what it can do. Please scan the mobile barcode below using your smart phone. If you don't have a barcode reader, just go to the app store on your phone and search for "barcode reader" and download a free app (no need to pay for one, most are free). If you don't know how to do this, don't assume your customers and prospects are the same as you. However, you don't need to feel intimidated – just call Plumb Marketing and we'll walk you through it if necessary.

This will take you to a mobile website that is self explanatory. Fill out the form on the site for more info and to schedule your free consultation. After reviewing the mobile site, are you starting to think about how Mobile Marketing might be able to have a positive impact on your marketing? *Imagine having prospects watching a video at a tradeshow after they scan your code at your booth.* What if customers and prospects scanned this image from a direct mail piece, email, printed flyer, door hanger, newsletter, leaflet or even a billboard? You can send prospects to very targeted landing pages that get them to the next step in your sales funnel.

Text Marketing
Text Marketing is another component of Mobile Marketing that can really enhance all of your other marketing activities. It's also a growing segment that should be considered by all small businesses.

Here are some eye opening stats:
- 91% of cell phone users keep their phones with them all day long
- 97% of text messages sent are read
- 2.5 billion text messages are sent every day in the US alone

Obviously these stats show that text marketing could have a big impact on your business simply because so many people are connected to this medium. But more importantly people are connected to this medium in a very personal way nearly 24/7. Most small business owners think this form of marketing is too complicated and possibly too expensive. With some help, you can implement a text messaging strategy in your business in less than a week using around one hour of your time.

Here's how text marketing can work for you**.**
Text: **MSQUARED** To: **41242**

Dynamic Landing Pages
Now that you've spent a lot of thought and effort on your direct mail project, make sure you send your prospect to a relevant website landing page, otherwise known as Dynamic Landing Page. Your prospects should not be guided to your home page, instead, guided to a page that relates to the direct mail piece they just received. According to *Marketing Sherpa*, up to 80% of Web visitors leave a landing page within eight seconds due to poor relevancy, design or offer. The landing page should look like the direct mail piece and have the same offer or message.

Dynamic Landing Pages and pURLs (see next section) offer marketers a powerful tool for giving their prospects and customers a personalized and relevant one on one experience.

Here are some tips you can follow to improve user experience and turn more prospects into leads:

- **Everybody likes to see their own name.** It may sound cliché, but it's true. Welcome the visitor by name.

- **Customize the headline.** Top performing landing pages need a headline that pulls. Use personalization to drive different headlines for all of your list segments. Use headlines that are relevant to the user based on what you know or learn about them.

- **Use personalized images to visually engage the user.** Make sure all images are relevant to the demographic that is receiving your message.

- **Listen and Learn.** Don't forget to listen to your prospects or customers. Personalization can be driven based on what you've learned. Ask the visitor questions to find out more about their feelings and interests. With pURL technology, you can then leverage this data to drive further personalization on subsequent pages.

PURL Marketing
PURL stands for personalized URL and it is a system of marketing that utilizes the internet in conjunction with a direct mailing or email message. Send prospects direct mail offers that feature personalized URLs. PURL marketing allows you to send out highly personalized messages to your customers to advertise an upcoming sale, promote a new product, or even gather customer information with a survey. This level of personalization can convert more direct mail recipients into prospects and lifetime customers.

People notice their name if it is placed in the web address. Here is an example of what a pURL can look like:
Janesmith.yourdomain.com

The pURL message is extremely customizable. You can create a personalized website for each of your customers or prospects; the

website can include your customers' names to present a very personalized message.

Because your pURL marketing message is customized through a database, it's not necessary to actually create the individual web pages for each customer one by one. All you have to do is supply the information, typically in the form of a spreadsheet or other type of mailing list. The information is converted, the page templates are created, and the pURL websites are generated, using as much or as little detail as you wish to include.

PURL Results
Studies show that pURL campaigns achieve higher response rates than traditional marketing. Customers and prospects are far more likely to pay attention to a pURL message that is directly addressed to them. Customizing the message to meet all of their preferences will definitely get their attention and are more likely to make a purchase or fill out information.

Ways to Integrate Your Direct Mail and Online Media Marketing
By now you hopefully have been experimenting with online media marketing such as, websites, Twitter, blogs and Facebook. No single media venue should be relied on to reach consumers.

Remember, content is KING with social media. Make sure your information is helpful, newsworthy and engaging. Here are a few ideas to help you integrate your direct mail marketing efforts with online media marketing.

- **Send your prospects mail offerings**. Web-savvy customers enjoy relevant mail offerings. Drive current customers from the computer to the mailbox by letting them provide their mailing addresses in exchange for special offers – coupons, product samples, etc. — made exclusively through the mail.

- **Make a direct-mail piece a membership card to your best customers** Mail recipients a unique code they can use to gain access to a members-only area with exclusive offers and information.

- **Tell-A-Friend promotion.** Every page on your website should have an option for visitors to share it with a friend. Expand that with the option to key in a mailing address. Members of your community can nominate friends to receive a membership card by mail or kick off a members-only coupon.

- **Post a "Top Ten Tips" list.** Have the list on your website and promote some of the items on a direct mail peice. Drive recipients online to see the tips they missed. You can do the same with advice or case studies submitted by your customers.

- **Make an announcement**. Make an announcement for an upcoming deal and to watch for details in the mail. Use social sites like Facebook and Twitter to drum up anticipation for your upcoming direct mail campaigns. Make sure there is a NEED to read that mail piece, it must be a very intriguing offer. You may even want to make a YouTube video to announce your offer.

Services and Products offered by Plumb Marketing

- Marketing Plan Development
- Product Fulfillment—*we ship products ordered online*
- Literature Fulfillment—*pick and pack or on demand printing*
- On Demand Printing
- Online Storefronts for Printed Material & Promotional Items
- Promotional Items—*over 300,000 available*
- Printing
- Mailing
- 3 Dimensional Mail
- Plastic membership Card Printing
- Personalized URL's
- Data Processing
- List Acquisition
- Email Marketing
- Pay Per Click Management
- SEO & Web Development
- Mobile Marketing & Text Messaging

Plumb Marketing has been successfully providing marketing, mailing, printing, and fulfillment services for almost 20 years. Offering these turnkey solutions enables you to meet all of your direct marketing and fulfillment needs at one location. Our experienced team can consult with you from the early design stages to ensure your campaign is getting off on the right foot. We're here to help you get a Return On Investment for all of your marketing dollars.

Please contact us if you would like to know more about the professional services offered by Plumb Marketing

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Lynndell Epp is President of Plumb Marketing, a full service direct mail service provider in Denver, Colorado.

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Plumb Marketing offers many free resources at its Web site, www.plumbmarketing.com