

10 WAYS TO INCREASE DIRECT MAIL RESPONSE—FAST!

Sometimes the most minor adjustment or fine-tuning can yield a surprisingly major lift in response. Here are ten little ideas that are easy to implement...and can pay off with big dividends at the mailbox.

Test different offers. Nothing earthshaking here. This old maxim still holds barrells of truth. The offer that you think is NOT your strongest offer may indeed pull the best. There's just no substitute for testing. Remember, keep all other variables exactly the same (and mail in enough quantity) for the test to be a valid indicator.

Take a close look at how you word your offer. Certain words are more inviting than others. For example, the word "trial" is often a part of the language of the offer. But trial means an examination or a test in this connotation...a slightly negative meaning. Now consider the word "use." That sounds a lot more positive, don't you think? These little nuances do make a difference!

Make your offer as risk-free and painless as possible. Do you offer an unconditional guarantee? Is yours a no-obligation offer? What about the time frame? Is your deadline 30 days hence? That's just not enough time to squeeze all the potential acceptances out of your campaign. Sixty days is perfect, as stretching to 90 does not help response.

Check your mailing for clarity. Mailings that are confusing, that muddy the key selling arguments, or fail to speak directly to the prospect have no chance of netting a good response. This is no

time for subtlety! Your benefits should be clearly stated, right up front, backed up by features. Is your strongest selling argument in the headline and reinforced several places throughout the copy? Even if you routinely test before you roll out your package, it's always a good idea to informally poll several people who know little or nothing about you or your company...and get their feedback.

If you can't recite your envelope copy without a breath, it's too long. This is not the place to overwhelm your reader's ever-shrinking attention span. The same goes for the postscript. If you find yourself into a PPS, you're going overboard. Put it in the body copy.

Don't describe the offer on the envelope. Remember, the sole purpose of the envelope copy is to get itself opened, so this is not the place to give away the store. It is the place to tickle the reader's curiosity and/or promise a benefit and/or make claims that will pull your target into the piece. Tip: A potent message will outpull heavy production.

Test different formats. Try different size packages. Self-mailers. Double postcards. All of these can lift response under the right circumstances. You won't know which works best for you until you experiment. One caveat—if yours is a complex product, forget the double postcard.

Try a premium. Premiums work best when they are seen as desirable, have a high-perceived value, and are closely tied into whatever you're selling.

Enclose a peel-and-stick merchandise return label with your solicitation (not with the merchandise). This builds confidence, validates your guarantee...and always lifts response. Hopefully your target will forget about it, or better yet, lose it altogether, by ordering time!

Print the order form or reply card on bright stock, so it stands out from the rest of your mailing. Other effective response builders: handwriting margin notes or the postscript, using a rubber stamp on the outside envelope, and using post-it notes (or even the semblance of post-it notes). In fact, anything that adds a personal quality to your mailing will likely lift response. ♦