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SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS DIRECT MARKETING

How to Increase Leads and Sales When Marketing to Business Prospects

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Section 1

What Makes Business-to-Business Marketing Different Than Consumer?

After a quarter of a century in business-to-business marketing, I think I've finally figured out an accurate, authoritative answer to the question, "What's the difference between business-to-business marketing and business-to-consumer marketing?"

The answer, in my opinion, is this:

The business buyer needs your product – the actual, physical product, not just its benefits – and wants to spend his money on it.

Yes, the benefits are critical. But he needs more than just the benefits or advantages; he also needs the actual product – a fax machine, personal computer, domain name, credit line, pollution control system – itself.

The consumer wants the benefits your product delivers, but does not want the product itself. Nor does he want to part with his money to obtain it.

Let's compare two different products; a business product and a consumer product.

The consumer product is a monthly financial newsletter that tells individual investors what stocks to buy.

The business product is a valve used in the chemical process industry.

In the case of the valve, your customer, an engineer – let's call him Pete – is not merely looking for a set of benefits (e.g., the ability to control fluid flow).

Pete is looking specifically for a valve. His processing plant uses many valves, and when one has failed or the plant is being expanded, he needs another valve. Nothing else will do.

Pete wants to buy a valve – the physical product – and he knows what he wants.

He most likely does not have to be sold on the idea of using valves; he already uses them.

(Yes, there may be exceptions, such as when another piece of equipment could be used in place of a valve.)

Pete does have to be sold on whether to buy your valve vs. another brand or model.

Although Pete may have a budget that constrains his selection of valve manufacturer and model, he is not opposed to the idea of spending money on valves. He does not resist it.

As a plant engineer, spending money on valves is actually part of Pete's job description: to not buy valves would be paramount to a dereliction of duty – the duty to keep the plant operating reliably and efficiently.

So Pete wants to buy, and he wants to spend his company's money to acquire this product.

Now let's take Pete's father, Tom, also an engineer but now retired.

Tom spends a good part of his retirement, as do many white-collar men who have been successful, managing his stock portfolio and other investments.

Tom has several things he wants. One is to make money with his stocks. Another is not to lose the gains he makes. So he desires profit and safety.

Tom does not need a stock market newsletter; thousands of Americans trade stocks every day having never subscribed to a financial advisory. As Bill Bonner of Agora Publishing is fond of saying, "Nobody wakes up, shakes the other person sleeping in the bed, and says, 'Honey, we need to get more newsletters today!'"

What Tom is after is the benefit of the product – increased stock market profits with greater safety.

Section 2

6 Ways Business-to-Business Marketing is Different Than Consumer Marketing

When asked if he could write an effective direct mail package on a complex electronic control system, a well-known direct response copywriter replied, "No problem. It doesn't matter what the product is. You are selling to people. And people are pretty much the same."

He's wrong.

Yes, there are similarities. But there are also differences in selling to business and professional buyers vs. the general public. In fact, here are six key factors that set business-to-business marketing apart from consumer marketing:

1. *The business buyer wants to buy*. Most consumer advertising offers people products they might enjoy but don't really need. How many subscription promotions, for example, sell publications that the reader truly could not live without? If we subscribe, we do so for pleasure – not because the information offered is essential to our day-to-day activity.

But in business-to-business marketing, the situation is different. The business buyer wants to buy. Indeed, all business enterprises must routinely buy products and services that help them stay profitable, competitive, and successful. The proof of this is the existence of the purchasing agent, whose sole function is to purchase things.

2. *The business buyer is sophisticated*. Business-to-business copy talks to a sophisticated audience. Your typical reader has a high interest in – and understanding of – your product (or at least of the problem it solves).

Importantly, the reader usually knows more about the product and its use than you do. It would be folly, for example, to believe that a few days spent reading about mainframe computers will educate you to the level of your target prospect – a systems analyst with six or seven years experience. (This realization makes business-to-business writers somewhat more humble than their consumer counterparts.)

The sophistication of the reader requires the business-to-business copywriter to do a tremendous amount of research and digging into the market, the product, and its application. The business audience does not respond well to slogans or oversimplification.

3. *The business buyer will read a lot of copy*. The business buyer is an information-seeker, constantly on the lookout for information and advice that can help the buyer do the job better, increase profits, or advance his career. "Our prospects are turned off by colorful, advertising-type sales brochures," says the marketing manager of a company selling complex 'systems' software products to large IBM data centers. "They are hungry for information and respond better to letters and bulletins that explain, in fairly technical terms, what our product is and how it solves a particular data-center problem."

Don't be afraid to write long copy in mailers, ads, and fulfillment brochures. Prospects will read your message – if it is interesting, important, and relevant to their needs. And don't hesitate to use informational pieces as response hooks for ads and mailers. The offer of a free booklet, report, or technical guide can still pull well – despite the glut of reading matter clogging the prospect's in-basket.

4. *A multistep buying process*. In consumer direct response, copywriters' fees are geared toward producing the "package" – an elaborate mailing that does the bulk of the selling job for a publication, insurance policy, or other mail order product.

But in business-to-business direct marketing, the concept of package or control is virtually non-existent. Why? Because the purchase of most business products is a multistep buying process. A vice president of manufacturing doesn't clip a coupon and order a $35,000 machine by mail. First he asks for a brochure. Then a sales meeting. Then a demonstration. Then a 30-day trial. Then a proposal or contract.

Thus, it is not a single piece of copy that wins the contract award. Rather, it takes a series of letters, brochures, presentations, ads, and mailers – combined with the efforts of salespeople – to turn a cold lead into a paying customer.

5. *Multiple buying influences*. You don't usually consult with a team of experts when you want to buy a fast-food hamburger, a soda, bottle of shampoo, or a pair of shoes, do you? In most consumer selling situations, the purchase decision is made by an individual. But a business purchase is usually a team effort, with many players involved.

For this reason, a business purchase is rarely an "impulse" buy. Many people influence the decision – from the purchasing agent and company president, to technical professionals and end-users. Each of these audiences has different concerns and criteria by which they judge you. To be successful, your copy must address the needs of all parties involved with the decision. In many cases, this requires separate mailings to many different people within an organization.

6. *Business products are more complex*. Most business products – and their applications – are more complex than consumer products. (For example, clients I now serve include a commercial bank, a manufacturer of elevator control systems,

a data processing training firm, a database marketing company, a mailing list broker, a general contractor, and a semiconductor manufacturer.)

Business-to-business copy cannot be superficial. Clarity is essential. You cannot sell by "fooling" the prospect or hiding the identity of your product. Half the battle is explaining, quickly and simply, what your product is, what it does, and why the reader should be interested in it. "In high-tech direct mail, the key is to educate the prospect," say Mark Toner, who manages the advertising program for Amano, a manufacturer of computerized time–clock systems. "With a product like ours, most customers don't even know of its existence."

In short, in business-to-business marketing, the rules are different. In the months to come, we'll explore ways to increase response and profits in this exciting and challenging marketplace.

Section 3

Business Buyers are Looking for Personal Benefits

In a column titled "The 6 Key Differences between Business-To-Business and Consumer Marketing," I described the six key factors that set business-to-business marketing apart from consumer marketing. They are:

1.The business buyer wants to buy.

2. The business buyer is sophisticated.

3. The business buyer is an information seeker who will read a lot of copy.

4. Business-to-business marketing involves a multistep buying process.

5. The buying decision is frequently made by a committee and not by an individual.

6. Business products are generally more complex than consumer products.

Recently, I have formulated a seventh principle which I would like to add to the list;

7. The business buyer buys for his company's benefit – and his own.

There are two parts to this principle. Let's take them one at a time.

The Business Buyer Buys for His Company's Benefit

The business buyer must acquire products and services that benefit his company. This means the product or service saves the company time or money, makes money, improves productivity, increases efficiency or solves problems.

Let's say, for example, that you sell a telecommunications network and your primary advantage over the competition is that your system reduces monthly operating expenses by 50 percent. If a prospect is spending $40,000 a month for your competitor's network, you can replace it and provide his company with the same level of service for only $20,000 a month.

The company benefits because it saves $240,000 a year in communications costs – more than $1 million in a five-year period.

Yet, despite this tremendous benefit, you find that prospects are not buying. They seem interested, and you get a lot of inquiries. But few sales are closed.

Why? Because in addition to buying for his company's benefit, the prospect also buys for himself.

The Business Buyer Buys for His Own Benefit

The second part of principle #7 is that, while the buyer is looking to do right by his company, he has an equal (if not greater) concern for his own well-being and selfish interests.

Although the idea of saving $240,000 a year with your telecommunications system is appealing to your prospect, his thought process is as follows:

"Right now I have an AT&T system. Your system sounds good but I don't know you or your company. If I switch and something goes wrong, I will be blamed. I may even get fired. My boss will say, 'You shouldn't have gambled on an unproven product from an unknown vendor – why didn't you stick with good ole reliable AT&T?' He will say this even though he approved my decision. So to be safe, I will stick with my current system … even though it costs my company an extra $240,000 a year. After all, I'd rather see them spend an extra $240,000 a year than me lose my $60,000-a-year-job!"

This play-it-safe mentality is only natural, and it affects buying decisions daily in corporations throughout the country. Data processing professionals are fond of saying, "Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM." Buying IBM ensures the prospect that no one can criticize his decision, even if brand X is the better choice from a business and technical point of view.

A corporate pension fund manager, writing in Money magazine, noted that no money manager ever got fired for losing money invested in a blue-chip stock. A different example, but the principle remains the same.

The Business Buyer Is For Himself

Concern for making the safe, acceptable decision is a primary motivation of business buyers, but it is not the only reason why business buyers choose products, services and suppliers that are not necessarily the best business solution to their company's problem.

Avoiding stress or hardship is a big concern among prospects. For example, a consultant might offer a new system for increasing productivity, but it means more paperwork for the shipping department … and especially for the

head of the shipping department. If he has anything to say about it, and thinks no one will criticize him for it, the head of shipping will, in this case, work to sway the committee against engaging the consultant or using his system … even though the current procedures are not efficient. The department head, already overworked, wants to avoid something he perceives as a hassle and a headache, despite its contribution to the greater good of the organization.

Fear of the unknown is also a powerful motivator. A middle manager, for example, might vote against acquiring desktop publishing and putting a terminal on every manager's desk because he himself has computer phobia. Even though he recognizes the benefit such technology can bring to his department, he wants to avoid the pain of learning something he perceives to be difficult and frightening. Again, personal benefit outweighs corporate benefit in this situation.

Fear of loss is another powerful motivator. An advertising manager in a company that has handled its advertising in-house for the past decade may resist his president's suggestion that they retain an outside advertising agency to handle the company's rapidly expanding marketing campaign. Even if he respects the ad agency and believes they will do a good job, the ad manager may campaign against them, fearing that bringing in outside experts will diminish his own status within the company.

In these and many other instances, the business buyer is for himself first; and his company, second. To be successful, your copy must not only promise the benefits the prospect desires for his company; it should also speak to the prospect's personal agenda, as well.

Section 4

23 Tips for Creating Business-to-Business Mailings That Work

1. Short letters – one or two pages – usually work best. Executives don't have time to wade through a lengthy sales pitch. Exceptions: subscriptions, seminars, and some other mail-order offers.
2. If you can personalize, great! But form letters addressed to "Dear Executive" or "Dear Engineer" can also pull well.
3. Should business mailings take a "consumer approach?"

   * Some mailers argue that executives are human beings before they are businesspeople – hence, all consumer DM techniques can apply to business mail.

   * But remember, in addition to being people, executives have professional responsibilities. And they take their work seriously. So business mailings must address their needs as professionals. Not every consumer gimmick is appropriate for business mail.
4. In particular, avoid "busy" graphics (e.g., Publishers Clearing House). Use graphics that make your mailing immediately clear, easy-to-follow, and easy to read.
5. If an envelope is filled with too many inserts, the busy executive is more inclined to throw the whole thing away. A standard package with a letter, brochure, and reply card seems to work best.
6. The biggest mistake you can make in writing business-to-business DM is to assume that the reader is as interested in your product or industry as you are. When writing copy, assume that your product is the last thing on the reader's

mind. He or she may never have given a second thought to problems, issues, technology, and competitive products that you worry about every day.

7. Another major error is writing copy that speaks on a layman's level when your mailing is targeted to industry professionals. For example: DP professionals know what CICS, MVS, and ISDN are. You don't – so the natural tendency is to want to explain them in your copy. But being too elementary turns readers off and signals that you're not really in touch with their business. How would you respond to a mailing that began, "Direct mail is an exciting way of selling products?" Yawn.
8. Make your mailing look professional – a business communication from one executive to another. A letter crammed with fake handwriting, arrows, pop-ups, and other gimmicks strikes many business readers as undignified and unprofessional.
9. One rule that applies equally to business and consumer mail: sell your offer. If you offer a 30-day trial, sell the reader on asking for the trial. Explain the benefits and that there is no risk or obligation. If it is an invitation to a seminar, sell the knowledge to be gained at the seminar and not the product being promoted.
10. A corollary to #9 is that there must be an appealing offer.

    A lead generating package should never sell just the product. It should also push the offer.

    And there is always an offer. The best offer is some type of free trial, free analysis, free consultation, or free sample. Premiums can also work well. At minimum, offer a free brochure of simply "free information." Free information is an offer and it does work.

11. Write copy that enhances the perceived value of your offer.

    Examples: A product catalog becomes a product guide. A software catalog becomes an international software directory. A collection of brochures becomes a free information kit. A checklist becomes a convention planner's guide. An article reprinted in pamphlet form becomes "our new, informative booklet -- HOW TO PREVENT COMPUTER FAILURES." And so on.

12. Many clients begin planning by sitting around a table and saying, "We want to do a mailing on product X. Should we use a mailing tube? A box? A message in a fortune cookie? What gimmick works best?"

    In my opinion, they are asking the wrong question. The right way to get started is to ask, "What is the key sales appeal of this product?" Ideally, this is something the product does better than other products and solves a major problem or addresses a key concern of the customer.

13. Clients often ask, "Shouldn't we do some market research and focus group testing to uncover key sales points and appeals before we do the mailing?" They probably don't realize that direct mail is a good research tool for many products and offers. For a few thousand dollars, you can test an offer and, within weeks, know whether prospects will respond.

14. Postcard decks generate a large number of responses at low cost. Direct mail packages are more costly and time-consuming to produce but generate a better quality lead. The only way to know for certain is to set up a lead-tracking system and test both types of mailings.

15. Self-mailers generally don't pull as well as packages with separate letters, brochures, and reply cards. They work well, however, for seminars. Also, they can add an attention-grabbing change of pace to a series of mailings. One ad agency I know has used self-mailers for years to generate new business, with great success. One reason why self-mailers do poorly is that most are not

given the same level of attention that businesses put into their regular DM packages.

16. About gimmicks, such as pop-ups, fancy folds, 3D objects, and so on: They generally work only if there is a strong, logical tie-in to the product, or offer, and sales appeal. Sending a pair of sunglasses doesn't make much sense for a valve manufacturer. It makes better sense for a travel agent offering a package cruise to the Caribbean or for a tanning parlor prospecting for new bodies.
17. Another mistake is to make the copywriter base your package around some artificial theme or slogan. A company selling industrial pumps, for instance, insists that the theme of its mailings be quality. A manufacturer of metal buildings wants a futuristic image, with copy full of references to outer space and science fiction. This is a deadly error. Perhaps advertising can be tied effectively to such weak themes. But response-getting mail offers can't. Mailings that get results push product benefits, cost savings, free offers, and no-risk guarantees – not images or themes. To force a mailing to fit some predetermined concept is difficult, tricky – and often fatal to results.
18. A BRC that restates the offer and asks for the order is doing only half the job. Reply elements should also be used to gather information that helps qualify prospects. For instance, if you're selling accounts receivable software, the BRC should ask: What type of computer do you have? What is your operating system? How many invoices do you write a month? If the advertiser seeks detailed facts, use a separate questionnaire or "specification sheet." And include a BRE.
19. "Is there any advantage to using business-reply cards and envelopes in industrial mailings?" asks one client. "After all, the businessperson doesn't care about a few cents postage, and his secretary has plenty of stamps handy." True, but use the BRC/BRE anyway. Why? Because such cards and envelopes

look like response devices. They signal the reader that a response is required. The same holds true for 800 numbers. Sure, the executive isn't paying for the call out of his own pocket, so he's less motivated by a free call than the consumer. But the 800 number leaps off the page and says, "Hey, pick up the phone – we want you to respond to this offer!" Regular numbers don't have this effect.

20. The trend today is to add perceived value to numbers by turning them into "hotlines." Filterite, a manufacturer of chemical filters, advertises toll-free filtration hotline 800-FILTERS. A good idea. However, I suggest you print the number in numerals along with the letter version. Some people don't like to translate letters into a phone number they can dial.
21. A popular technique is to add to the perceived value of the order form or BRC by calling it an "Information Request Form," "Trial Request Form," or "Needs Analysis." This still works but is losing impact as more and more mailers use the technique.
22. Response goes up when you give the reader choices. For instance, include both a BRC and a toll-free number. And allow for multiple responses, such as:

[ ] Reserve my free 30-day trial
[ ] Have a sales representative call
[ ] Send brochure by mail
[ ] Not interested right now, but add me to your mailing list

23. Tell the reader that there is no cost or obligation or that no salesman will call … if these statements are true.

Section 5

Estimating Response to Business-to-Business Direct Mail

"What kind of response can I expect from my lead-generating mailing and what percentage is considered good for business-to-business direct mail?"

This is one of the most frequently asked questions in business-to-business marketing. Let's see if we can shed some light on the topic.

Percentage Response

The number of inquiries produced per thousand pieces mailed varies dramatically depending on a number of factors, some of which we'll discuss shortly. However, based on recent results, we can make the following generalizations:

If your mailing has a hard offer, you can expect a response rate in the range of 1 percent to 1.5 percent. I define a hard offer as any response choice that forces the prospect to try the product or have direct contact with a salesperson. These include meetings, demonstrations, presentations, so-called "free consultations" (sales meetings in disguise), demo diskettes selling for nominal fees, and 30-day trial offers.

On the other hand, if you have a soft offer – such as the offer of a booklet, gift, or special report – you can expect a response from 1 percent to 4 percent; some mailers with good offers and highly targeted lists even get 5 percent or more.

Sales

Some practitioners object that percentages are irrelevant and that sales results are the only true measure of direct mail success.

The problem is, sales are more difficult to tally in lead-generating programs than in mail order. One reason is that the direct mail piece does not do the whole job of selling; many other factors contribute. What's more, many companies do not have an adequate system for tracking leads through to sales and reporting on the results.

Still, if you are able to track sales, then percentage response may not be as important to you. One client, for example, sells a product so highly specialized that his percent response is miniscule – a small fraction of 1 percent. Yet the large dollar amount of each sale more than pays for the cost of mailing large quantities to get those few hot leads.

Establishing a Baseline

I often tell new clients that I don't know what a good response is until we do our first mailing.

The first mailing gives us a "baseline" which we can measure future efforts against. If we are pleased with the level of response generated by mailing #1, then we consider that a good response for our product in our marketplace. If mailing #2 equals or exceeds that level of response, we consider it a winner; if not, it's a loser.

This baseline concept is especially important if your product is one not widely promoted through the mail. Magazine publishers and fund raisers can cite "typical" response rates of 1 percent and 2 percent because millions of such solicitations are mailed every month, and so the response rates are pretty well-known. But if you were the pioneer in your field … the first to use direct mail promotion to sell your type of product … then there is no known "typical" response rate you can anticipate and *you* will be setting the standards. Good luck!

Products

The nature of the product itself has a dramatic effect on response rates. If your product is used by a large number of the prospects you mail to, response will

be higher (an example might be a mailing selling bandages to hospital purchasing agents). On the other hand, if your product is highly specialized and of interest to only a small portion of the market, the response will be significantly lower (an example might be a specialized type of heart monitor of interest to only one hospital in 100).

Format can make a big difference in how well your mailing pulls. As a rule, sales letters mailed in business envelopes pull better than self-mailers. But sometimes this is not the case.

Format

I like to use letters when I have to make an appeal to the prospect's rational mind or emotional side in order to build his interest in the product.

But, if he is already predisposed to buy the product … if it's something he's familiar with, and he doesn't have to be sold on its merits … then a self-mailer, featuring a photograph that readily identifies the product being sold, may do as well or better.

Offer

As stated earlier, the specific offer being made in the mailing can make a big difference in response rates.

One area of indecision among mailers is whether to use the popular "free booklet strategy." In this type of mailing, the reader is offered an incentive – a free booklet, report, or other helpful information he will receive by return mail for responding.

Usually the booklet or report offers helpful how-to or technical information the reader can use on the job. For example: "How to Improve Direct Mail Results" – from a firm offering direct mail services.

These offers can boost response and are especially effective in markets where prospects are flooded with direct mail offers or are not excited about services and products and need an extra incentive to take action.

The key is to know how to introduce the booklet offer without overstressing it. If the whole mailing is based around the booklet offer, you will get a high volume of low quality leads – people who just want a free booklet but do not want to hear about your product.

A better approach is to talk about the reader's problems and how your company, service, or product can solve these problems. Then bring in the booklet offer as an extra sales incentive, without putting total emphasis on it. Experiment with copy approaches until you achieve the right balance between quality and quantity in your response.

Section 6

50 Lead-Generating Tips

What should you know when planning a lead-generating direct mail program? Here are a few pointers to guide you in the right direction:

1. How many steps are there in the buying process for this product? Where in this process does my mailing fit?
2. What can I tell my prospect that will get him to take the next step in the buying process?
3. Can I reduce selling costs by creating a mailing designed to produce a direct sale (a mail order) instead of an inquiry?

4. How many leads do I want to generate? Do we want a large quantity of "soft" leads? Or are we better off getting a smaller number of more highly qualified leads?

5. What happens if the mailing produces too many leads? Too few?

6. Is there a geographic region that my sales force does not cover? How can I respond to inquiries from this region?

7. What is the primary market for my product or service? (Which industry needs it most?)

8. Are there any secondary markets for the product large enough to justify a custom-tailored version of the mailing?

9. Who is my primary prospect within the target industry? What is his or her job title? Function?

10. Who are the other people (by job title) involved in the purchase decision for this product? What are their roles? (Who recommends the product? Who specifies it? Who has authority to approve the purchase?)

11. Must we reach all of these prospects? Or can we generate the desired sales result by targeting only one or two key decision makers at each prospect organization?

12. If we don't know who we should be mailing to, how can we find out? From our sales representatives? Market research? Direct mail?

13. If we don't know what we should be telling our potential customers about our product, how can we find out?

14. Should we tailor versions of our sales letter either to vertical markets or various job titles - or both?

15. Should we tailor our brochure to specific markets or job titles?

16. What offer are we using in our current mailing? Is there a way to make the offer stronger or better?

17. Is the prospect in need of information about our product or the problem it solves? Can we package this information in a booklet or report and offer it as a response piece in our mailing?

18. Does our sales process involve a face-to-face meeting with the prospect? Can we legitimately call this sales meeting a "free consultation" and feature it as the offer in our mailing?

19. Do we allow the user to sample our product on a free trial basis? Should we be stressing this free trial offer in our mailing?

20. Do we offer our mail customers a free gift, price discount, free shipping and handling, or other money-saving incentive for responding to our mailing? If not, why not?

21. What reason or incentive can we give the reader to respond NOW and not later?

22. Can we use telemarketing to qualify sales leads generated by our direct mail program?

23. Can we use telemarketing to turn non-responders into responders?

24. Can we use telemarketing to identify and presell prospects before we send them our mailing package?

25. What format is best for our mailing? Full-blown direct mail package (letter, brochure, reply card)? Or sales letter only?

26. Is there any benefit to personalizing the mailing?

27. What graphic treatment is appropriate for our audience? Should it be businesslike or bright and loud? Should it be "disguised" as personal correspondence or clearly marked (by use of teaser and graphics) as direct mail?

28. What copy approach should I use? Serious or breezy? Educational and informative vs. hard sell?

29. Does my reader want or need a lot of information?

30. Can I use a self-mailer format?

31. Is post card-deck advertising appropriate for my offer?

32. Should I use a single mailing or a series of mailings?

33. How many mailings should I send to my list before giving up on people who do not respond?

34. In a series of mailings, am I using a variety of different sizes and formats to gain attention for my message?

35. Are requests for more information fulfilled within 48 hours?

36. Are hot sales leads separated for immediate follow up by sales representatives or telephone salespeople?

37. What is the conversion ratio (the percentage of mail-generated inquiries that result in a sale)?

38. Are our salespeople competent? If not, what can we do to ensure better handling of sales leads?

39. Do salespeople follow up on all leads provided? If not, why not?

40. Do salespeople welcome direct mail leads or do they grumble about them? Why?

41. Are there qualifying questions we can add to our reply form to help salespeople separate genuine prospects from "brochure collectors"?

42. Can we afford to send a brochure to everyone who requests it?

43. Do we have a sufficient quantity of sales brochures on hand to fulfill all requests for more information — assuming we get a 10 percent response to our mailing?

44. Do we get a better quality lead by requiring the prospect to put a stamp on the reply card rather than offering a postage-paid business reply card?

45. Do we get better sales results from prospects who respond by telephone versus those who mail in reply cards?

46. Does our fulfillment package or sales brochure provide the prospect with the information he asked for? And does it do a good job of selling our product or service?

47. Do we include a cover letter with the brochures and data sheets we send in response to mail-generated inquiries?

48. Do we include a questionnaire, spec sheet, or some other type of reply form with our inquiry fulfillment package?

49. Do we automatically send follow-up mailings to prospects who don't respond to the inquiry fulfillment package?

50. Should we be more vigorous in our program of follow-up mailings and phone calls?

Section 7

Six Things I Know for Sure About Marketing to Engineers

I am a chemical engineer and have been writing copy designed to sell products and services to engineers for 25 years. Here's what I know about appealing to this special audience:

1) Engineers look down on advertising and advertising people, for the most part. Engineers have a low opinion of advertising – and of people whose job it is to create advertising.

The lesson for the business-to-business marketer? Make your advertising and direct mail informational and professional, not gimmicky or promotional. Avoid writing that sounds like "ad copy." Don't use slick graphics that immediately identify a brochure or spec sheet as "advertising." The engineer will be quick to reject such material as "fluff."

Engineers want to believe they are not influenced by ad copy – and that they make their decisions based on technical facts that are beyond a copywriter's understanding. Let them believe it – as long as they respond to our ads and buy our products.

2) *Engineers do not like a "consumer approach*." There is a raging debate about whether engineers respond better to a straight technical approach, clever consumer-style ads or something in between. Those who prefer the creative approach argue, "The engineer is a human being first and an engineer second. He will respond to creativity and cleverness just like everyone else."

Unfortunately, there is much evidence to the contrary. In many tests of ads and direct mailings, I have seen straightforward, low-key, professional approaches equal or out pull "glitzy" ads and mailings repeatedly. One of my clients tested two letters offering a financial book aimed at engineers. A straightforward, benefit-oriented letter clearly outpulled a "bells-and-whistles" creative package. And I see this result repeated time and time again.

Engineers respond well to communications that address them as knowledgeable technical professionals in search of solutions to engineering problems. Hard-sell frequently falls on deaf ears here – especially if not backed by facts.

3) *The engineer's purchase decision is more logical than emotional*. Most books and articles on advertising stress that successful copy appeal to emotions first, reason second.

But with the engineering audience, it is often the opposite. The buying decision is what we call a "considered purchase" rather than an impulse buy. That is, the buyer carefully weighs the facts, makes comparisons and buys based on what product best fulfills his requirement.

Certainly, there are emotional components to the engineer's buying decision. For instance, preference for one vendor over another is often based more on gut feeling that actual fact. But for the most part, an engineer buying a new piece of equipment will analyze the features and technical specifications in much greater depth than a consumer buying a stereo, VCR, CD player or other sophisticated electronic device.

Copy aimed at engineers cannot be superficial. Clarity is essential. Do not disguise the nature of what you are selling in an effort to "tease" the reader into your copy, as you might do with a consumer mail order offer. Instead, make it immediately clear what you are offering and how it meets the engineer's needs.

4) *Engineers want to know the features and specifications, not just the benefits*. In consumer advertising classes, we are taught that benefits are everything, and that features are unimportant. But engineers need to know the features of your product – performance characteristics, efficiency ratings, power requirements and technical specifications – in order to make an intelligent buying decision.

Features should especially be emphasized when selling to OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), VARs (value-added resellers), systems integrators and others who purchase your product with an intention to incorporate it into their own product.

Example: An engineer buying semiconductors to use in a device he is building doesn't need to be sold on the benefits of semiconductors. He already knows the benefits and is primarily concerned about whether *your* semiconductor can provide the necessary performance and reliability while meeting his specifications in terms of voltage, current, resistance and so forth.

5) *Engineers are not turned off by jargon – in fact, they like it*. Consultants teaching business writing seminars tell us to avoid jargon because it interferes with clear communication.

This certainly is true when trying to communicate technical concepts to lay audiences such as the general public or top management. But jargon can actually enhance communication when appealing to engineers, computer specialists and other technical audiences.

Why is jargon effective? Because it shows the reader that *you speak his language*. When you write direct response copy, you want the reader to get the impression you're like him, don't you? And doesn't speaking his language accomplish that?

Actually, engineers are not unique in having their "secret language" for professional communication. People in all fields publicly denounce jargon but privately love it. For instance, who aside from direct marketers has any idea of what a "nixie" is? And why use that term, except to make our work seem special and important?

6) *Engineers have their own visual language*. What are the visual devices through which engineers communicate? Charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, blueprints, engineering drawings, and mathematical symbols and equations.

You should use these visual devices when writing to engineers – for two reasons. First, engineers are comfortable with them and understand them. Second, these visuals immediately say to the engineer, "This is solid technical information, not promotional fluff."

The best visuals are those specific to the engineer's specialty. Electrical engineers like circuit diagrams. Computer programmers feel comfortable looking at flow charts. Systems analysts use structured diagrams. Learn the visual language of your target audience and have your artist use these symbols and artwork throughout your ad, brochure or mailer.

Section 8

10 Tips for Writing More Effective Industrial Copy

When asked if he could write an effective direct mail package on a complex electronic control system, a direct response copywriter replied, "No problem – it doesn't matter what the product is. You're selling to people. And people are pretty much the same."

His message was clear: In direct mail, industrial copywriting and consumer copywriting are pretty much the same.

He's wrong.

Yes, there are similarities. But there are also differences in selling to technical buyers vs. the general public. And the *major* difference is: *technical people want technical information.* The industrial copywriter is selling to engineers, managers, purchasing agents, and other technical people – people whose understanding of and interest in complex product information is inherently far greater than the average consumer's.

Below are ten time-tested tips for writing industrial copy that sells. Apply them to your next ad, mailer, or catalog, and watch the reply cards come pouring in.

1. Be technically accurate. Industrial marketers sell systems to solve specific problems. Copy must accurately describe what the product can and cannot do.

Being accurate means being truthful. Industrial buyers are among the most sophisticated of audiences. Technical know-how is their forte, and they'll be likely to spot any exaggerations, omissions, or "white lies" you make.

Being accurate also means being specific. Writing that a piece of equipment "can handle your toughest injection molding jobs" is vague and meaningless to a

technician; but saying that the machine "can handle pressures of up to 12,000 pounds" is honest, concrete, and useful.

One way to achieve specificity in your writing is to prefer concrete terms (right-hand column below) to general terms (left-hand column).

General	Concrete
bad weather	rain and snow
heavy	more than 15 tons
experimental	gas chromatographs
apparatus	a dozen

And, just as a stain on a sleeve can ruin the whole suit, a single technical inaccuracy can destroy the credibility of the entire promotion. In *Technical Writing: Structure, Standards, and Style* (McGraw-Hill), the authors point out that "Technical writing that contains technically inaccurate statements reflects inadequate knowledge of the subject." All the persuasive writing skill in the world won't motivate the industrial buyer if he feels that you don't know what you're talking about.

2. *Check the numbers.* Many of us became writers just to get *away* from having to deal with numbers; all the math whizzes in our class went on to become computer programmers, accountants, and media buyers. But to write effective industrial copy, you've got to approach numbers with a new found respect.

Just think of the disaster that would result if a misplaced decimal in a sales letter offered a one year magazine subscription at $169.50, ten times the actual price of $16.95. You can see why this would stop sales cold.

Well, the same goes for industrial copy. Only, in technical promotions, a misplaced decimal or other math mistake is less obvious to the copywriter, since the material is so highly technical. You and I would suspect an error in a mailer that advertised a $169.50 magazine subscription. But how many direct response writers could say, at a glance, whether the pore size in a reverse osmosis filter should be 0.005 or 0.00005 or 0.0005 microns? (How many of us even know what a micron is?) Yet, to the chemical engineer, the pore size of the filter may be as crucial as the price of the magazine subscription. Get it wrong, and you've lost a sale.

All numbers in industrial promotional literature should be checked and double-checked by the writer, by the agency, and by technical people on the client side.

3. Be concise. Engineers and managers are busy people. They don't have the time to read all the papers that cross their desks, so make your message brief and to the point.

Take a look at some industrial direct mail. Letters are seldom more than a page long, and you almost never see a four page letter in industrial selling.

As Strunk and White point out in *The Elements of Style,* conciseness "requires not that the writer … avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that *every word tell."* (italics mine.) In other words, cram your industrial promotions full of product information and strong sales arguments. But avoid redundancies, run-on sentences, wordy phrases, and other poor stylistic habits that take up space but add little to meaning or clarity. For example, don't write "water droplets condensed from atmospheric vapor and sufficiently massive to fall to earth's surface" when you're talking about rain.

4. Simplify. The key to successful industrial copywriting is to explain complex concepts and products clearly and directly. Avoid overly complicated

narratives; write in plain, simple English. In the first draft of catalog copy for a line of pollution control equipment, the product manager wrote:

It is absolutely essential that the interior wall surface of the conduit be maintained in a wet condition, and that means be provided for wetting continually the peripheral interior wall surface during operation of the device, in order to avoid the accumulation of particulate matter about the interior surface area.

Here's how the copywriter simplified this bit of technical gobbledygook to make it more readable:

The interior wall must be continually wetted to avoid solids buildup.

One way to achieve simplicity in your industrial writing is to avoid the overuse of technical jargon. Never write that a manufacturer's new dental splint "stabilizes mobile dentition" when its function is to keep loose teeth in place. When you're deciding whether to use a particular technical term, remember Susanne K. Langer's definition of jargon as "language more technical than the ideas it serves to express." Never let your language make things more complex than they already are.

5. Talk to the users to determine their needs. Elaborate marketing research is often unnecessary in industrial selling. By talking with a few knowledgeable engineers, the copywriter can quickly grasp what makes a technical product useful to industrial buyers.

Because the products are highly technical, you can't rely on your own feelings and intuition to select the key selling points. The benefits of buying a kitchen appliance or joining a record club are obvious, but how can a layman say

what features of a multistage distillation system are important to the buyer, and which are trivial?

By speaking with technical and marketing people on the client side, you can find out which product features should be hi–lighted in the copy and *why* they appeal to the buyer. Then, apply your usual skill in persuasive writing to turn these features into sales-oriented "reason-why-they-should-buy" copy. The kind of copy that generates leads – goodwill – orders – and *money.*

Recently, I was given the assignment of writing a package on a water filtration system to be sold to two different markets: the marine industry and the chemical industry. In the course of conversation with a few customers in each field, I discovered that marine buyers were concerned solely with quality and price, while chemical engineers considered "technical competence" the number one selling feature. They wanted to know every detailed specification down to the last pump, pipe, fan, and filter. Selling the product to the two markets would require two completely different sales letters … but I'd never have known this if I hadn't *asked.*

6. Understand how the promotion fits into the buying process. The sale of an industrial product can require many lengthy steps; machinery is seldom marketed by mail order. Sometimes your package can be used to generate the lead. Or it may help qualify prospects. Many industrial marketers use sales letters to distribute catalogs, remind customers of their products, or answer inquiries. Know where your copy fits into the buying process so you can write copy to generate the appropriate response.

7. Know how much to tell. Different buyers seek different levels of technical information. If you're writing for top management, keep it short and simple, and pile on the benefits. If you're pitching to technicians, be sure to include plenty of meaty technical information.

Here's a description of a "Dry FGD System" (a large piece of industrial equipment) from a promotion aimed at plant engineers:

The average SO2 emission rate as determined in the outlet duct was 0.410 lb/106 Btu (176 ng/J). All emission rates were determined with F-factors calculated from flue gas analyses *obtained with an Orsat analyzer during the course of each test run.*

This will satisfy the technically curious buyer who wants to know *how you* determined your product specifications, not just what they are. But managers have little time or interest in the nitty-gritty; they want to know how the product can save them money and help improve their operations. A brochure on this same Dry FGD System aimed at management takes a lighter, more sales-oriented tone:

The Dry FCD System is a cost-effective alternative to conventional wet scrubbers for cleaning flue gas in coal-fired boilers. Fly ash and chemical waste are removed as an easily handled dry powder, not a wet sludge. And with dry systems, industrial and utility boilers can operate cleanly and reliably.

8. Don't forget the features. By all means, stress customer benefits in your copy. But don't forget to include technical features as well. In the industrial marketplace, a pressure rating or the availability of certain materials of construction often mean the difference between a buy or no-buy decision. Although these features may seem boring or meaningless to you, they are important to the technical buyer.

Direct response copywriters often work up a list of *product features* and the *benefits* that these features offer the consumer. Then, the benefits are worked into the sales letter.

In industrial copywriting, we do the same thing, except *we include the features in the copy.* Features and their benefits are often presented in "cause and effect" statements, such as:

Because the system uses L-band frequency and improved MTI (moving target indication), it can detect targets up to 50 times smaller than conventional S-band radars.

No mechanical systems or moving parts are required. Which means that Hydro-Clean consumes less energy and takes less space than conventional pump driven clarifiers.

The geometric shape of the seal ring amplifies the force against the disc. As the pressure grows, so does the valve's sealing performance.

9. Use graphs, tables, charts, and diagrams to explain and summarize technical information quickly. Put strong "sell copy" in your headlines, subheads, and body copy; relegate duller "catalog information" to tables, side-bars, charts, and inserts. And don't hesitate to use visuals; photographs add believability, and drawings help readers visualize complex products and processes.

10. *Include case histories to demonstrate proven performance.* Industrial buyers want to know that your product has proven its performance in real-life applications. Case histories – concise "product success stories" – are a sure-fire way to put the buyer's mind at ease.

In mail order, a simple one line testimonial from "GK in Portland" or "the Jack Reeds in Jersey City" is all that's needed to demonstrate a product's success. But industrial buyers need to know more, and the typical case history tells what the problem was, how the product solved it, and what the results were in terms of money saved and improved plant performance. In an ad for the Hitachi

chiller-heater, a unit that cools and heats buildings, Gas Energy, Inc. uses a series of tightly written one paragraph case histories to show readers that the product works. Here's a sample:

Miami Hospital *(300,000 sq. ft.). Linking a gas turbine generator with one 450 ton Hitachi Cogeneration unit produces all cooling and heating and saves $360,000 yearly vs. purchased electricity and the previous electric centrifugal system.*

The case history approach is one area where industrial and consumer writers agree. After all, every direct response writer knows that the best advertising is a satisfied customer.

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Section 9

How to Write More Effective Technical Product Brochures

When I was the advertising manager for a process equipment manufacturer, one of my responsibilities was to serve as liaison between the advertising agency we hired to write our ads and product brochures and our staff engineers.

The engineers, because of their technical expertise in the subject matter, were responsible for reviewing the agency's work.

As is often the case in our industry, the engineers complained that those "ad types" at the agency didn't understand the product or the audience – and that their copy was way off base.

The agency countered that engineers may know technology but don't know writing, marketing, design, or selling – and that they wanted to cram the brochures with too much unnecessary detail that would dilute the sales message.

Who was right? The fact is, both arguments have some merit.

On the agency side, ad agency folk often have a flair for creative, colorful communication, which can help a brochure gain attention and be noticed.

On the other hand, clients – especially the engineers who review the agency's brochure copy – often complain, sometimes correctly, that the agency's brochure copy is superficial.

Laziness is often the cause. The writer did not do sufficient research to understand the technology and the needs, concerns, and interests of the target audience. The copy he writes reflects this lack of understanding. When you read it, you immediately think, "This person doesn't know what he is talking about" – and you are probably right.

Another problem with professional or agency-written product literature is a tendency toward cleverness for the sake of being clever. "Be creative!" the client instructs the agency. But the reader often doesn't get the joke, pun, or reference in the headline, the creativity goes over her head, and she is turned off rather than engaged.

Engineers who write their own brochure copy are rarely superficial; they usually have a solid understanding of the product and its technology. However, engineers tend to assume that the reader knows as much as the writer, speaks the same jargon, and has the same level of interest in the technology. And often this is not the case.

Take jargon. People today frequently use the term "open systems architecture" in sales literature. But do they really know what this means? Write down your own definition, ask five colleagues to do the same, and compare.

I guarantee they will not be the same. Engineers who write often don't strive for clarity. So they fall back on buzzwords and clichés that, unfortunately, don't get across the messages they wish to convey.

6 Tips for Writing Better Technical Product Brochures

Given these conditions, how can you – as an engineer or manager who either writes brochure copy, edits copy, approves copy, or provides input for ad agencies or freelance industrial copywriters – do your job better so the finished brochure is the best one possible?

Here are some simple guidelines to follow:

1. *Define the topic.* Is your brochure about a solution? A system? A product line? A product? A specific model of that product? A specific industry use or application of that product? The support services you offer for that product? The accessories?

Define what the piece is about. The narrower the topic, the more focused, specific, and effective your brochure can be within the limited space available.

Tip: Your brochure doesn't have to cover everything. You can always decide to have other pieces of sales literature that go into more depth on certain aspects of the product.

For instance, you can talk about satisfied users in case histories. You can expand on specifications in a spec sheet. Some marketers use application briefs to focus on a specific application or industry. Others develop separate sell sheets on each key feature, allowing more in-depth technical discussion than is possible in a general product brochure.

2. *Know your audience.* Are you writing to engineers or managers? The former may be interested in technical and performance specifications.

The latter may want to know about support, service, ease of use, scalability, and user benefits, or return on investment.

If you are writing to engineers, are they well-versed in this particular technology? Or do you have to bring them up to speed? Just because someone is a chemical engineer does not mean they know nearly as much about industrial knives, turbine blades, corrosion-resistant metals, ball valves, or your particular specialty as you do. Indeed, they probably don't.

When in doubt, it is better to explain so everyone understands than to assume that everyone already understands. No engineer has ever complained to me that a brochure I wrote was too clear.

3. *Write with your objective in mind.* Unlike a Victoria Secrets catalog, which gives the buyer all the information she needs to place an order, most technical product brochures support the selling process but are not designed to complete it on their own.

Is the objective of the brochure to convince the prospect that your technical design is superior to your competition? Or show that you have more features at a better price? Or demonstrate that your system will pay back its cost in less than 6 months?

Establish a communication objective for the brochure and write with that goal in mind. For instance, if the objective is to get a meeting for you to sell consulting services to the client, you only need to include enough to convince them that the meeting is worth their time. Anything more is probably overkill.

4. *Include the two things every brochure should contain.* These simply are (a) the things your prospects need and want to know about your product to make their buying decision and (b) what you think you should say to persuade them that your product is the best product choice – and your company is the best vendor.

The things a prospect wants to know about an industrial product might include weight, dimensions, power requirements, operating temperature, and whether it can perform certain functions.

Things you might want to tell them include how the performance compares with competitive systems in benchmark tests (if you were the winner, of course) or the fact that it was cited as "Best Product" by an industry publication, or won an award from a trade association, or is the most popular product in its category with an installed base of more than 10,000 units.

5. *Be selective.* While ad agency copy is sometimes too light and tells the reader too little, engineer copy often makes the opposite error, attempting to cram every last technical fact and feature into a four or eight page brochure.

Keep in mind that your prospect is bombarded by more information than he can handle on a daily basis. Everyone has too much to read, and not enough time to read it. According to a study by the School of Information Management & Systems at UC Berkeley, each year the human race produces about 1.5 exabytes of unique information in print, film, optical, and magnetic content worldwide — roughly 250MB of new information for every man, women, and child.

Be selective in your presentation. Copywriter Herschell Gordon Lewis has a formula, $E^2 = 0$. Or as Lewis says, "When you emphasize everything, you emphasize nothing." If every fact about your product is given equal weight in the brochure, the key facts that make the most persuasive case for buying the product will not stand out.

6. *Understand the selling environment.* There are three basic selling situations for process equipment, chemicals, and other industrial products. You must know what situation your product falls into, so you can market it effectively.

The first situation is that the prospect is not acutely aware of the problem he has that your product can solve. Or he is aware of it but does not consider it a priority. In this situation, to get your prospect's attention, your brochure must dramatize the problem and its severity, and then position your product as the solution.

Example: Mainframe computer operators did not realize that certain operations accidentally overrode and erased files stored on magnetic tapes. A brochure for a utility that prevented this operation from occurring began, "Did you know that your storage devices may be accidentally wiping out important files even as you read this sentence?" It alerted them to the problem in a dramatic way.

Once alerted to a problem they didn't know existed, the readers were eager to find a solution, which the utility handily provided. Sales were brisk.

The second situation is that the prospect is aware of the problem or need your product addresses, but is not at all convinced that your type of product is the best solution.

Example: A chemical manufacturer warned wastewater treatment plants that their current activated charcoal bed systems were too costly.

The plant managers believed that, but didn't believe that the manufacturer's alternative filter technology was a viable solution. A paper reprinting lab test results plus the offer of a free trial overcame the disbelief and got firms to use the new filter system.

The third situation is when the prospect knows what his problem is, believes your type of product is the right solution, but needs to be convinced that your product is the best choice in the category, and better than similar products offered by your competitors.

One way to demonstrate superiority is with a table comparing your product with the others on a feature by feature basis. If you have a more complete feature set than they do, such a table makes you look like the best choice.

Another technique is to give specifications that prove your performance is superior. If this cannot be quantitatively measured, talk about any unique functionality, technology, or design feature that might create an impression of superiority in the prospect's mind.

There are many other copywriting techniques available to produce a superior technical product brochure in any of these three situations; this is why I've devoted the past 20 years, my entire professional life, to practicing and studying copywriting – just like an engineer practices and studies his specialty.

But if you follow the basics in this article and do nothing else, I guarantee an improvement in your brochures that you, your sales reps, and your customers will appreciate. You might even some day receive that rare compliment: "You know, I actually read your brochure. It wasn't boring, and it told me what I needed to know!"

Section 10

Can't Find Good Newsletter Items? Here are 29 Good Places to Look

Coming up with good story ideas is one of the toughest tasks in publishing a company newsletter. Here's a checklist of story sources to stimulate editorial thinking and help identify topics with high reader interest that help to promote the company.

1. Product stories: New products; improvements to existing products; new models; new accessories; new options; and new applications.
2. News: Joint ventures; mergers and acquisitions; new divisions formed; new departments; other company news. Also, industry news and analyses of event and trends.
3. Tips: Tips on product selection, installation, maintenance, repair, and troubleshooting.
4. How-To articles: Similar to tips, but with more detailed instructions. Examples: How to use the product; how to design a system; how to select the right type or model.
5. Previews and reports: Write-ups of special events such as trade shows, conferences, sales meetings, seminars, presentations, and press conferences.
6. Case histories: Either in-depth or brief, reporting product application success stories, service successes, etc.
7. People: Company promotions, new hires, transfers, awards, anniversaries, employee profiles, customer profiles, human interest stories (unusual jobs, hobbies, etc.).
8. Milestones: e.g., "1,000th unit shipped," "Sales reach $1 million mark," "Division celebrates 10th anniversary," etc.
9. Sales news: New customers; bids accepted; contracts renewed; satisfied customer reports.
10. Research and development: New products; new technologies; new patents; technology awards; inventions; innovations; and breakthroughs.
11. Publications: New brochures available; new ad campaigns; technical papers presented; reprints available; new or updated manuals; announcements of other recently published literature.

12. Explanatory articles: How a product works; industry overviews; background information on applications and technologies.
13. Customer stories: Interviews with customers; photos; customer news and profiles; guest articles by customers about their industries, applications, and positive experiences with the vendor's product or service.
14. Financial news: Quarterly and annual report highlights; presentations to financial analysts; earnings and dividend news; etc.
15. Photos with captions: People; facilities; products; events.
16. Columns: President's letter; letters to the editor; guest columns; regular features such as "Q&A" or "Tech Talk."
17. Excerpts, reprints, or condensed versions of: Press releases; executive speeches; journal articles; technical papers; company seminars; etc.
18. Quality control stories: Quality circles; employee suggestion programs; new quality assurance methods; success rates; case histories.
19. Productivity stories: New programs; methods and systems to cut waste and boost efficiency.
20. Manufacturing stories: New techniques; equipment; raw materials; production line successes; detailed explanations of manufacturing processes; etc.
21. Community affairs: Fund raisers; special events; support for the arts; scholarship programs; social responsibility programs; environmental programs; employee and corporate participation in local/regional/national events.
22. Data processing stories: New computer hardware and software systems; improved data processing and its benefits to customers; new data processing applications; explanations of how systems serve customers.
23. Overseas activities: Reports on the company's international activities; profiles of facilities, people, markets, etc.

24. Service: Background on company service facilities; case histories of outstanding service activities; new services for customers; new hotlines; etc.
25. History: Articles of company, industry, product, community history.
26. Human resources: Company benefit programs; announcement of new benefits and training and how they improve service to customers; explanations of company policies.
27. Interviews: With company key employees, engineers, service personnel, etc.; with customers; with suppliers (to illustrate the quality of materials going into your company's products).
28. Forums: Top managers answer customer complaints and concerns; service managers discuss customer needs; customers share their favorable experiences with company products/ services.
29. Gimmicks: Contests; quizzes; puzzles; games; cartoons.

Section 11

Ten Ways to Stretch Your Advertising Budget

Most business-to-business advertisers have smaller ad budgets than their counterparts in consumer marketing. Here are 10 ways to get more out of your advertising dollars - without detracting from the quality and quantity of your ads and promotions. In some cases, these ideas can even *enhance* the effectiveness of your marketing efforts.

ONE *Use your ads for more than just space advertising*. Ads are expensive to produce and expensive to run. But there are ways of getting your advertising message in your prospect's hands at a fraction of the cost of space advertising.

The least expensive is to order an ample supply of reprints and distribute them to customers and prospects every chance you get. When you send literature in response to an inquiry, include a copy of the ad in the package. This reminds a prospect of the reason he responded in the first place and reinforces the original message.

Distribute ads internally to other departments - engineering, production, sales, customer service, and R&D – to keep them up to date on your latest marketing and promotional efforts. Make sure your salespeople receive an extra supply of reprints and are encouraged to include a reprint when they write to or visit their customers.

Turn the ad into a product data sheet by adding technical specifications and additional product information to the back of the ad reprint. This eliminates the expense of creating a new layout from scratch. And it makes good advertising sense, because the reader gets double exposure to your advertising message.

Ad reprints can be used as inexpensive direct mail pieces. You can mail the reprints along with a reply card and a sales letter. Unlike the ad, which is "cast in concrete," the letter is easily and inexpensively tailored to specific markets and customer groups.

If you've created a series of ads on the same product or product line, publish bound reprints of the ads as a product brochure. This tactic increases prospect exposure to the series and is less expensive than producing a brand new brochure.

If your ads provide valuable information of a general nature, you can offer reprints as free educational material to companies in your industry. Or, if the ad presents a striking visual, you can offer reprints that are suitable for framing. Reuse your ads again and again. You will save money – and increase frequency – in the process.

TWO *If something works, stick with it.* Too many industrial marketers scrap their old ads and create new ones because they're bored with their current campaign.

That's a waste. You shouldn't create new ads or promotions if your existing ones are still accurate and effective. You should run your ads for as long as your customers read and react to them.

How long can ads continue to get results? The Ludlow Corp. ran an ad for its erosion-preventing Soil Saver mesh 41 times in the same journal. After 11 years it pulled more inquiries per issue than when it was first published in 1966.

If a concept still has selling power but the ad contains dated information, update the existing ad – don't throw it out and start from scratch. This approach isn't fun for the ad manager or the agency, but it does save money.

THREE *Don't over-present yourself*. A strange thing happens to industrial advertisers when they get a little extra money in the ad budget: they see fancy four-color brochures, gold embossed mailers, and fat annual reports produced by Fortune 500 firms. Then they say, "This stuff sure looks great – why don't we do some brochures like this?"

That's a mistake. The look, tone, and image of your promotions should be dictated by your product and your market – not by what other companies in other businesses put out.

Producing literature that's too fancy for its purpose and its audience is a waste of money. And it can even *hurt* sales – your prospects will look at your

overdone literature and wonder whether you really understand your market and its needs.

FOUR *Use "modular" product literature*. One common advertising problem is how to promote a single product to many small, diverse markets. Each market has different needs and will buy the product for different reasons. But on your budget, you can't afford to create a separate brochure for each of these tiny market segments.

The solution is "modular literature." This means creating a basic brochure layout that has sections capable of being tailored to meet specific market needs.

After all, most sections of the brochure – technical specifications, service, company background, product operation, product features – will be the same regardless of the audience. Only a few sections, such as benefits of the product to the user and typical applications, need to be tailored to specific readers.

In a modular layout, standard sections remain the same, but new copy can be typeset and stripped in for each market-specific section of the brochure. This way, you can create many different market-specific pieces of literature on the same product using the same basic layout, mechanicals, artwork and plates.

Significant savings in time and money will result.

FIVE *Use article reprints as supplementary literature*. Ad managers are constantly bombarded by requests for "incidental" pieces of product literature. Engineers want data sheets explaining some minor technical feature in great detail. Reps selling to small specialized markets want special literature geared to their particular audience. And each company salesperson wants support literature that fits his or her individual sales pitch. But the ad budget can only handle the major pieces of product literature. Not enough time or money exists to satisfy everybody's requests for custom literature.

The solution is to use article reprints as supplementary sales literature. Rather than spend a bundle producing highly technical or application-specific pieces, have your sales and technical staff write articles on these special topics. Then, place the articles with the appropriate journals.

Article reprints can be used as inexpensive literature and carry more credibility than self-produced promotional pieces. You don't pay for typesetting or production of the article. Best of all, the article is free advertising for your firm.

SIX *Explore inexpensive alternatives for generating leads*. Many smaller firms judge ad effectiveness solely by the number of leads generated. They are not concerned with building image or recognition; they simply count bingo-card inquiries.

If that describes your approach to advertising, perhaps you shouldn't be advertising in the first place. Not that lead-generating isn't a legitimate use of space advertising. But if leads are all you're after, there are cheaper ways to get them.

New-product releases lead the list as the most economical method of generating leads. Once, for less than $100, I wrote, printed, and distributed a new-product release to a hundred trade journals. Within six moths, the release had been picked up by 35 magazines and generated 2,500 bingo-card inquiries.

Your second best inquiry generator is the direct-action postcard pack. You can write and typeset your own postcard for less than $200. And running the card in a trade journal's postcard pack generally costs from $800 to $1,200. But that same $800 to $1,200 would probably buy only a sixth or a third of a page in the magazine.

I've seen a single postcard mailing pull nearly 500 inquiries, and you'd have a hard time doing that with the average one-third page ad.

SEVEN *Don't "overbook" outside creative talent*. Hire freelancers and consultants whose credentials – and fees – fit the job and the budget.

Top advertising photographers, for example, get $1,000 a day or more. This may be worth the fee for a corporate ad running in *Forbes* or *Business Week*. But it's overkill for the employee newsletter or a publicity shot. Many competent photographers can shoot a good black-and-white publicity photo for $200 or even less.

When you hire consultants, writers, artists, or photographers, you should look for someone whose level of expertise and cost fits the task at hand.

EIGHT *Do it yourself*. Routine tasks, such as mailing publicity releases, duplicating slides, or retyping media schedules can be done cheaper in-house than outside. Save the expensive agency or consultant for tasks that really require their expertise.

Even if you don't have an in-house advertising department, consider hiring a full-time administrative assistant to handle the detail work involved in managing your company's advertising. This is a more economical solution than farming administrative work out to the agency or doing it yourself.

NINE *Get the most of existing art, photography, and copy*. Photos, illustrations, layouts, and even copy created for one promotion can often be lifted and reused in other pieces to significantly reduce creative costs. For example, copy created for a corporate image ad can be used as the introduction to the annual report.

Also, you can save rough layouts, thumbnail sketches, headlines, and concepts rejected for one project and use them in future ads, mailings, and promotions.

TEN *Pay vendors on time.* You'll save money by taking advantage of discounts and avoiding late charges when you pay vendor invoices on time.

And, you'll gain goodwill that can result in better service and fairer prices on future projects.

About the author:

BOB BLY is an independent copywriter and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in business-to-business, high tech, industrial, and direct marketing.

Bob has written copy for over 100 clients including Network Solutions, ITT Fluid Technology, Medical Economics, Intuit, Business & Legal Reports, and Brooklyn Union Gas. Awards include a Gold Echo from the Direct Marketing Association, an IMMY from the Information Industry Association, two Southstar Awards, an American Corporate Identity Award of Excellence, and the Standard of Excellence award from the Web Marketing Association.

He is the author of more than 50 books including *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Direct Marketing* (Alpha Books) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt & Co.). His articles have appeared in numerous publications such as *DM News, Writer's Digest, Amtrak Express, Cosmopolitan, Inside Direct Mail*, and *Bits & Pieces for Salespeople.*

Bob has presented marketing, sales, and writing seminars for such groups as the U.S. Army, Independent Laboratory Distributors Association, American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and the American Marketing Association. He also taught business-to-business copywriting and technical writing at New York University.

Bob writes sales letters, direct mail packages, ads, e-mail marketing campaigns, brochures, articles, press releases, white papers, Web sites, newsletters, scripts, and other marketing materials clients need to sell their

products and services to businesses. He also consults with clients on marketing strategy, mail order selling, and lead generation programs.

Prior to becoming an independent copywriter and consultant, Bob was advertising manager for Koch Engineering, a manufacturer of process equipment. He has also worked as a marketing communications writer for Westinghouse Defense. Bob Bly holds a B.S. in chemical engineering from the University of Rochester and has been trained as a Certified Novell Administrator (CNA). He is a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the Business Marketing Association.

Bob has appeared as a guest on dozens of TV and radio shows including MoneyTalk 1350, The Advertising Show, Bernard Meltzer, Bill Bresnan, CNBC, Winning in Business, The Small Business Advocate and CBS Hard Copy. He has been featured in major media ranging from the LA Times and Nation's Business to the New York Post and the National Enquirer.

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