

Using Direct Mail To Generate Sales Leads

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Section 1

The Importance of Sales Leads

For many organizations, a prime objective of advertising and promotion is to generate inquiries. And one of the best ways to do this is with direct mail.

In a comparative evaluation of sales tools, published in *Chemical Engineering Progress*, George Black of the Bozell & Jacobs ad agency rated the effectiveness of various forms of marketing communications in selling industrial equipment. When it came to effectiveness in generating sales leads, direct mail received a 4 out of a possible 5. Only publicity was rated higher.

American business spends billions of dollars each year to generate, track, and follow up sales leads. For some companies, the sales lead program represents a tremendous investment in time and money. For instance, in *Business Marketing* magazine, Don Mallison, marketing communications manager of Digital Equipment, reported that his company processed 120,000 inquiries in a recent year.

But, regardless of whether you receive 1,200 inquiries this year or 120,000, you naturally want the best-quality leads – inquiries from genuine prospects with real interest in your product or service. My experience shows that direct mail is often the most effective tool for generating high-quality leads. Publicity may generate more leads at less cost, but the quality is frequently not as good.

More and more companies are using direct mail to generate leads. One survey, reported by *DM News*, revealed that presidents, general managers, and division heads receive more than seventy-five pieces of business mail each week. Some executives receive as many as two hundred pieces per week. With all that competition, it pays to develop the strongest, most effective mailing possible. Otherwise, your letter will just be lost in the crowd.

Section 2

Quality or Quantity?

The overwhelming majority of companies I've encountered measure the success of a lead-generation program strictly by the number of leads produced or the percentage of responses.

But all leads are not created equal. Some inquiries represent impulse responses from people who are curious but not really interested. Other inquiries are from people who want your free brochure or slide rule or booklet but have no need for your product. Yet some leads, the best leads, are urgent inquiries from genuine prospects who have a real need, are actively looking for a solution, and want to buy – now.

A successful lead-generation program looks at both quality and quantity. The goal should not be to gather great numbers but to generate the highest quantity of "hot" inquiries: phone calls and reply cards from genuine prospects who say, "I'm interested in this – really. What's the next step?"

One advertising executive, who handles the inquiry-generating advertising and direct mail campaigns of a number of schools offering computer training, said to me recently, "We rarely offer a brochure. The response we want is for someone to pick up the phone or come into the school for an interview. We want inquiries from people who are motivated enough to call or visit, not just from people who want to get free brochures in the mail."

Why has the quality aspect of lead generation been ignored for so long? For the simple reason that it is difficult to measure. Anyone can count reply cards. But how do you determine what is a "good" lead from what is a mediocre one?

In theory, it's not so hard. You determine what information you need to know about each lead, set up a system for tracking the lead and collecting the information, and report on the results. For instance, for each mailing, you might want to know:

- number of leads generated
- percentage of leads that result in a sale
- dollar value of total sales generated

Every person has different standards by which he or she judges a mailing's effectiveness. Some say, "A maximum quantity of leads is what we look for. Whether the sale is made depends on the follow-up, not the sales letter itself" Others say, "We judge a mailing by how many dollars in sales each mailing piece brings in. What good are reply cards that don't turn into customers?" Ultimately, only you can determine the yardstick by which you will judge your direct mail efforts.

In practice, gathering this type of information is not always easy. It depends on cooperation from the sales force and administrative personnel; gathering data and keeping records involves a lot of counting and paperwork. Today, much of this work has been simplified by computer systems and software packages designed specifically to track and monitor lead-generation programs.

With a computer, files are quickly and easily updated, and up-to-the-minute reports can be printed in a flash. For each mailing, you can track the leads, sales, and profits produced. The computer gives you fast access to better data for more informed decision making. Often the inquiries recorded in the lead-generation database double as the source of your in-house mailing list.

A discussion of how to create and manage a lead-generation system (computerized or manual) is beyond the scope of this book. If you need to know more, you might start by talking with a direct marketing consultant, computer programmer, or one of the consultants specializing in lead management. You can

have a staff or independent computer programmer create a system for you. Or you can buy one of a number of packaged systems that come complete and ready to go. Some of these consist of hardware and software installed in your office; others are computerized inquiry-fulfillment services that are performed for you off-premises. A partial list of vendors is presented below.

Section 3

Seven Ways to Get Better Leads

In some situations, you may be after the best leads possible. If, for example, each lead is to be followed up by a salesperson, you don't want salespeople wasting their valuable travel or telephone time chasing after nonprospects. Thus, you would be willing to sacrifice quantity to improve quality. In his book *Direct Marketing: Strategy, Planning, Execution*, Ed Nash gives seven ways to get better sales leads:

1. Mention the price.
2. Say that a salesperson will call.
3. Give a lot of information about the product, including any potential negatives.
4. Ask the prospect to give you a lot of information on the reply card, such as phone number, best time to call, number of employees.
5. Charge something. Even a small amount for a booklet or sample will eliminate the freeloaders.
6. Require a stamp. Don't use a business reply card or business reply envelope.

7. Make the offer specific and relevant to the product or service you are selling.

All of these rules are really common sense. Take rule 7 as an example. Imagine how many replies you would get if you offered a free clock radio to everyone who responded to your mailing! But how many of these people, do you think, would respond just to get the clock radio, without having any real interest in your company or your product?

On the other hand, if you changed your offer to a free booklet entitled, "Seven Ways to Protect Your Computer Equipment Against Power Surges," only people interested in protecting their computers against power surges would be inclined to send for the booklet. Thus, you would be attracting the right type of prospect for a surge protection device.

Section 4

And Seven Ways to Get More Leads

In other situations, you might want to increase the number of leads your mailing generates. For instance, I had a client tell me, "We have a new product, no prospects, and three new salespeople sitting around twiddling their thumbs. I need leads and lots of them – FAST!"

As a rule, the more leads you get, the lower the overall quality of the leads. In his book, Ed Nash also gives seven ways to get more leads:

1. Tell less. Leave something to curiosity.
2. Use your computer printer to personalize the response device so the prospect doesn't have to write in his or her name and address.

3. Add convenience. Supply the stamp, the envelope, maybe even a pencil. .
4. Give a gift or a premium – one that is valuable and not necessarily related to your product. The more valuable, the more leads you'll get.
5. Make the entire offer FREE.
6. Ask less on the reply card – the fewer questions, the better.
7. Add a prize. Sweepstakes can really boost response.

Checklist of Lead-Getting Offers

Key: 1 = low 5 = average 10 = high

Offer	Quantity of Leads Produced	Quality of Leads Produced
Free gift by mail	10	2
Free information report by mail	9	3-6
Free brochure	8	5
More information	7	5
Demonstration	5-6	5-6
Sales presentation/consultation	4	7
Salesperson will call	3	7-8
Write on your letterhead to request information	1	8
Complete questionnaire or spec sheet	2	9

Section 5

The Lead-Getting Letter: How Much to Tell?

In mail order there is an old saying that goes: "The more you tell, the more you sell."

But in lead generation, things are different. The lead generating direct mail package does not have to do the whole job of selling the customer and bringing back the order. Rather, the goal of the lead-generating package is to get a prospect to raise his hand and say, "Yes, your product sounds like something that might be able to help me. Tell me more!"

However, if you tell your whole story in the mailing, there is nothing left for the reader to inquire about. The prospect may feel that he or she knows everything there is to know about your product or service, and that there is no reason to respond – unless he or she is ready to buy now.

For this reason, lead-generating packages do not tell the whole story. Rather, they provide enough information to whet the reader's appetite for further details. The interested reader is invited to send for more details – which might be a brochure, a presentation, or a demonstration of the product.

Exactly how much information should your package include? Enough to give the prospect a good idea of (a) what you are selling; (b) the problem it solves or the key advantage of your product over similar products; and (c) how the reader can personally benefit from the product. You should also specify, in detail, the action you expect on the part of the reader – and provide an incentive for immediate response, if possible.

Section 6

Phone or Mail Response?

Not all prospects are ready to buy your product today, of course. A few might be. But there are plenty of others who may be ideal buyers for your product – except that they don't have (or don't think they have) an immediate need for what you offer.

Your lead-generating mailing should accommodate both the hot prospect and people with a more casual interest in your offer. For this reason, I recommend you give readers the following options:

- In your sales letter, tell the reader he can contact you either by mailing an enclosed reply card or picking up the telephone and calling you directly. You will get more phone calls if your phone number is toll-free. And you will get more reply cards if you pay the postage.
- On your reply card, have at least two options the reader can select by checking the appropriate box. The first option says, "Have a salesperson get in touch with me. The best time to call is _____." The second option says, "Send me your free brochure."

In this way, you can get qualified responses from all levels of prospects – both those who are inclined to pick up the phone and speak with you now, and those who prefer to review sales literature in the privacy of their own homes, without being bothered by a salesperson.

Some direct marketers frown on free-brochure offers, arguing that it is a waste of money to mail expensive literature to consumers who are just "brochure collectors." I disagree. There are many people – and I'm one of them – who want to

see a brochure first and read it before making a buying decision ... without being badgered by telephone salespeople. We are not cranks and we may buy your product, but we will do it on our terms – not yours. If you want our business, you must give us the option of getting a brochure in the mail without being grilled on the phone, pestered by salespeople, or having a company representative insist on visiting us to deliver your literature in person. I personally know many people who say they have a policy of never buying anything sold over the telephone.

Section 7

Sample Letter: Free Information Kit

I recently wrote a new sales letter to generate sales leads for my own services as a freelance writer.

Rather than focus on my background and credentials, as previous letters had done, I stressed the offer of a free information kit. The new letter pulled a 10 percent response versus 7 percent for my old letter.

Here is the text of my new letter:

Dear Marketing Professional:

"It's hard to find a copywriter who can handle industrial and high-tech accounts," a prospect told me over the phone today, "especially for brochures, direct mail, and other long-copy assignments."

Do you have that same problem?

If so, please complete and mail the enclosed reply card, and I'll send you a free information kit describing a service that can help.

As a freelance copywriter specializing in business-to-business advertising, I've written hundreds of successful ads, sales letters, direct mail packages, brochures, annual reports,

feature articles, press releases, newsletters, and scripts for clients all over the country.

But my information kit will give you the full story. You'll receive a comprehensive "WELCOME" letter that tells all about my service - who I work for, what I can do for you, how we can work together.

You'll also get my client list (I've written copy for over 65 advertisers and agencies), complete with client comments . . . biographical background . . . samples of work I've done for others in your field . . . a fee schedule listing what I charge for ads, brochures, and other assignments . . . helpful article reprints on copywriting and advertising . . . even an order form you can use to put me to work for you.

Whether you have an immediate project, a future need, or are just curious, I urge you to send for this information kit. It's free . . . there's no obligation . . . and you'll like having a proven copywriting resource on file - someone you can call on whenever you need him.

From experience, I've learned that the best time to evaluate a copywriter and take a look at his work is before you need him, not when a project deadline comes crashing around the corner. You want to feel comfortable about a writer and his capabilities in advance . . . so when a project does come up, you know who to call.

Why not mail back the reply card TODAY, while it is still handy? I'll rush your free information kit as soon as I hear from you.

Regards,

Bob Bly

I think this letter has been successful for me for a number of reasons:

- The first two paragraphs immediately identify and empathize with the reader's problem.
- The rest of the letter positions my free information kit as offering a solution to this problem.
- The reader can get this solution with no cost, no obligation, no sales pressure - just by mailing a reply card.

- I invite response from people of varying degrees of interest – from those with an immediate project to those who are just curious.
- By describing the package in detail, I persuade the reader that it is something worth having.
- The second to last paragraph gives the reader some free helpful advice about selecting copywriters . . . which demonstrates that I have his or her best interest in mind.
- The letter closes with a strong call to action.

Section 8

Sample Letter: Free Seminar

My friend Gary Blake wrote an even more successful lead-getting letter which he has generously agreed to share with us. Gary's company, The Communication Workshop, offers writing seminars to corporations.

The problem is that managers are bombarded by sales pitches from such firms. So Gary decided to do something different. Instead of using his letter to pressure people to hire him, he offered a free seminar – no cost, no obligation – to people who responded.

Approximately one out of ten people receiving Gary's letter registered for the free seminar, and so he had no trouble filling the session.

Offering a free seminar makes sense for Gary, because it allows prospects to sample his service directly. Oh yes, at least one of the people attending the free seminar hired Gary to give a full-length seminar, so the mailing has already paid for itself many times over.

Here is Gary's letter – simple yet effective:

Mr. Joe Smith
Manager of Development Big Company
Anywhere, USA

Dear Mr. Smith:

No, this is not another pitch for your business. Not yet, anyway. This is an opportunity for you to attend a FREE three-hour overview of The Communication Workshop's popular seminar in effective business writing.

You may have heard about The Communication Workshop. We've been featured in Crain's New York Business, Training & Development Journal, Training News, and Across the Board (enclosed).

You are among a select group of training professionals being invited to see the writing workshop in action. Here's your chance to pick up some valuable writing tips, socialize with your colleagues, and find out why so many people turn to The Communication Workshop for writing seminars.

The attached sheet gives you all the specifics. As a participant, you'll be invited to submit a writing sample to me two weeks before the seminar. I'll personally review it, and give you clear, consistent feedback on your writing.

Please join me for an enjoyable, information-packed three hours.

Sincerely,

Gary Blake, Ph.D.
Director

Along with the personalized letter Gary enclosed an article reprint (from Across the Board) and a descriptive flyer with a registration coupon attached.

Why does this letter work so well?

- The opening ("No, this is not another pitch for your business") is a shocker – not what the reader is expecting. It also empathizes with the fact that the reader is deluged with sales pitches.
- It offers something of incredible value (a three-hour business writing

workshop) for free.

- It flatters the reader ("You are among a select group of training professionals").
- It builds credibility by mentioning all the publications that have written about The Communication Workshop and by enclosing a reprint for the reader.

Section 9

A Three-Dimensional Mailing

Lewis Advertising, a Baltimore ad agency, decided to use a three-dimensional mailing to invite customers and prospects to its fifty-fifth anniversary celebration.

The package was a box with a teaser on the lid: "You're in for a real treat!" Inside was a realistic photograph of a slice of cherry cheesecake on a plate. Next to the "cake" was a stainless steel fork engraved with the company's logo.

Out of 250 customers and prospects who received the mailing, two hundred people attended the celebration – a 72 percent response rate. Some of those who were unable to attend asked for a tour of the agency's facilities later on.

The moral? Expensive mailings can be a costly waste if not done properly. But well executed, a high-cost mailing piece can dramatically outpull a plain-jane mailing in certain cases. (Source: Imprint magazine, Summer 1985, p. 14.)

Section 10

Budgeting the Lead-Generating Package

In mail order, it is easy to determine how much to spend on direct mail. You know approximately what range of response you will receive, based on past experience. You know how much your product sells for, and you know your profit per sale. You can calculate, based on profit per sale and anticipated sales per thousand pieces mailed, how much you can afford to spend if you want to break even on the mailing.

In lead generation, such precise formulas fall apart, because we don't know how much profit we can make from each lead. Also, when a lead is converted to a customer, the dollar volume of sales can be hundreds of times greater than in mail order.

For example, if you are writing a package selling subscriptions to a \$19.95 magazine, you know that each order will bring in exactly \$19.95. But if you are writing a lead-generating mailing for a law firm, a person who responds may spend anywhere from fifty dollars for an initial consultation to \$100,000 or more for major litigation. Especially in industrial marketing, one sale can often be a yearly contract worth up to several million dollars.

Therefore, I can't really give you a formula for determining how simple – or how elaborate – to make your mailing package. In the truest sense, it is up to you.

My recommendation, of course, is that you start with the least expensive package and work your way up from there. I prefer a simple, inexpensive package consisting of a business reply card (BRC) and a one- or two-page sales letter . . . with a booklet added, if appropriate.

But other companies use more elaborate packages, often with great success. One engineering firm, promoting a new type of joint, sent out a mailing that included an audiocassette tape of the inventor of the product explaining how the joint worked, its importance, and the ways engineers could use it in their designs.

The tape was sent to about five hundred prospects. In addition to these, the engineering firm sent a separate, more expensive mailing to their fifty top prospects – large corporations representing potential contracts of millions of dollars. These fifty prospects received a box containing not only the audiocassette but a free Sony Walkman on which to play it. Expensive? Yes. But certainly bound to get attention. And well worth the price if it brought in just one of those fifty people as a customer.

Again, though, my advice is to start with a simple package. If it works, think about upgrading to something fancier. "Bells and whistles" can increase response, but they are no substitute for a strong offer or sales proposition. Concentrate on making a strong offer that people will respond to. Then dress it up to make it pull even better.

Section 11

Analyzing Your Needs

Unfortunately, there is no formula I can give you that tells you which package format or sales approach to use in your particular situation. Each mailing is different; what works in one situation may not be right for yours. However, by asking the right questions, you can quickly get your strategy on track.

Here are some of the questions to ask when planning a lead-generating mailing.

- **Do people know my product?** Let's say you want to get people to come into your store and look over a new computer.

If the computer is an IBM PC or other well-known brand, people are probably somewhat familiar with your product and your company. Your letter does not have to "sell" them on your machine; your TV commercials and ad campaign have already done it.

Instead, your letter should focus on giving people a reason to go to the store, such as a free demonstration, free software with purchase, or \$250 rebate.

- **Is my prospect familiar with my product category?** In some cases, not only has the person receiving your letter never heard of your product, but he or she may be totally unfamiliar with the entire product category.

This was surely the case when Apple began advertising its first personal computers in the late 1970s. People had never heard of a personal computer and could not conceive of having such a device in their homes. Early Apple ads had to educate people about computers before they could begin selling the Apple brand.

I recently did a mailing package promoting a new service that produces color slides from computer graphics created on PCs and stored on floppy disks. Since this was something new, we included with our sales letter a rather lengthy brochure illustrating what the system was and how it works.

Most people believe it is easier to sell and promote new and different products. In fact, the opposite is true. With a new product, you must educate the public as well as sell them. And educating people takes time – and money.

- **Does my prospect understand the problem my product solves?** Can you would imagine how hard it would be to sell a product that reduces high blood pressure if people didn't understand what high blood pressure is and that it can harm their health?

If your prospects do not understand the problem your product solves . . . or if they have the problem but are not aware of it . . . you must educate them about the problem before you can effectively sell your product as a solution.

A company called KnowledgeWare sells software packages that automate part of the work usually done by programmers, systems analysts, and other people who design new software. Specifically, the software automates a particular set of techniques known as information engineering.

Many IS professionals don't know or don't use these techniques, so part of KnowledgeWare's challenge was to educate them and sell them on these techniques. The solution was to write a forty-page white paper on Information Engineering and offer it through direct mail.

The mailing consisted of a letter and reply card stressing the offer of the free white paper. A small booklet was also enclosed. The title of the booklet was, "Can you answer these ten questions about Information Engineering?" The purpose of the booklet was to tease the prospect by asking ten important questions that would be answered in the free white paper. Response to this mailing was 10 percent.

- **What is the next step in the buying process?** This is the most important question you can ask in lead generation. The primary purpose of your mailing is to get the prospect to take this next step – and not to sell the product itself.

Do you want prospects to come to your store or showroom? Give them compelling reasons for making the trip, such as a free test drive, free gift, or discount.

Do you want prospects to send for a catalog, brochure, or other free literature? Stress the offer of the literature. Tell them that it is given free and without obligation. Describe it in attractive terms that will compel readers to send for a copy.

Do you have to visit with the prospect to describe your services in more detail? Don't think of this visit as a sales call; in your mailing, promote it as a "free consultation." Your copy should stress the value of this free consultation and describe how it benefits the reader. For example, tell the prospects you will analyze their particular problem and make suggestions on how they can solve it (if this is indeed what you do).

Do you offer a free gift, such as a poster or wall calendar or pen-and-pencil set? Stress this free offer in your letter.

Naturally, you don't want to give away too much for free. But the more valuable your free offer, the more leads you'll get.

- **Who is the logical prospect for my product or service?** I know you don't want to give away free service, free information, or free gifts to people who are not prospects for your product or service. So it's important to identify and find mailing lists of logical prospects for your order.

For example, let's say you have an office-cleaning service. Who at a company would be the person to hire your type of service? The office manager? The company president? The owner of the building? You will get a higher-quality sales lead by mailing to the right prospect: someone with the authority, money, and desire to own your product or take care of the problem it solves.

- **But what if I don't know who my best prospect is?** Take a guess and do a mailing to people you think are likely to buy. Then, in the P.S. of your letter say, "If you would like us to send information about our product to other people in your organization, please fill in their names and titles on the enclosed reply card and mail it back to us." In a mailing to consumers, you can say, "Please give us the names and addresses of friends who might also be interested in our product." On the reply card, leave space

for the recipient to write in the names of two or three other people.

In this way, you get the recipient to tell you who you should be mailing to . . . and provide the names, titles, and addresses for you. This technique is known as member-get-a-member, probably because it has frequently been used to get current members of an organization to provide the names of other people the organization could solicit for membership.

- **Do I need a brochure?** Should you include a booklet in your mailing, or should you just send a letter and reply card?

You should consider including a flyer or booklet if:

- your product is unfamiliar to the reader and needs to be explained
- it's important to tell the reader how the product works
- you need to show a picture of the product
- your firm is unknown and you want to build credibility with your market
- your prospect needs some background education in the technology or subject matter your product addresses.
- **What will I send to people who respond to my mailing?** If you have a great sales brochure or a helpful, informative pamphlet, great! You can increase response to your mailing by emphasizing the value of your free information.

However, if your brochure isn't really very good, or you don't have any literature, you may want to talk more about your product and your company, and downplay the free-literature offer. There isn't much point to getting people to request literature if the brochure you send does a poor selling job.

Have any articles been published about your company or product? Often you can turn an article into an informative booklet which can be offered in your

mailing. For example, I reprinted one of my articles as a report, "23 Ways to Create Business-to-Business Mailings That Work." A one-paragraph mention of the free report in a business magazine generated sixty-five inquiries.

Take a look at existing brochures, booklets, speeches, article reprints, press releases, and other sales and technical literature. Is there any material there that can be repackaged into free information to form the basis of a direct mail offer?

- **Must I include a reply card?** Yes. You will always get more responses when you include a business reply card or order form with a return envelope. I think it is a mistake not to include a reply element with your mailing. Even when your primary goal is to generate a telephone response, you should still include a reply card to capture those prospects who don't want to call.
- **Is a toll free number available for inquiries?** Although having people call you toll-free costs you money, you generally get a better response with a toll-free number than if you force the prospect to make a toll call. Don't forget to tell the reader that the call is free.
- **How many people am I mailing to?** If you are mailing to many thousands of people, you may be limited by budget constraints to a standard package consisting of a one-page sales letter, business reply card, and simple pamphlet in a number-ten envelope.

If you can segment a small portion of these people – say, 10 percent or so – as prime prospects, you may want to send them a more elaborate version of your package. Since these people represent a greater potential dollar volume of sales, you might spend five or even ten dollars per package instead of just fifty cents.

On the other hand, if you are mailing to a small market – several hundred people or less – producing an elaborate brochure for such a limited mailing cannot be done cost-effectively because of the development costs. For small mailings, you

are better off sending a sales letter and reply card with an inexpensive enclosure, such as an article reprint or inexpensive black-and-white folded pamphlet.

- **Where am I getting my mailing list?** If the mailing list is available on floppy disk or tape, you can personalize the mailing on your in-house word processing system or at an outside letter shop.

The problem with personalization is that it consumes either a lot of your time or a lot of your money.

If you do it in-house, you tie up a person and a computer until the mailing is done. Even with a fast letter-quality printer, you might only be able to produce fifty or sixty personalized letters and envelopes an hour. Thus, most companies only go this route if the mailing list is a few hundred names or less.

If you use an outside letter shop, personalization is rarely cost-effective for mailings of less than five thousand to ten thousand. For smaller quantities, use a printed form letter.

In many cases, small mailing lists are available on labels only, not in computer-readable form, which makes it extremely difficult to personalize your letters unless you have someone key all the names on the list into your computer.

- **What special action do I take if someone has an immediate need for my product?** Some people who receive your mailing may be ready to buy right now. Your letter should tell them how to get immediate service from your firm. For example: "If you have an immediate project in mind, call us toll-free at 800-XXX-XXXX for a prompt survey and price quotation. Response within 24 hours." You should be able to accommodate the urgent prospect as well as people who are just shopping around.
- **Will my mailing be screened by a secretary?** One of the big problems in using direct mail to reach business executives is getting past the secretary.

As a rule, the higher up you go in the corporate ladder – especially at Fortune 1000 companies – the more likely the secretary is to screen incoming mail.

How do you get around this?

- A popular technique has been to mark the outer envelope PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL. But it doesn't work anymore because everyone is doing it and secretaries are wise to the trick.
- Secretaries look for clues that your envelope contains advertising material rather than important correspondence. A sure sign of this is teaser copy or graphics on the outer envelope. So don't use a teaser when mailing to high-level executives.
- Make your mailing look like a personal communication from one business executive to another. Use a high-quality paper stock. Personalize the letter on your word processor. Run the envelope through your printer; don't affix labels. Use postage stamps instead of an indicia or postage meter. Mail first class instead of bulk third class.
- Xerox Corporation used a unique format in which a smaller number-ten envelope was glued to a larger six-by-nine-inch envelope. Teaser copy on the small envelope reads:

Dear Secretary,
Your company needs your expert opinion, And so do we.
We also have a free gift for you.

P.S. Please peel off this envelope and keep it for yourself. Then just pass along the larger one.

This clever approach openly asks the secretary for help, turning a potential enemy into an ally.

- Personalize any gifts, premiums, or other enclosures. For example, if you send a typed report, add a title page which says, "Prepared exclusively for T. C. Smith." Smith's secretary, thinking that the report may be important, will not throw it away.
- **Is there a time limit on my offer?** You can increase response by stressing the urgency of your offer. When running a special promotion, for example, be sure to let the reader know that (a) the promotion is special, (b) it is being offered only through direct mail to a select group of customers and prospects, of which he or she is a member, and (c) the offer is for a limited time only, and once it expires it may never be repeated again. If there is a specific date by which the offer will expire, state this in your letter.
- **How many leads do I want to generate?** According to The Computer Studio, a Tuckahoe, New York, firm specializing in lead-generation programs, you should limit your mailings so you don't produce more leads than your sales staff can properly handle. For instance, if your response rate is 2 percent, you might generate twenty leads per month from one thousand pieces per month. This may be enough to keep a full-time salesperson busy if selling your product requires a lot of customer contact and up-front effort.
- **What information do I need to collect about the prospects and their needs?** A reply card that restates the offer and asks for a response 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 reply card should ask: What type of computer do you have? What is your operating system? How many invoices do you write a month?

Remember that mailing from KnowledgeWare . . . the one offering a free white paper on "Information Engineering"? The reply card asked the readers to tell what type of mainframe computer, database management system, and programming tools they used in their data center. It also asked how many systems analysts worked at their company.

If gathering detailed information is your primary goal, you might consider doing a mailing in the form of a survey or mail questionnaire. Response rates of 20 to 30 percent or more are not uncommon. Try to keep your survey short: two sides of a single 8 1/2-by-11-inch sheet is the maximum. Use yes/no or multiple-choice questions rather than a fill-in-the-blank or essay format. And always include a business reply envelope.

About the Author

BOB BLY is a freelance copywriter with 35 years experience in business-to-business and direct marketing. He is the author of more than 80 books including *How to Promote Your Own Business* (New American Library) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt).

Bob has written copy for dozens of clients including IBM, AT&T, PSE&G, Intuit, Newsmax, Agora Publishing, Brooklyn Union Gas, and Ingersoll Rand. His articles have appeared in many periodicals including *Cosmopolitan*, *Amtrak Express*, *Writer's Digest*, *New Jersey Monthly*, and the *Parent Paper*.

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