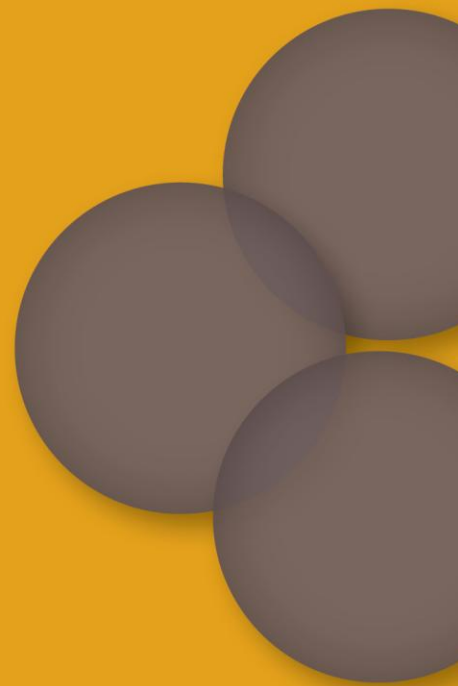


# SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY MARKETING



by Robert W. Bly

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## Section 1

### 10 Steps to Successful Software Direct Mail

Are you planning to test a new direct mail package to promote your software?

Following these 10 simple steps can help you avoid common mistakes, increase response, and tip the odds of having a profitable mailing in your favor.

1. *Product.* What are you selling? A stand-alone PC application? An enterprise-wide system, such as supply chain management (SCM) or customer relationship management (CRM)? A Web application that must be integrated with back-end systems?

Study the promotions from successful software companies in your category. Do you sell tax or accounting software? Reply to an Intuit mailing and see what happens. Selling databases? Check out what Oracle is doing.

Analyze the structure, format, and content not only of the initial direct mail piece, but also of the entire marketing campaign, from generating the inquiry to closing the sale.

Chances are companies with products similar to yours, especially the successful ones, have developed these marketing models through expensive trial and error testing. Why not copy what works and avoid the cost of going down the wrong path?

Things to look out for when modeling your efforts after the marketing campaigns of successful software publishers include offer, pricing, media, formats, the mix of online and offline marketing methods, lead qualification, the discrete steps that take a potential buyer from an inquirer to a closed sale, and numbers and types of communications used in each.

2. *Offer.* What offer would work best for your software? For low-priced products costing under \$500, the mail order model – selling the software directly from the direct mail package – is possible and should be tested. If it works – if the package generates sales that are 1½ times or more of its total cost in the mail (printing, letter shop, postage, and lists) – then you have a winner.

If the product is enterprise software or other applications selling for \$5,000 or more, you will probably need to use a two-step, or lead-generating, direct mail model. The direct mail piece generates an inquiry, which is then fulfilled and followed up by mail, phone, Web, in person, or some combination of these. The sale is closed in the follow-up, not in the initial mailing.

If the price of your software is between \$500 and \$5,000, you are in a gray area. You have to experiment to see whether you should go for sales or leads.

One thing that works with a \$5,000 product is to offer a “Small Project Version” or other smaller version for a nominal fee, say \$50 or \$99. The small version has all of the features of the full product, but is limited in some way – for instance, the “Small Project Version” of a project management program may only allow up to ten tasks in a project plan. If the customer decides to buy the full version, the money he paid for the small version is credited toward the purchase of the complete program.

When generating leads, offering a premium usually increases response. “White papers on Web sites, informative online newsletters, even thinly disguised bribes are used to prompt dialog,” says copywriter George Duncan. Other premiums that have worked well for software marketers include print white papers, CD-ROMs, software utilities on diskette, ROI calculators, checklists, and “needs assessments” – such as forms that can be used to evaluate whether there is a need for the software, or how to plan for its installation and deployment.

3. *Price.* Direct mail is a medium that works well when special offers, such as discounts, are used.

Do you want to get \$300 for your software? In the mailing, say that it is regularly \$399 (yes, supermarket pricing works below \$1,000), but if they buy now it is only \$299. A \$100 savings is a proven offer for mail order software marketing.

For more expensive software, state the license price per user. “Just \$50 per user for 100 desktops” sounds more affordable than “\$5,000 for up to 100 users.”

Software with a high price often causes “sticker shock.” To offset this, show a strong ROI (return on investment). Example: A direct mail package for surfCONTROL, a program that monitors employees’ Internet access, says that if an employee wastes an hour a day in non-work-related Web surfing, and their time is worth \$60 an hour, the cost in lost productivity is \$300 a week – \$15,000 per employee per year. The copy then compares the elimination of that lost productivity with the \$2 per user licensing fee.

4. *Audience.* Analyze the audience: their needs, interests, problems, concerns, awareness of the problem your software solves, level of PC literacy and sophistication.

“With end-to-end productivity solutions, you have two audiences – executive management and Information Technology (IT),” notes Duncan. Executives want to know the business benefit: lower costs, increased productivity, improved customer service, higher profits. IT wants to know whether the software is compatible and easily integrated with their existing systems.

A helpful exercise is to analyze what is known as the buyer’s “core complex,” abbreviated BFD for beliefs, feelings, and desires. These are the emotions, attitudes, and aspirations that drive your prospect:

- *Beliefs.* What does your audience believe? What is their attitude toward your product and the problems or issues it addresses?

- *Feelings.* How do they feel? Are they confident and brash? Nervous and fearful? What do they feel about the major issues in their lives, businesses, or industries?
- *Desires.* What do they want? What are their goals? What change do they want in their lives that your product can help them achieve? For instance, we did this exercise with IT people, for a company that gives seminars in communication and interpersonal skills for IT professionals. Here's what we came up with in a group meeting:
- *Beliefs.* IT people think they are smarter than other people, technology is the most important thing in the world, users are stupid, and management doesn't appreciate them enough.
- *Feelings.* IT people often have an adversarial relationship with management and users, both of whom they service. They feel others dislike them, look down upon them, and do not understand what they do.
- *Desires.* IT people want to be appreciated and recognized. They also prefer to deal with computers and avoid people whenever possible. And they want bigger budgets.

Based on this analysis, particularly the feelings, the company created a direct mail letter that was its most successful ever to promote a seminar "Interpersonal Skills for IT Professionals." The rather unusual headline: **"Important news for any IT professional who has ever felt like telling an end user, 'Go to hell.'"**

Before writing copy, write out in narrative form the BFD of your target market. Share these with your team and come to an agreement on them. Then write copy based on the agreed upon BFD.

5. *Medium.* The choice of medium depends on the available list, offer, the product, and the audience.

Is your audience very Internet-oriented (e.g., Web masters)? Ask your list broker for recommendations on e-lists. Using e-mail instead of paper direct mail might make sense – especially if you can direct them to a strong Web site that can drive the sale or the download of a demo or evaluation copy.

If you have a specialized audience numbering in the thousands or tens of thousands (e.g., CPAs, dentists), direct mail can work well if a list is available targeting this specialized group of users.

For a product with broad appeal and a potential market in the hundreds of thousands or millions (e.g., software to prepare a will or make greeting cards), newspaper ads can work well.

On the other hand, if you have a narrow audience of only a few hundred potential buyers (e.g., software for robot manufacturers), telemarketing may be the way to go.

6. *Format.* Say direct mail is the medium of choice. What format will work best for you?

“When you want to drive prospects to a Web site where an uncomplicated transaction can take place, oversized postcards are frequently effective,” says Duncan.

For generating inquiries for a PC program, the traditional direct mail package – outer envelope, sales letter, brochure, order form, and business reply envelope – is the format of choice.

What about high-end solutions, like CRM, SCM, and ERP (enterprise resource planning)?

“Because of the costs involved, and the fact that these purchases are made by committee after an exhaustive review process, prospects are difficult to reach and engage,” says Duncan. “Three-dimensional mailings are often effective for

this purpose, but can result in unqualified responses. Given the price points involved, however, such responses are far more acceptable than they used to be.”

7. *Lists.* Contact one or two list brokers and ask for list recommendations. These are presented in “data cards” – sales sheets describing the number and type of people on the mailing list.

Always go to a list broker for list recommendations. Do not call the list owner directly. If you call the list owner (e.g., a computer magazine), they will want to rent you their list, whether it’s the best for your offer or not.

A list broker, by comparison, is not promoting a specific list. Their advice is more objective. Their interest is in getting you the lists that will work best for you, so you will come to rely on their list recommendations and rent more lists from them.

Many software marketers do not realize that the services of a list broker are free. There is no charge to get list recommendations.

You pay the list broker only when you rent names from the lists they find for you. They do not mark up the lists. The list owner pays their commission. That means you pay the exact same price as if you rented the list directly from its owner.

The mailing list is the most important element in direct mail, affecting response rates up to 1,000% or more! And with more than 30,000 lists available, only a professional list broker has the time to keep up to date on what’s available ... and what will work for you.

8. *The USP.* With so many software products on the market today, how do you make yours stand out? You must define its USP — Unique Selling Proposition. This is the reason why the customer should buy your program instead of your competitor’s.



Many marketers have heard of USP, but very few remember the three characteristics of a successful USP, first defined by Rosser Reeves in his 1961 book *Reality in Advertising* (Alfred A. Knopf):

- Each advertisement must make a proposition to the consumer. Each advertisement must say to the reader: “Buy this product, and you will get this specific benefit.”
- The proposition must be one that the competition either cannot or does not offer. It must be unique – either a uniqueness of brand or a claim not otherwise made in that particular field.
- The proposition must be so strong that it can move the mass millions, i.e., pull over new customers to your product. (In the case of software, this may be the mass thousands rather than millions, but the idea is the same.)

Why is having a USP so important? Think about it: If you don’t know what sets your product apart from the competition, or why people should buy your program instead of theirs, how do you expect to convince complete strangers to do so?

9. *The Big Promise*. Samuel Johnson said, “Promise, large promise, is the soul of an advertisement.”

Once you have defined a USP, convert it into a big promise — a succinct, compelling statement of why the prospect should buy your product. The big promise can usually be stated in 15 or fewer words, and used as the headline of an ad or the outer envelope teaser of a direct mail package. For instance: “Develop Clipper applications 4 times faster — or your money back” for an application development tool.

The headline is the most important part of any promotion, so once you have written it, see if you can make it even better and stronger. One useful

technique for this is the “4 U’s.” That is, ask yourself whether the headline is urgent, unique, ultra-specific, and useful (i.e., promises a benefit).

A software marketer wrote to tell me he had sent out an e-mail marketing campaign with the subject line “Free White Paper.” How does this stack up against the 4 U’s?

- *Urgent.* There is no urgency or sense of timeliness. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest rating, “Free White Paper” is a 1.
- *Unique.* Not every software marketer offers a free white paper, but a lot of them do. So “Free White Paper” rates only a 2 in terms of uniqueness.
- *Ultra-specific.* Could the marketer have been less specific than “Free White Paper”? Yes, he could have just said “free bonus gift.” So we rate “Free White Paper” a 2 instead of a 1.
- *Useful.* I suppose the reader is smart enough to figure the white paper contains some helpful information he can use. On the other hand, the usefulness is in the specific information contained in the paper, which isn’t even hinted at in the headline. And does the recipient, who already has too much to read, really need yet another “Free White Paper”? I rate it a 2. Specifying the topic would help, e.g., “Free White Paper shows how to cut training costs up to 90% with e-learning.”

Rate your Big Promise headline in all four U’s on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = weak, 4 = strong). Then rewrite it so you can upgrade your rating on at least 2 and preferably 3 or 4 of the categories by at least 1. This simple exercise may increase readership and response rates substantially for very little effort.

10. *Content.* “Content” refers to the rest of the copy. How much copy should there be? What information should it present? At what level of technical detail and in what order? Should you give features, benefits, specifications, data, test results, testimonials — or all of them?

A key issue is the “information density” of the copy. For most software products, you can literally write a book about the product (proof of this is the thousands of computer books published each year). But in direct mail, you don’t have that space, so you have to be selective. If telling everything about the product would sell it, we’d simply mail prospects the book.

A useful exercise in planning the content and organization of your mailing is to divide a sheet of paper or Word file into two columns. Label the left “features” and write down your product’s features. In the left column, write down the corresponding benefit, and label this column “benefits.”

Now put the list of features and benefits in order of importance. The first feature/benefit should be the one that corresponds with the big promise. This becomes the lead of the package – the outer envelope teaser, letter headline, and letter lead.

The next three to six feature/benefit combinations are the most important after the big promise, and are highlighted in the sales letter. They may also be amplified upon in the brochure.

The rest of the features/benefits are secondary and can be covered in the brochure. A table works well for features and benefits. Specifications can be put in a separate box or sidebar.

A useful rule of thumb when determining content and information density is to include only what it takes to get the prospect to take the next step in the buying process. If it’s to go to a URL and download a free demo, that probably requires a lot less information than getting the prospect to order a \$299 PC application sight unseen.

## Section 2

### Stalking the Perfect High-Tech Sales Brochure

Years ago, when I was the advertising manager of a technology company, we lost a \$300,000 sale because we didn't have a brochure on a new product we were introducing to the market. "Sorry," the customer wrote in his rejection letter, "but we have a corporate policy that forbids us to issue a purchase order without a product brochure or spec sheet on file with our purchasing department."

That lost sale taught me the importance of sales brochures. And the lesson was confirmed by a Thomas Publishing Co. Study which found that 90 percent of business buyers insist on reviewing a piece of printed product literature before they make a buying decision.

"Not everyone has a budget for advertising," observes ad executive Jane Maas, author of *Better Brochures, Catalogues and Mailing Pieces*, "but almost every business produces some type of promotional material, whether it is one simple flier or many elaborate booklets." In high-tech marketing, where the buyers are often sophisticated and the products complex, brochures are especially important as a means of differentiating your product and educating your audience.

But, as one marketing consultant observes, "High-tech product brochures are like snowflakes: thousands of them are produced each year with no two alike." Some of these brochures work – and even more don't. To find out what determines whether product literature falls in the "Success" or "Failure" category, I interviewed managers at high-tech firms and the agencies that produce their literature.

The experts disagree more than they agree, but several general principles surface. Chief among them is that high-tech brochures need to contain more

information about the product, not less. Yet everyone we spoke with said the brochures should be written by professional copywriters who understand the importance of stressing product benefits, and not by engineers – despite the difficulties of educating ad people about technical subjects.

### **TELL, DON'T JUST SELL**

To Terry C. Smith, communications manager at Westinghouse Defense and Electronic Systems Center in Baltimore, MD, content – or the lack of it – is what separates a winner from a loser among sales brochures aimed at the high-tech market. “The biggest single thing that improved our brochures was making sure they had enough content, so the reader would go away thinking he learned something,” says Smith, whose department is responsible for producing sales brochures to promote the various electronic defense systems marketed by Westinghouse. “At one time, our brochures were glossy, pretty things without much meat. But now, when a prospect finishes reading one of our brochures, he feels his time has been well spent.”

Smith draws an analogy to automobile sales literature. “Take a look at a Saab brochure,” he says. “The Saab brochure has 60 pages or so, with maybe 30 cutaways giving detailed technical information. A Chevrolet brochure, on the other hand, has less information, and the photos show mostly exterior shots – “glamour” shots. We feel a technical brochure should be more like the Saab brochure. Instead of trying to sell with a shallow presentation, a good brochure should inform and educate the reader.”

According to Smith, who has produced more than 500 pieces of sales literature in a career spanning over three decades, a brochure describing a technical product should tell the reader what the product is, what it does, and how

it works. He teaches his staff writers to describe technical products on three levels: functions, features and benefits.

“A function is what something does,” Smith explains. “A feature is the technical ‘gee-whiz’ that allows the equipment to perform a specific function. And a benefit tells what the payoff is in terms of time and money saved or improved performance.”

In Smith’s mind, the brochure writer – not the technician – is ultimately responsible for the accuracy of content. “I tell writers that if you pick something up from another source, use it in your brochure and find out later that it’s incorrect or outdated, *you* are responsible for the error,” he says. “The minute you use a drawing or specification, it becomes yours. The brochure-writer should become knowledgeable enough about his subject to suspect something is wrong, or at least know when to check with an expert.”

Although Smith advocates a heavy technical content, he concedes that many people won’t read long copy. The solution, he says, is to use visuals to communicate information and concepts.

“The average reader spends more time looking at pictures and captions than at text, so use a lot of visuals, and write informative captions,” he advises. “However, the full text must also be there to tell the complete story for readers who want the detail.”

Smith and his department strive for new ways to use visuals. In one sales brochure for the F-16 fighter aircraft’s radar system, an artist proposed a block diagram to describe the system. One of Smith’s writers improved on this by using photos of the actual components instead of blocks with labels.

What types of visuals are appropriate for a high-tech brochure? “Of course, show your product,” Smith says. “But if your product is part of a larger system, show the system too. The system – not the component – is what turns the

customer on. In our F-16 radar brochure, we show the entire aircraft, not just our radar.”

The bottom line, according to Smith, is that technical customers need to be educated about the products they buy, and they look favorably upon manufacturers who provide this information. Smith says the professional technical communicator should be constantly thinking of creative ways to use information as a marketing tool.

“One of the most popular promotions we ever did, a weapons chronology wall chart, was originally published as a diagram buried in an obscure technical report,” Smith recalls. “All we did was recognize it as valuable information a prospect might enjoy having, then dress it up, produce it, and make it available to our customers. Not a day goes by when we don’t get at least one request for our wall chart. It’s a good example of sales literature that works.”

### **GET ORGANIZED**

Like Terry Smith, Dick Hill agrees that brochures need to be informative. But the secret of success, says Hill, is knowing how to organize key sales points in a logical sequence and clearly communicate them to key prospects.

He should know. As vice president of technology for Alexander Marketing Services, a Grand Rapids, MI-based business-to-business advertising agency, Hill has created brochures for such clients as Irwin International, a manufacturer of Winchester disk drives; Knowledgeware, a software firm, and Dow Chemical.

“One of my pet peeves is the practice of starting a brochure with a company’s history or philosophy,” he says. “Buyers are looking for products that fit their applications and needs. Their interest in the company itself varies with the situation, but is nearly always secondary.”

Ideally, a brochure should be organized like a good sales pitch, Hill says.

“Follow the approach a good salesman would use,” he says. “First qualify the prospect, then get him interested, then go through the features and benefits, then give details about selections and models. Try to learn the logical sequence the buyer goes through in making a decision. Then follow that sequence in organizing your sales brochure.”

Unlike engineering reports, which are often written as one continuous stream of thought, brochures should be organized according to pages or two-page spreads, Hill says. He recommends that each major topic should be given its own page or spread.

Engineers and other technical readers respond favorably to this type of approach. Says Hill: “Technical readers are logical people, and they like their information presented in a clear, logical format.”

The first step, he says, is to help the reader determine whether reading the brochure is worth his time. “Up front, you have to convey key benefits or where the product fits into the reader’s application,” he explains. “People won’t read through the whole brochure to find out whether they’re interested.”

One favorite Hill technique is to segment sales brochures, creating separate pieces of literature for each market or application, and identifying that market or application right on the cover. He also advocates adding some helpful technical tips or other service information to sales brochures, to turn them into “semi-reference” pieces that people will read and save.

One problem with technical brochures is the varying backgrounds of the readers. Some readers need greater education and will read your brochure from cover to cover. Others may be more knowledgeable, or lack the time to wade



through a lot of copy. Hill says the ideal sales brochure is one that accommodates both types of readers.

His recommendation: Use clear, informative subheads on each page. “The subheads should be written and arranged in such a way that the casual reader skimming the heads and subheads will get the gist of your story,” he says.

“Copy then becomes supporting evidence for readers who want more depth or detail.” If he thinks a few readers may need basic background information on a subject, he will include short “backgrounder” articles in sidebars sprinkled throughout the brochure.

Although Hill has a technical background, he has very definite prejudices against company engineers writing their own sales literature.

“Many companies rely on their own engineering staff to write about their products, and only involve an outside agency to “dress up” their literature,” he says. “I think this is a mistake. While the company’s engineers certainly understand the products, they don’t know how to write. They don’t understand the buying process, and they are addicted to long sentences and jargon that hurt readability. High-tech companies should use an ad agency staffed by people with technical backgrounds.”

What about the complaint that non-technical people over-simplify when writing about technical products? Says Hill: “As long as the information is there, you have an obligation to make it as clear as possible.”

### **THE RESPONSE IS ALL**

Unlike many ad managers we interview, New York City-based marketing consultant and seminar leader Chip Chapin couldn’t care less whether others consider his brochures beautiful.

“All I care about,” Chapin says, “is whether people respond to it.”

A former national director of Evelyn Wood Reading Dynamics, Chapin’s approach is to turn every sales brochure into a direct marketing tool – something that produces a concrete, measurable response.

“The purpose of a sales brochure is not just to disseminate information,” he says. “You’d go broke handing out that type of brochure. And brochures should not be primarily for building image, either. Magazine ads can do that. I believe the purpose of a brochure is to generate a response on the part of the reader – to get him to take the next step in the buying process.”

In contrast to those who speak of the need for painstaking attention to graphic design, Chapin believes such details are relatively unimportant.

“A lot of companies get their ego involved in brochures,” he says. “The result is brochures that get prettier and prettier. Marketing people tend to fall in love with ‘pretty.’ Companies are so involved with their product that they become more concerned with image than with what their customers want.”

“What really matters is marketing strategy, not whether you use blue or red, or which photo you select. These are only tactics. Gorgeousness is immaterial. All the tactics in the world may get you only 10 percent more response. But a change in strategy can increase response 50 to 100 percent or more.”

Chapin distinguishes between four basic types of high-tech brochures: the presentation piece (used by salespeople as a visual aid), the leave-behind, the rack piece and brochures used in direct mail.

“The presentation aid only needs an outline of the product features, since the salesperson can elaborate on the benefits in person,” Chapin explains. “But, since the other types of brochures are read by the prospect without the presence of

a live salesperson, they must be 'salespeople in print,' presenting all the benefits and telling the full story."

Chapin criticizes spec sheets and rack brochures that merely list technical features and product descriptions. "Your customers don't buy products," he warns. "They buy benefits – what the product *does* – not what it is."

And Chapin believes copy, not design, should be the dominant element in any product brochure. He feels the writer, not the artist, should call the creative shots. "The writer should do a rough sketch showing where the elements go, then hand it over to an artist for tighter execution," he says.

Chapin scoffs at the notion that people won't read long copy. "It's the non-prospects that hate long copy," he explains. "Prospects are the ones who want the information and always say 'Give me more.' You need enough copy so the well-qualified prospect will do what you want him to do."

He says prospects will read brochures as long as the brochures are relevant to their interests. "People talk about a glut of advertising messages," he says, "but the only glut is caused by irrelevance. Take the guy who is into backpacking. If he gets a catalog from Eddie Bauer and another from L.L. Bean, he'll read both, because he's interested. The way to break through the clutter is by being relevant to the customer's needs."

## **THE VIDEO SOLUTION**

If Craig R. Evans has his way, we'll all be watching brochures on our VCRs – not reading them.

Evans is director of marketing for Minneapolis-based Computer Video Productions, an 8-year-old firm specializing in video brochures – sales brochures produced on videotape rather than printed form.

Evans is quick to point out that the video brochure is as different from the old-fashioned industrial film as day is from night.

"The conventional 'industrial' is 20 minutes of pretty pictures that tell a nice story, with music in the background – an ill-defined program that is generally manufacturer-oriented," he explains. "The video brochure runs approximately 9 minutes in length and is based on a marketing perspective, just as a regular sales brochure is."

At Computer Video Productions, an in-depth analysis of the client's marketing objectives is conducted before the first word of the script is put on paper. The results, says Evans, is a powerful marketing tool with several inherent advantages over ordinary print brochures.

"Video is a very intimate medium," he explains. "It appeals to both the audio and the visual sense. A paper brochure just sits there. With video you can see the product and also hear it. And you have a captive audience. People tend to watch your video brochure from start to finish, in the order you want the information presented."

Compatible VCRs capable of playing the advertiser's videotape are becoming less of an obstacle. "Consumer studies show that 38 percent of consumers now have VHS machines, with 50 percent of homes expected to have them by the end of 1987," Evans says. "In business we don't have such precise statistics, but our experience shows that at companies with more than 50 employees, the recipient of your video brochure is likely to have access to a VCR either at work or at home."

Computer Video Productions' own mailing of their self-promotional video brochure offers a good example of the effectiveness of the new video medium. The company's first video mailing went to 70 prospects. "Only one was thrown away, and that was by accident," Evans says.

Eventually, Computer Video Productions mailed 300 video brochures to potential clients – with impressive results. Ninety-five percent of the recipients watched the tape – half on the day they received it. The response rate was 30 percent. “We learned that the corporate manager does not throw away a tape when he receives it,” Evans says. “Rather, he will search out a machine to watch it, or go to extra pains to pass it along to the right person. One of our videos got passed along 16 times before ending up in the right prospect’s VCR.”

In addition to being sent cold as a mailing piece, a video brochure can be used as a presentation aid or a leave-behind by a direct sales force or manufacturer’s representative. Video brochures are an ideal medium for many high-tech products, which are either too big to be carried for an on-site demonstration, or too complex to explain in print.

“Video brochures are a primary marketing tool, not an ancillary tool,” Evans says. “We use print to support video – not the other way around.” Because high-tech products evolve so rapidly, the average shelf-life of the video brochures Evans produces for technology clients is approximately 12 to 18 months. Prices for a finished video brochure range from \$800 to \$2,500 a minute. Extensive on-location shoots, combined with “Star Wars”-type special effects, can bump the price tag up to \$3,000 or even \$4,000 per minute.

But, says Evans, producing a video brochure and mailing it to key prospects is cost-competitive when compared with the salary of a full-time salesperson. “And,” he adds, “unlike the salesman, your video never has a bad day.”

Evans views video as a window of opportunity for high-tech marketers. “Right now, video is a totally under-utilized medium for marketing products,” he

says. "Possibly, there may be a glut of video brochures in 5 to 10 years. But today it's still a novelty."

### **GOING DESKTOP**

One problem shared by high-tech marketing managers is the need to keep brochures accurate and up-to-date. Products and technologies change so fast that brochure copy approved today may be dated by the time the brochure rolls off the presses three months from now.

According to Edward Marson, president of the New York City-based firm Desktop Design Resources, desktop publishing can help high-tech marketers produce a steady stream of timely promotional materials – faster and at far less cost than traditional methods.

"Desktop publishing allows the client to take control of his information," says Marson, whose involvement in the field includes training, consulting, and graphic design using desktop publishing systems. "For example, a salesman can use a Macintosh to put together his own sales presentation, without help from the art department. Desktop publishing lets you publish your ideas as quickly as you think of them."

Desktop publishing won't make the graphic designer obsolete, Marson adds. Rather, the designer becomes a consultant to corporate people producing their own bulletins, brochures, newsletters, booklets and reports on in-house desktop systems.

The specific advantages of a desktop system are many, Marson says. "Hard copy is eliminated," he says. "There's no retyping, no proofing of galleys, because all the typesetter does is output a file from your diskette or modem transmission."

The savings for corrections are especially pronounced, he adds. "It used to be, when you were two to five weeks away from production, changes cost a lot of

money. Now, with desktop publishing, you can make last-minute changes and corrections easily and at very little expense."

The result, Marson says, is dramatic reduction in typesetting costs. To produce a page of type from a diskette submitted by a desktop publisher, a typesetter will charge \$12 to \$25, compared with \$65 to \$75 a page to set hard copy into type.

And if the desktop publisher is equipped with a laser printer, he can produce a review copy of a document that is virtually identical in appearance to what the finished piece will look like. "If you had an ad agency design the piece, you'd review a typewritten manuscript with a dummy layout attached," Marson explains. "With desktop publishing, reviewers can look at something that is essentially the finished piece. This makes it easier to visualize and speeds the approval process."

So far, corporate desktop publishers have been using their desktop systems mostly for low-end, intercompany communications, such as reports, bulletins and departmental newsletters. But Marson has bigger plans: "Many people say the technology can't do sophisticated projects," he says. "I don't agree. Right now I can use the Macintosh for anything from a memo to a full-blown annual report."

Marson's firm recently created a new sales brochure for a mainframe software vendor – entirely on the Macintosh. And he's using his Mac to create a "full blown comp" for an upcoming annual report.

Some critics of desktop publishing say the graphics produced by these systems have a certain sameness, an almost "digital" quality. Marson counters that many high-tech companies like the style of "3D" art they can create on the Mac.

What's more, new low-cost scanners allow desktop publishing users to incorporate photographs and other half-tone artwork into their layouts.

Resolution is 300 bits per inch – fine enough for reproduction on a printing press. And Marson is planning to start an electronic bulletin board where desktop users can leave their files for refinement by Marson's trained staff of desktop publishing consultants.

Ironically, communications people – not techies – will be the moving force in the desktop publishing revolution.

"Curiosity is great; movement slow," says Marson. "MIS people are most reluctant to embrace the Macintosh, because they are committed to IBM technology. The impetus to implement these new desktop publishing technologies will have to come from the marketing and communications end of the corporation."

### **Section 3**

#### **Selling Technology to Senior Management, End Users, and Other Nontechies**

When selling software to businesses, you often have to appeal to three different buying influences within each company:

1. Senior management – CEOs, CFOs, COOs, vice presidents.
2. End users – often middle managers or administrative staff.
3. IS – Information Systems professionals ranging from programmers to systems analysts.

The first two audiences consist primarily of people who are not techies. And these non-techies care about different things, and respond differently, than the traditional IS technology buyer.

Nontechies are results-oriented, interested in the ends rather than the means, the bottom line rather than the process. They lack interest in the details, preferring



to focus on the “big picture.” Most nontechnies simply want to resolve problems; engineers, scientists, and programmers enjoy actually working on problems.

The result is that nontechnies are more interested in benefits, business results, and the reputation and credibility of the vendor. IS, by comparison, tends to focus on technical issues including platforms, scalability, interoperability with existing systems, reliability, specifications, limitations, and ease of implementation, operation, and maintenance.

### **Price and value**

When generating leads for expensive enterprise software, quote the price in the terms that seem most palatable – for instance, per user or per site license. Demonstrate, if it exists, the rapid return on investment.

For instance, a mailing for SurfControl, an application that monitors and controls employee Internet usage in organizations, informs the recipient that surfing the Internet for personal rather than business reasons costs \$300 per employee per week. (Copy claims that 4 out of 5 hits to the Playboy Web site are from Fortune 500 companies!) The letter then positions the license fee of a few dollars per user as a drop in the bucket compared to the savings SurfControl can generate.

### **Offers**

For high-end software representing a major corporate investment, the goal is often to get an appointment with the decision-maker. The offer then becomes, in essence, not the software, but rather the initial meeting – which is frequently positioned as a needs analysis or assessment, to be followed by recommendations. Of course, the seller’s goal is to gain the information needed to provide a quote or proposal the buyer will accept.

For both lead generation and mail order, premiums are proven response-boosters. Premiums that have worked well for technology marketers include white papers, computer books, audio and video cassettes, free software, free support, free training, seminars, and electronic conferences that the user accesses via telephone (for voice) and, optionally, the Web (for visuals).

Another popular premium is to offer a simple calculator that demonstrates the potential return on investment to the prospect if they purchase your product. This is typically an Excel application on a disk. The prospect inputs his business scenario and instantly discovers whether your product will pay off for him.

Select a premium that is highly desirable and ties in with your product or service. A Web design firm, for instance, offered “four free digital photos of your key staff, postable on your Web site.” When the rep visited the prospect, she carried a digital camera, took the photos, and immediately gave the disk to the prospect. Of course, the prospect wanted the photos posted on their Web site, something which could be done as part of the “Web site makeover” service the Web consulting firm offered for a fee.

### **Response mechanisms**

There are four basic response mechanisms: paper reply forms (fax-backs, reply cards, and reply envelopes), online (e-mail or logging on to a Web site), phone, and fax.

Since you never know which reply method a particular prospect prefers, why not offer them all? At a recent marketing conference, one software executive said, “Every software prospect is on the Internet today. It’s a waste of time to offer any other response mechanism.” A colleague from his company disagreed. “I don’t want to log onto the Internet if I’m not already online just to respond to an ad or mailing,” he said, insisting that for him, a toll-free number or reply card is more convenient.

While it's generally safe to assume IS professionals are comfortable responding by going to your Web site, don't make that assumption with nontechies. Some can access the Web but are not comfortable with it and prefer not to. Others, amazingly, don't even know how to get onto your site!

One tip: *Always* offer the Web as a response option when mailing to IS professionals – especially those involved with the Internet. Also, if you sell software, such as the latest antivirus or Y2K program, that prospects may want to try immediately, make it available for downloading from your Web site. You can let prospects download a demo version for free or the full program if they supply credit card information.

The key to success? Talk to businesspeople in their language, not yours. Show that if they give you a dollar, they'll get back two dollars. And test – sales appeals, offers, pricing, response mechanisms, copy, graphics, formats, and premiums. Don't assume you know which will work best. Instead, let your prospects tell you. Makes sense, doesn't it?

## Section 4

### Promote the Heck Out of High-Tech Products

**1. Make it clear, not too technical.** To stand out from the pack of competitive products, your headline should telegraph what your product does. For example, "Link 8 PCS to your Mainframe – only \$2,395" instantly says all the reader wants to know.

**2. Put the main benefit in the headline or subhead,** especially in high-tech writing. Although technical buyers shop for technical benefits, management types want to see a major benefit of efficiency, productivity, money – or time – savings.

“Develop dBASE Applications Up To Four Times Faster” began a tremendously successful DM campaign for a software product. The head not only identifies the function (“Develop dBASE Applications”) but also spells out the benefit (“Up To Four Times Faster”).

**3. Make the lead paragraphs identify the reader’s problem and present your product as the solution.** Try the two-part approach. The first sentence of paragraph dramatizes the problem; the second offers the product as the solution. For example, check out the opening of a lead-generating sales letter that pulled an 11% response.

“Do you have a potable water supply or waste stream that contains organic contaminants? And have you considered activated carbon as the ideal treatment, only to ultimately *reject* deep-bed carbon installations because of the cost? Envira-Plus Filter Precoats may be the answer for you...”

Restating the problem helps you set the stage for your sales pitch, and says you understand the reader’s needs, concerns and fears.

**4. Stress functions, not just benefits.** Tech buyers look for products to solve specific tasks. They already know the benefits. So the best high-tech copy tells – and shows – exactly what your product can do for them. You don’t have to reduce every paragraph to “saves money” or “saves time.”

**5. Use a feature/function table.** A box, table or sidebar shows all the product’s features and capabilities at a glance. List features in the left-hand column; their corresponding function in the right.

For example, in a spec sheet for a software design tool, a feature is “Automated Balancing.” The function performed reads: “Provides automatic proofreading of a project by pointing out errors between diagram levels, dictionary and text specs.”

In a typical brochure, the feature/function table might contain 15 to 20 items. Highlight the five or six hottest features in the main text, with hard-sell copy. All the prospect wants to know about the other features is the functions they perform.

**6. Use a tech specs box.** Put specifications – hardware, power and temperature needs, software compatibility, operating system – in a separate box or table, typically on the last page. Make specs easy to find. They may not get people excited about products, but prospects want them before they place an order.

**7. Use subheads and short copy blocks.** Don't try to force tech and business buyers to wade through long, argument-packed copy to get what they need to know. Each subhead should communicate so well, the reader could get the message just by reading subheads. With each new idea, concept or feature, start a new section. Organize copy so the readers can find what's relevant to them and skip what isn't.

## Section 5

### Taking the Mystery Out of High-Tech Direct Mail

Direct mail is booming among high-tech marketers:

- Marketing Logistics, a research firm that monitors the direct marketing industry, reports that mail-order sales of personal computers, consumer electronics and related products reached \$1.5 billion in 1985. Business-to-business mail-order sales for computer software and data-processing supplies for the same year were \$1.7 billion.

- According to a survey in the July 1986 issue of Family Computing, 72 percent of personal computer owners said they have purchased computer equipment or software by mail. Half of these buyers cite lower prices as the most important reason they buy through the mail.
- The Direct Marketing Association, a trade group, reports that revenue from direct marketing for all product categories, now around \$44 billion, is growing 10 percent a year – about twice as fast as retail.

But despite direct mail's appeal to the high-tech industry – it allows marketers to target their select audiences without spending big advertising dollars, and is a natural for products that face stiff competition for dealer attention – direct mail remains a mystery to many high-tech marketers. They view it as an advertising medium filled with more unknowns than knowns, and are reluctant to commit to large-scale programs.

What works, they ask, in high-tech direct mail? What doesn't? Is high-tech fundamentally different from regular direct mail? Or do the basics of good direct mail apply equally to all product categories? Can sophisticated products and systems be sold directly through the mail? Or is direct mail appropriate for lead-generating only?

I bounced these and other questions off nearly a dozen high-tech marketers experienced in direct mail. Although their answers were as varied as their products, they did provide some general guiding principles. Boiled down, their advice was simple: Never underestimate the importance of testing and tracking, of stressing benefits and offering guarantees, and of sticking to your "best-shot" mailing lists.

A sampling of the formulas these direct marketers use follows:

**The Price is right.** According to Ken Sullivan, marketing manager of SoftLogic Solutions, Inc. Of Manchester, NH, *price* is a key element in selling

software through the mail. For the past two years, Sullivan's company has used direct mail to sell microcomputer software packages priced at approximately \$50 per program.

"In microcomputer software, any product priced at \$100 or under is basically an impulse buy," explains Sullivan. "Over \$100, it becomes a major decision that the customer has to think about. At \$50 to \$100, it's less of a decision."

Sullivan's basic message: Get the reader to respond today. The longer he takes to think it over, the less likely he is to respond at all. SoftLogic mails 250,000 to 300,000 pieces a month, and Sullivan considers each mailing a "test." That is, he expects to gain specific knowledge that will help him improve his response rate every time he mails a new package.

SoftLogic has tested many variations and offers, including mailings that offer one, two, three and four products. Sullivan says that mailings offering two related products, with a discount on the second product if a customer buys the first, seems to work best for him. He considers a mailing successful if it pulls 1.2 to 1.3 percent response.

SoftLogic uses a "standard" direct-mail package consisting of a sales letter, brochure and reply card. Sullivan is very particular about the way his mailings are written and designed.

"To begin with, don't use a teaser on the outer envelope," he says. "This makes it look like junk mail. People will throw it away."

"Use a short letter, with short paragraphs. The longer the letter, the less appeal. People don't want to read. They will breeze through your package very quickly."

“On the front of the brochure, put a simple explanation of what the product does. Put a lot of information on the back page, including technical specifications and features.”

Repetition is as important in direct mail as it is in space advertising, Sullivan says. SoftLogic mails repeatedly to the same list of software buyers, continually testing new letters and new offers.

Direct mail has been so successful for SoftLogic that every promotion the firm does is designed to generate a direct sale by mail. Even ads, once used to build image, now carry a toll-free number and copy that asks for the order up front. “For a \$50 to \$100 software package, it’s better to get mail orders than leads,” Sullivan says. “For us, mail order is very profitable, while leads are a waste of time.”

**Testing, testing.** Eugene M. Schwartz, president of Bi-Intelligence, Inc. of New York, has also had great success selling inexpensive microcomputer software directly through the mail. But unlike Sullivan, who has strong notions about how to structure a mailing, Schwartz says there are no sure things in direct mail. The only way to learn what will work for your product, your offer and your market, Schwartz says, is to test many different approaches.

“You have to test everything – price, offer, headline, copy, format, theme,” he says. “There are no answers in direct mail except test answers. You don’t know whether something will work until you test it. And you cannot predict test results based on past experience.”

Schwartz is something of a mail-order maven. In addition to running Bi-Intelligence and Instant Improvement, Inc., a company that sells health books by mail, Schwartz serves as a freelance consultant to Rodale Press, Boardroom Reports and other direct marketing clients. He has 35 years’ experience in mail order and is the author of a book on the subject.



Schwartz's latest effort is a package selling an \$89.50 product called Easyfier, which enhances the performance of several software applications. The mailing consists of a #10 envelope with lengthy tester copy on both sides, an eight page sales letter, an order form and a reply envelope. The headline on the envelope teaser reads: "FOR \$89.50 YOU CAN MAKE YOUR IBM AS EASY TO USE AS A MACINTOSH."

"The essential rules of direct mail are the same no matter what you are selling – including high-tech," Schwartz says. "A product is just a bundle of benefits; your direct-mail copy lets the consumer 'sample' the product's benefits before he buys it."

"Most marketers are very much in love with their product – and they shouldn't be. The customers don't care about you and your product. All they care about is what the product can do for *them*."

Although Schwartz is known in the industry for his long-copy ads and letters, he says that content, not length for length's sake, is what makes for successful direct mail. "If a person wants to know what you're saying, he'll read a 20 page letter, blurred, in 2-point type," he says, half joking. "Copy should be as long as is needed to make it complete and interesting."

An important feature of a successful direct mail package, says Schwartz, is that it allows the customer to try the product without risk. He explains: "Always give a money-back guarantee. Without it, most people won't pay any attention to you. If they haven't heard of your company, why should they trust you?"

Schwartz also contends that percentage of response – the yardstick by which most companies measure direct mail results – is a meaningless statistic. He says the real test of whether a mailing works is the profit it makes. Schwartz considers a mailing successful if it generates revenue 150 percent above "break

even” – the point where the income from sales equals the cost of doing the mailing.

**The technical target.** Vivian Sudhalter, director of marketing for Macmillan Software Company of New York, faces a slightly different challenge than Sullivan and Schwartz: selling expensive (\$495 to \$2,000 per product) scientific software to scientists, engineers, and researchers. According to Sudhalter, the two markets – technical vs. consumer – are quite different.

“Despite what tradition tells you, the engineering and scientific market does *not* respond to promise or benefit-oriented copy,” says Sudhalter. “They respond to features. Your copy must tell them exactly what they are getting and what your product can do. Scientists and engineers are put off by copy that sounds like advertising jargon.”

Sudhalter’s lead-generating self-mailer for Macmillan’s Asyst and Asystant software follows this model. The copy has a scientist-to-scientist tone and talks about such arcane matters as Hermitian matrices, spectral slicing and QR factorization. Yet it is successful, having generated a 4 percent response with Macmillan’s in-house prospect list.

Sudhalter’s technical audience seems to respond well to visual treatments of complex concepts. “Scientists are excited when you show them something rather than tell them,” she says.

What types of visuals are used to illustrate a mailing piece promoting software? “Show screens of your program if they are unusual or interesting,” Sudhalter advises. “A diagram with call-outs is much more effective than volumes of prose. Scientists like tables and graphs. They will ignore copy but pore over a table of specifications and features. And they resent it if you talk down to them. When writing copy, don’t try to be clever; just give information about the product.”

Sudhalter says that finding good lists is a problem when using direct mail to sell high-tech. Because of poor results with outside lists, she mails primarily to Macmillan's in-house list – people who have previously inquired about Macmillan software through advertising or publicity. But she will use outside lists to announce a new product or product enhancement.

Sudhalter has experimented with a variety of formats in her career, but chose a self-mailer for the Asyst package because self-mailers are less costly than the standard direct-mail package (consisting of outer envelope, letter, brochure and reply form). She says that skyrocketing paper prices and production expenses have made it increasingly difficult to do cost-effective mailings.

"Today I find that there are two kinds of direct mail that work," she says. "For a cold mailing, you've got to go for glitz. You can't send out a two-color mailing and expect to generate much excitement. You need four-color, slick design, high-quality paper, slick copy and a larger typeface than the old-fashioned tiny type used in traditional direct mail packages."

"However," Sudhalter says, "a cheapo mailing can work well with your in-house customer and prospect list." To prove the point, she recently mailed a one-page form letter to prospects who had telephoned in responses to ads and PR (no bingo-card inquiries were on the list). The response rate was more than 12 percent. Why so successful with such a simple package? "People who are already interested in your product just want the facts," she says.

**High impact.** Rochester, NY-based Xerox also is following Sudhalter's "go-for-the-glitz" formula. The company is investing heavily in "high impact" direct mail – expensive three-dimensional pieces designed to stand out among the clutter of direct marketing that deluges today's professional.

To launch its new Conference Copier – an electronic "blackboard" with a copier attachment that can make reproductions of anything written or drawn on

the board – Xerox targeted several major business centers, starting with San Francisco.

In each city, Xerox compiled a list of approximately 500 key corporate decision-makers. The company sent each prospect on the list a series of four high-impact, three-dimensional mailers based on a theme showing how the communications process for meetings has evolved. The first mailing contained a miniature Rosetta stone; the second, a quill pen and parchment; the third, a slate and chalk. The fourth mailing introduced the new Conference Copier, which sells for \$3,295.

Although Xerox would not release response figures, test results are “encouraging,” according to Dick Martin, manager of Advertising and Sales Promotion for Direct Marketing.

The high-impact mailing was just part of the Conference Copier direct-mail campaign. Another mailing, an invitation to a product demonstration, was sent to 15,000 prospects in each target city. In San Francisco, approximately 150 of the people invited actually attended the demonstration.

Kam Shenai, product manager for the Conference Copier, points out that for mailings inviting people to a public seminar or demonstration, the mailing list must be carefully segmented by zip code. The reason: The farther the prospect’s office from the hotel where the demo is being held, the less likely he or she is to attend.

A third mailing piece in the program was a self-mailer sent bulk rate to approximately 200,000 prospects in each target city.

“The self-mailer is the most economical format,” Martin says. “We tested the self-mailer vs. a standard package, and the self-mailer generated a better response.”

In an unusual offer for a product as costly as the Conference Copier, the self-mailer asks for the order directly. By giving a credit card number or sending a check for 10 percent of the purchase price, prospects can try the copier free for 15 days.

So far, the self-mailer has generated many sales. Says Martin: "We have learned that it is possible to sell high-priced equipment directly by mail and phone. And we do."

**The critical list.** "Regardless of whether you're about to do your first mailing or your one thousandth, no factor is more critical to your success than choosing the right mailing list," says Steve Roberts, a senior account supervisor with Edith Roman Associates, a firm that specializes in high-tech mailing lists. "The best list can pull 10 times the response of the worst list for the identical mailing piece."

Roberts explains how his clients use both response and compiled lists.

"Response lists are generally better," says Roberts. "People who have previously responded to direct mail are twice as likely to respond to your offer as people who aren't proven direct mail buyers. With compiled lists, you risk mailing to the one-third of Americans who don't read direct mail."

But Roberts does recommend compiled lists for total penetration of a particular market. "Let's say you want to reach every manufacturer in Kalamazoo, MI," he says. "Only a compiled list can do that. A response list won't have all the names, because not every manufacturer in Kalamazoo has responded to direct mail."

The best high-tech lists around, says Roberts, are publishers' subscription lists for controlled-circulation publications. "You have a greater degree of selectivity with a controlled vs. paid circulation list, because people must give a lot of information about themselves to qualify for the free subscription," he says.

An example of a “hot” high-tech mailing list, says Roberts, is the subscription lists to *NASA Tech Briefs*, an official publication of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. This list allows direct marketers to target recipients by job function, type of industry, number of engineers at the location and – importantly – type of products and components purchased.

“With *NASA Tech Briefs*, you can mail to engineers who buy test equipment, or purchasing agents who authorize the purchase of electronic components,” Roberts says. “You can’t get that level of selectability with a paid-circulation subscription list.” He advises list users to make sure that the controlled-circulation lists they rent are from a BPA-audited publication.

Roberts acknowledges that there is a great deal of duplication among many of the subscription lists, but he notes that larger companies in the list business have sophisticated “merge/purge” computer systems that eliminate duplication. For this reason, he urges high-tech marketers to rent all their lists from a single broker, compiler or list management firm, rather than go to the publications directly.

“There is no extra cost in going through a broker, since the broker gets his commission from the list owner,” Roberts points out. “Also, the broker gets to know your products and can use his expertise to recommend the best lists for your offer.”

**Opting to co-op.** Because of rising direct-mail costs, more high-tech marketers are opting to co-op with their dealers. Says Mark Toner, who runs the direct mail program for Amano, a manufacturer of computerized time recorder and data collection equipment: “If a dealer wants to do a mailing, we split the cost. Then we let them decide whether they want to use our mailer or do their own. The manufacturer should be happy to let dealers do whatever they want.”

Amano also does its own mailings, independent of dealers. A good response for a lead-generating self-mailer, says Toner, is 2-3 percent.

Toner believes that unlike consumer marketing, where a host of look-alike products may compete for the same customers, half the battle in high-tech is simply reaching the right prospects to tell them about your product. "You have to educate the market," he says. "With an unusual product like ours, most people don't even know of its existence."

Segmenting mailing lists provides the key to a good response, Toner says. "Using SIC codes, we select only those portions of the list that reach our best prospects. For example, our best markets are hotels and restaurants. We also segment geographically."

Toner says that his response from outside mailing lists ranges from less than 1 percent to 3 percent. When mailing the same piece to his in-house list, he can get as much as 5 percent.

Finally, Toner has discovered that his fellow direct marketers are rather open about discussing their successes and failures. "Ask your competitors and associates about which lists have worked best for them," he advises. "In most cases, they'll tell you."

## **Section 6**

### **How to Sell Software by Mail**

In March, I wrote a column on how to sell software by mail. Since then, I've produced dozens of ads, direct mail packages, and brochures for software clients and in doing so have formulated a few more guidelines on the subject:

### **1. Price is more important than you think.**

Pricing is not an afterthought but a key ingredient of the marketing mix. How much the software costs is terribly important to buyers – much more so than most marketers seem to believe.

When selling software through mail order, always give the prospect a discount price and identify it as such. Even sophisticated programmers and system analysts like to think they are getting a bargain.

### **2. One step or two?**

Aside from pricing, the most important decision you face is whether to use a one-step or two-step selling process. One-step is the classic mail order approach, in which the reader orders directly from the ad or mailing. In a two-step approach, the ad or mailer generates an inquiry, which is then converted to a sale whether by a live salesperson, telemarketing representative, or a fulfillment package.

Which should you use? For one-step mail order marketing, the lower the price, the better. PC packages such as add-ons, simple utilities, and programming tools in the \$59 to \$299 price range are good candidates for the one-step approach. In the \$399 to \$899 price range, you may want to test a one-step vs. two-step approach and see which works best.

Once you start to edge near \$1,000 and above, the two-step approach is usually best. Very few people will send payment for a \$1,999 software package without some extra convincing by a salesperson or demo diskette.

### **3. The free-trial approach.**

This is sort of a hybrid approach. Here's how it works:

You send the prospect a letter describing your package and offer to send a copy of the product for a free 30-day trial – no commitment or payment required. If the prospect responds, he gets the software. At the end of the trial, if he wants to



keep it, you send the bill, licensing agreement, contract, or whatever, and the customer pays for the product.

One of my clients uses this approach with great success, selling mainframe systems software in the \$8,000 to \$15,000 price range.

#### **4. To demo or not to demo?**

The question of whether to use a demo diskette in the marketing of a software product comes up all the time. I have a few suggestions:

- First, unless the demo is great, don't send it. Most demo diskettes are thinly disguised sales-presentations-on-disk and don't do justice to the actual product.
- The best demos are those that are identical to the actual product except they have a "locking code" that doesn't allow you to print or save to disk. The benefit: the customer can give the product a thorough test-drive but has not received anything of real value. Because of the high unit cost of these demos, many firms charge \$10 to \$50 for them; the payment is then credited toward the purchase price of the product when the customer places his order.
- Because of the high cost-per-thousand, companies rarely include software demo disks in cold mailings. Reason: Although it would be an effective selling tool, the question is whether the cost would be paid back in increased sales. The best use of single demo diskettes is to mail them with inquiry fulfillment packages sent only to qualified prospects. I would like to see a market research study done to determine what percentage of people who receive demo diskettes actually use them – and what percentage throw them away.

## 5. Visuals.

Although ad agencies are constantly pressured by their clients to come up with new and innovative visuals for illustrating software ads, no one has found a breakthrough yet. The old standards – photos of the product itself and of screens – still work best. Every screen should be accompanied by a factual caption that makes clear what is going on in the picture.

Most software buyers tend to be more screen-oriented than print-oriented, so showing pictures of print-outs usually doesn't work as well as putting the same information on a screen.

## 6. "Concept products" require a lot more selling effort.

A "concept product" is one that requires the user to buy into a conceptual way of doing things.

For example, to sell project management software, you first have to convince the prospect that the way your package manages projects is best, then you sell the software itself. Another good example is the mainframe computer security package sold by one of my clients. Before they can sell the software, they first must sell the need for extra security protection.

Concept products usually have a longer sales cycle and require a more intensive, step-by-step selling effort. They are almost never sold directly off an ad or mailer.

## Section 7

### 20 Secrets of Selling Software in Print

Whether you're writing an ad, brochure, or direct mail, selling software in print can be tricky. Here are 20 tips to help you tackle the job with success.

1. Stress the benefits of the software — what it will do for the buyer — rather than the technical features, specifications, or how it works.
2. Tell the buyer how he can use the software to do his job better. Give specific examples.
3. Early in the copy, say what type of software you are selling (word processing, spread sheet, graphics, etc.). People are usually in the market for a package to handle one of the known, identifiable, major application areas.
4. If you have a package that doesn't easily fall into a category, describe how it goes beyond conventional software. But do try to compare it with something the reader is familiar with. Do not be vague about its specific function and utility.
5. If your product has one key advantage over the competition, highlight it in your headline and copy. Bring in other facts to support this claim.
6. Avoid what former Ted Bates chairman Rosser Reeves called "vampire video" – irrelevant pictures that detract from the main message of your ad because they do not relate to the product or its benefits. The best visuals are those that dramatize the main benefit or advantage of the program.
7. If you illustrate your ad with photos of screens and printouts, be sure the text on the screen or report is meaningful to the reader. If the screens or reports look complex, they may actually serve to unsell your product.

8. Say how many people are using your product and are pleased with it. List some, if possible.

9. Include testimonials from satisfied users.

10. Try a hard sell approach instead of an image building approach. Go for the order or, at least, try to generate sales leads or to get people to visit the computer store.

11. Talk in terms that readers can understand and visualize. Instead of writing "28.8 Kbps baud rate, – say, Our SuperSpeedy modem transmits data at a rate of 28,800 bits per second – less then one second for a page of text."

12. Specifications should be scaled down to numbers the reader can relate to. "Stores a mailing list of 50,000 prospects" is better then "Stores 100 million characters," because people have an easier time grasping the smaller number.

13. Offer a demonstration via a demo diskette (for micro-computer software) or a live demonstration (for more costly mainframe or minisystems). Be sure the demonstration gives a good impression of the system and its capabilities.

14. Use excerpts from favorable third party reviews of your product. Also highlight benchmark test results that prove your product's superior performance.

15. The headline or teaser should select the right audience for the ad or mailer. For example, a good headline for an ad offering a C-compiler is, "Attention C Programmers!"

16. Always make it clear which machines and operating systems are compatible with your software. People want to know.

17. This information and other vital technical specs should be highlighted in a separate box or page. This makes them stand out from the rest of the ad or brochure copy.

18. Let the reader know about any special product support and service you offer, such as a toll free hot line or a network of service dealers. First time buyers are especially concerned with this.

19. Mention years in business, gross sales, company size, industry reputation, and any other facts that can help build your credibility. People want to buy from a company that will be around for the long haul.

20. Make it easy for the reader to respond to your promotions. Always include your address and phone number. Use coupons, reply cards, order forms, toll free numbers, fax numbers, E-mail addresses, and other devices that increase response.

## **Section 8**

### **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 10 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 out pulled 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 than 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 9**

### **10 Tips for Better User Manuals**

When installing the hottest new office workstation and software, the key to raising user productivity often is not the products themselves. Rather, it's the manuals that introduce the innocent to new technology.

Poorly written manuals have plagued computer users for decades — probably since the first electronic computer, Eniac, was switched on in 1946. A clear, easy-to-follow manual can increase productivity, save money, speed acceptance, and increase usage of a new software product or computer system. Here are 10 guidelines for your manual writers to live by. These tenets will ensure that your organization's manuals communicate the right message to users:

1. Organize logically. The best way to organize most computer manuals is by user tasks rather than by machine functions. The distinction makes a world of difference to users. They're much more concerned about how the product can help on their jobs than about how the system works.

For instance a word-processing manual organized by task might contain sections on "writing memos," "writing letters," "writing technical paper using footnotes," "writing in script format," "editing your work," and "producing customized direct-mail letters." Those headings are far more appealing and meaningful to users than section headings like "dot commands," "cursor movement," "block/marker identification," "file operations," "scroll text," and "toggles."

To ensure that manuals are sensibly organized, direct your writers to first make an outline. They can use the items in the outline as headings and subheadings in the final version. This procedure will help writers prepare manuals that reflect your organization's organizational scheme, and also will break the text into short, easy-to-read sections.

2. Use numbered step-by-step instructions. Clear instructions leave no room for doubt. Use the "active" narrative voice: Start sentences with imperatives and use direct statements. For example, the manual accompanying a database package guides the reader with instructions: Step 1. Type "UNISTOX" Step 2. Type the report numbers you have located in Source Digest or Data Reports.

When your writers start instructions with the imperative form of a verb, the reader instantly knows what to do. Imperatives cut unnecessary verbiage, too.

3. Minimize cross-references. The overuse of cross-references makes manuals hard to follow. Here's a real life example:

"In order for the FOCUS Report Writer (see Section 2.3.1) to read a TOTAL Database (see Database manual), the user or project designer must prepare a FOCUS Data Description (see Section 3.4.1.1 ) that is equivalent to the TOTAL Database structure (see Appendix C)."

Instead of learning the system, the user will spend most of his or her time frantically turning pages, switching from section to section for instructions or descriptions vital to understand what he or she is reading.

Cross-references are frustrating and confusing. Use only cross-references that are absolutely necessary for the user to understand the material.

Even better, provide all the information the user will need to understand a particular point in the section of the manual outlining that point in the section of

the manual outlining that point. If the material to be referenced is only a sentence or two long, you're better off repeating it wherever it's needed, rather than continually cross-referencing. If it's more than half a page, and vital to getting your meaning across, then a cross-reference is appropriate.

4. Repeat procedures until the user gets them right. For example, the user has to go through the logging-on procedure regardless of which function he or she wants to perform. Should the manual repeat the procedure under every section or assume the user got it right the first time?

We recommend repeating basic procedures (loading disks, accessing programs, using menus) until you can be reasonably certain that the user is comfortable with them. When the manual writer reaches that point with the users, procedures can be reduced to simple statements like "log onto the system" or "set margins for standard paper."

5. Show users — don't tell them. Employees would rather do than read. Keep descriptive text to a minimum; most of the manual should give the user instructions to follow at a terminal or personal computer.

6. Use lots of illustrations. When words cannot adequately describe a thought, the manual writer should use illustration. For example, in addition to writing "Put the tape reel on the take-up drive," present a picture of how the tape reel fits onto the drive.

7. White space and the right typeface make the manual easier to read. Readers appreciate the clear, uncluttered look of a manual that uses wide margins and lots of blank or "white" space.

If the manual will not change, typeset the text to give it a clean professional look. Typeset text makes manuals more legible, and it also introduces an element of familiarity. It will help manuals seem like real books, as opposed to slapdash imitations of books.

If your manual will be updated frequently, you'll probably want to reproduce typed pages or printer output to save money. Three-ring binders are usually best for manuals that are revised frequently. If a section or a page is changed, you can distribute just the changed portion, not a revision of the whole manual. But don't skimp on the "type" you present to users. Pick a typewriter or printer typeface that is easy on eyes. Daisywheel printers, for example, produce much more legible copy than dot-matrix machines. Daisywheel printers are more expensive, but the result will justify the added cost.

8. Add guideposts to aid readability. Another ploy to keep the reader on track is adding "guideposts" — a table of contents, introduction, index, and tabs. The table of contents outlines all sections and subsections of the manual. The index should cover key terms and concepts, but not every word in the manual. If a user wonders what to do when a disk is filled to capacity, he or she should be able to find the heading, "Disk full" in the index.

9. Break the tension. Although the manual should be written in a straightforward, instructional tone, an occasional pun, joke, or other "human" interruption can break the tension and help put nervous computer novices at ease. Here's one example from one of the many guides that's been written for the IBM Personal Computer, *The IBM PC Guide*, by James Kelley (Banbury Books, \$30):

"We need just 10 of the 255 characters in IBM's extended set. Thus, we ought to be able to pack some 25.5 times more numeric information into a byte than is permitted by the ASCII coding scheme. That seems reasonable, doesn't it?

"In fact, this is exactly what is done in practice. I'm not going to put a glaze in your eyes by explaining the arcane coding schemes used, I'd have to look them up anyway!"

10. Test drive your manual. Although your technical communications pros will probably review a manual writer's work, the true test of a manual's effectiveness is that it be so easy that any old user can understand it. So, give drafts of manuals to a few "typical" users for a tryout.

For instance, if a manual helps bank tellers access checking account balances, give them the manual and see if they can follow the instructions. If they have trouble, so will your organization. Better send your manual writer back to the drawing board. If the users can follow the instructions, you can be confident the manual and the new automated tool will be successful.

## **Section 10**

### **7 Tips for Writing Technically Accurate High-Tech Copy**

A lot of B2B marketing either promotes technical products, or sells to a technical audience, or both.

The technical nature of these marketing campaigns poses a challenge to those who must create them, because the marketers tasked with executing these high-tech marketing campaigns often lack a technical background. Therefore, they may have a steep learning curve and difficulty understanding what they are selling and to whom they are selling it.

I have been writing copy to sell technical products to engineers, scientists, programmers, and other techies for 34 years. Here are some tricks of the trade I use to give me an edge in creating copy that both pleases the client as well as persuades the target prospect:

1—Build an accurate “fact bank.” A fact bank is a series of statements describing the products and its features that have been vetted by a technical expert.

Before I start writing my copy, I go through the source material for the project and write down a series 5 to 10 sentences that precisely describe the product, its major features, how those features translate into important use benefits, and how the product works.

I e-mail these sentences to my clients with the request that they review them and make any necessary corrections, additions, or deletions. After they do so, I make their edits. Now I have a “palette” of pre-approved sentences I can use to construct my copy, with the added confidence of knowing that what I am writing is technically accurate. The clients, in turn, get a first draft of copy on a highly technical subject that is surprisingly correct and on the mark.

2—Buy a children’s book on the topic. If you have to write copy about a technical subject, buy either a children’s book on the subject or an adult nonfiction book aimed at a lay audience. For example, when I had to write copy for an aerospace contractor, I was aided by an Isaac Asimov book for young readers about satellites.

The children’s books especially will provide clear, easy-to-understand explanations of key terms and concepts. The adult book will likely have descriptive phrases of features and functionality you can paraphrase in your own copy. If I “borrow” from books, I alert the client by adding a footnote and make sure I am not plagiarizing.

Another good purchase for the high-tech copywriter is a dictionary of industry terms. I have owned at various times dictionaries for computers, telecom, banking, finance, and aerospace.

3—Ask the client for copies of PowerPoints. Engineers in particular are visually oriented, so you should have visuals to accompany your text.

Rather than draw a lot of charts and graphs, I ask the client for copies of PowerPoints used in presentations given by their technical and sales staff. I then extract and paste into my copy whatever visuals I think would work best, carefully noting the name of the PowerPoint and the page number from the source.

Sometimes I find an ideal diagram for illustrating my point on a web site that is not the client's. If I use it, I add a note explaining to the client that it is for reference only and must be redrawn to avoid copyright infringement.

4—Understand graphics have meaning. Unless you understand what a chart or graph means, don't use it until you do. It is extremely embarrassing to cut and paste a diagram out of a client's PowerPoint into your copy, and then when the client asks you why you used it, to have to answer "I don't know." You should understand each visual so well that you can write a clear descriptive caption for it – and then do so.

5—Use e-mail for interviews. I often interview subject matter experts (SMEs) when writing copy over the phone. But occasionally, I get an SME who cannot express himself well verbally, making it difficult for me to extract the information I need.

In that case, I may suggest that I e-mail him questions and that he in turn can e-mail me his replies. Often technical people who cannot speak English well can write decently – perhaps a result of the rise of e-mail, which forces people who might not otherwise do so to write often.

At times, the e-mail replies are so clear I can almost cut and paste them right into my copy.

If the answers are still unclear, I rewrite in plain English to the best of my understanding, and then e-mail my rewrite back to the SME for review. Usually the SME makes a few minor edits, and after that, that text is ready to use.

6—Use Wikipedia – with caution. You can't wholly rely on information in Wikipedia to be accurate because it is compiled by amateurs. However, I've found that entries on technical terms usually start off with a clear plain-English definition of the term, which is invaluable for gaining a quick understanding of what a thing is and its usage.

When you are researching statistics to augment your copy – for example, the date the laser was invented or the speed of sound in a vacuum – most clients in my experience want a better source than Wikipedia. Web sites are also an iffy source when you don't know who is running them, as are blogs. I prefer citing an article in a respected industry or scientific journal.

7—Get smart. If you are going to be writing about a product or technology on an ongoing basis, it makes sense to get some additional education on the topic.

An ad agency president told me he assigned one of his account executives to handle an industrial welding account. On his own, the account executive took night school courses in welding, eventually becoming a certified welder.



## 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, Websites, 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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