

# How to make your direct mail more effective

*Expert knowledge means success*



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**Note:** This publication has not been updated since it was last published. Some of the hyperlinks may have changed and may need updating. In addition, some of the information in this publication may be out of date.

## Introduction

One of the leading and most successful exponents in direct mail effectiveness is Ted Nicholas. In the US, he claims to have invested more than \$100,000 of his own money on promoting his own books - and he's certainly sold millions of them so he must know what he's talking about.

### A case study in percentages

We all know that direct mail is a bit like aiming at a moving target. Response rates range from 2% to 5% - that means for every 1,000 prospects that you mail, subject to one important proviso (which we'll go onto in a moment), you can expect to get 20 to 50 people who are willing to listen to you. That doesn't mean you'll get 20 to 50 sales out of the exercise. The sales you'll make will be a fraction of that 20 to 50 people who listen to you and like what you say and want to buy from you - let's say that your selling techniques are quite good, in which case you might expect to convert say 40% of prospects into sales.

All of the above figures translate into between 8 and 20 sales per 1,000 prospective customers to whom you send a direct mail letter or other communication.

Now here's the proviso that we mentioned - you'll only achieve something like the above figures IF your direct mail messages strike a chord with the people who receive them. It's sad to say that if the messages you send are uninteresting to the reader, they'll be sent to the waste paper bin. What a waste of your money and what a waste of an opportunity.

We'll come onto powerful words in a moment. But first, what are the ingredients that make a message really interesting to the reader - or any other audience for that matter. The answer is AIDA. This is what AIDA means:

- **A: ATTENTION** you have about 1/2 a second to gain it. So, the letter, brochure, advertisement, jump out gimmick etc must be relevant to the customer's needs and expectations.
- **I: INFORMATION** the customer has agreed to read what you've got to say. Make it succinct, keep it relevant and

give a commitment (on price, service, guarantee etc)

- **D: DESIRE** by this stage you must have the reader's full attention (we call it "scratching the reader's itch") so the next stage is a natural progression - "what's next, I'm interested"
- **A: ACTION** the natural response to desire is action - and the letter, brochure, advertisement etc must make it easy for the customer to do whatever you've suggested he/she should do. But beware - you can still lose the reader if your response systems don't match up to your promises.

Think how it would be different if your messages were so powerful that people would read them, would call you and would be most likely to buy from you.

Let's see how the percentages would change if your messages were stunning - maybe you could expect a 6% to 12% response. And if you did, and your sales skills were improved too, maybe the conversion rate could be lifted from 40% to 60%. That translates into 36 (up from 8) to 72 (up from 20) sales per 1,000 prospects - the figures in brackets are the numbers you got with your old methods.

## Getting the right direct mail message across

One of Ted Nicholas' ideas is that you can use powerful emotive words at the front end of any selling messages you want make. These words appeal to people's emotions and values. As a result, they are more likely to relate to them. Ted Nicholas suggests that there are 27 main ways to do this and the words are:

1. Announcing...	2. Secrets of...
3. New...	4. Now...
5. Amazing...	6. Facts you...
7. Breakthrough...	8. At last...
9. Advice to...	10. The truth of...
11. Protect...	12. Life...
13. Here is...	14. Discover...
15. Do you...	16. Bargains...
17. Yes...	18. Love...
19. Hate...	20. How much...
21. How would...	22. This...
23. Only...	24. Sale...
25. Free...	26. You...
27. How to...	

### The Regulations

E-mail can be a quick and convenient means of promoting goods and services to potential and existing customers. The Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (the "Regulations") came into force on 11 December 2003 and imposed new legal restrictions on e-mail direct marketing.

#### The old position

- Legally, it is generally not necessary to obtain an individual's explicit consent to receiving direct marketing e-mails, provided that in each such communication the individual is given the opportunity to opt out of receiving further e-mails.
- As a matter of good practice, however, you should refer to the British Code of Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing which mirrors many of the requirements of the Regulations.

#### The new rules

- "Opt-in": Generally, individuals will have to give their explicit prior consent to receiving direct marketing e-mail.
- "Opt-out": If a customer's details are obtained in the course of a sale of a product or service, you may then use those details to market your own same or similar products or services to that customer.
- You must clearly and distinctly give the customer the opportunity to opt-out easily and free of charge when the details are collected and on any subsequent marketing e-mail.

#### Non-compliance

- The Information Commissioner will be able to investigate and issue enforcement notices to individuals or companies who breach the Regulations.
- Failure to comply with an enforcement notice is a criminal offence and is liable to an unlimited fine.
- Any individual who suffers damage as a result of a breach may also pursue a claim for compensation.

Not to be outdone, we've added 28 more of our own - see what you think:

1. If...	2. X (number) Ways to...
3. What's new...	4. Only...
5. Achieve maximum...	6. Thanks to...
7. The reason...	8. Want to...
9. Where can...	10. Let's talk about...
11. Here's to...	12. The promise of...
13. The latest...	14. With...
15. Get your...	16. Information about...
17. Information...	18. Making the best of...
19. Ready for...	20. Don't lose...
21. Nothing...	22. Everything...
23. Can you/your...	24. More...
25. Less...	26. The next...
27. Easy steps to...	28. Share...

Next time that you have your marketing message in front of you, try replacing a few words with some from the list above... we think that you'll be stunned by the impact it will make.

## Anatomy of a Direct Mail Letter

George Duncan, the President, Duncan Direct Associates, is an award-winning direct mail writer and consultant in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He is frequently listed among the top fifty direct mail writers in US.

George says that direct mail letters are not casual correspondence, though they may borrow some of its elements - mainly the salutation and signature. The rest of a direct mail letter is its own entity, as seen in this brief tour of a typical letter. Not every letter will have every feature. (The features outlined apply to sales letters only - lead generation letters, especially to top management, possess different dynamics.) But you should use the elements outlined if you want your letter to sell rather than merely convey information.

### The Headline

The first thing to consider in your letter is the headline. Right away the reader will see that this is not a normal business correspondence. The headline focuses the reader's attention on one or two quick benefits or promises. It gives the reader a reason to spend valuable time reading this letter. It also helps close out other random thoughts and provides a context for what is about to follow.

If your company letterhead is heavily designed or distracting, you may want to consider putting it at the end of the letter instead of the usual position at the top of page one. (Now you know it is not a correspondence!) That way, your logo is not fighting for attention with the headline. Remember that you are not selling your logo.

- Try to make a promise or allude to a key benefit, and refer in some way to the offer, perhaps in a subordinate line. The offer is what the reader will eventually act upon.
- Avoid negatives in copy, especially in headlines. Do not say "don't."
- Try a headline group: A headline, subhead, and one, two or three short bulleted phrases that extend and expand on the headline message. It provides more information and takes fuller advantage of that high-readership location. It promotes greater involvement than a headline alone.

### The Opening

The opening is the first sentence or two following the salutation. "I am writing to you about ..." or "I want you to know about ..." are not openings. The reader, frankly, does not care what you want. Your reader cares about herself or himself. This is a key place to say something about the reader's needs and how your product gratifies these needs.

Try a headline group: A headline, subhead, and one, two or three short bulleted phrases that extend and expand on the headline message. It provides more information and takes fuller advantage of that high-readership location. It promotes greater involvement than a headline alone.

The documentary film, "The Ad and The Ego," makes the point that the purpose of all advertising is "the production of discontent" in the reader or prospect. That advertising seeks to "develop an inner sense of conflict" in people which the product, of course, promises to resolve. We do much the same in direct mail, but we address ourselves to one person, not multitudes.

- Your opening should seek out the reader's "hot button" or major problem and immediately demonstrate how your product or service can solve it.
- Most letters are won or lost in the first sentence. The surest way to lose is to begin talking about yourself and your organization. The phrase I use to keep my head straight on this is, "Talk about my lawn, not your grass seed!"





## Offer Preview

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After the opening, I like to make a brief reference to the offer. "... and you can discover it, (prove it, enjoy it) free, without obligation with the certificate enclosed." Now the reader knows I am not going to be asking him/her for money, so he/she can relax. And my early reference to the response device begins to set up the response behaviour.

It is also helpful to "merchandise" the offer by referring to it at several points throughout the letter. "When you send for your free demo (free trial issue, 30-day no-risk trial, etc.) and get it up and running, you'll quickly see ..."

## Sell Copy

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From the offer preview, get right into the benefits that your reader will realise when he/she tests, previews, examines your product.

- Stay in second person throughout your letter. You are talking to her (one person, not a market) about her, not you. Talk about yourself and your product only in terms of what it will do for her. Avoid the first person pronouns (I, we) unless doing otherwise creates an awkward phrase.
- Remember you are selling the offer, not the product. It is much easier to sell a 30-day trial or a free examination than it is to sell the product itself. You will discuss payment terms later.
- Try to lead off sentences and phrases with benefits. "You'll make first hand contact with hundreds of the most active, most involved sales prospects in the industry in just two short days ... " "As one of America's elite "Million-Plus" pharmacies, you are in a unique position to increase sales, slash operating costs and grow your business rapidly with xyz ... "

## Use Subheads to Introduce New Thoughts

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

- Write in short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Instead of writing in linear paragraphs, present benefits or features in list form with each item preceded by a bullet.

- Use one-syllable words whenever possible. Do not assume your reader is as literate as you are. Even if the reader is as literate, he or she is probably distracted and trying to extract the key information, by scanning the letter. Which is another good reason to use subheads, bulleted listings, and ellipses.
- Be ruthless when cutting unnecessary words and phrases.
- Write like you talk, assuming you talk like a successful salesperson.
- In direct mail, clarity is more important than literary merit and the ability to sell is more important than the ability to write.

## The Offer

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When you have fully described the many ways your product will benefit the reader, show him/her how he can acquire this fabulous program, product and service. Or rather, how he/she can realize these benefits right now.

Your opening should seek out the reader's "hot button" or major problem and immediately demonstrate how your product or service can solve it. Most letters are won or lost in the first sentence. The surest way to lose is to begin talking about yourself and your organization.

Spell out your offer in detail. What the reader gets. If you are offering a premium, this is the place to sell it a bit too. You may also feature it in a brochure if you have one, or in a separate premium flyer. If at all possible and appropriate, date your offer. An expiration date helps to keep your package from ending up between the lamp and the tape dispenser for further consideration. Again, agreement does not do it. Only acting on that agreement right now results in sales.

## The Guarantee

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No one wants to make a mistake, especially not an expensive mistake. Relieve your reader's fear with a guarantee.

Mitigating risk is an essential function of successful direct mail. By law you must refund legitimate requests up to 30 days anyway, so why not make it a virtue? Do not worry that your guarantee might somehow shed doubt on your product. The guarantee speaks not to your product, but to you as an honest and fair businessperson they can trust. But do not hawk it as a "money back guarantee" or "full refund if not satisfied" kind of thing. This is negative wording.

A free (or risk-free or no-risk) 30-day trial is the same thing, expressed in positive terms. "Examine it, try it, use it for a full 30 days without risk" is an invitation, not a warning. Be aware that under FTC rules governing the use of the word "free." An offer is not "free" if the prospect must pay something to receive it.

So a guaranteed refund should be called "risk-free."

If you can extend the guarantee to 60 or even 90 days, so much the better. Longer trial periods allow prospects to become acclimated to the product. This also gets inertia working for you, instead of against you. People forget to return things.

### The Call to Action

Even after all that, you cannot assume the reader will do what you want him/her to do, right now. But that is what he/she must do, so spell it out.

Does he detach and complete a reply card, call a toll free number, complete a questionnaire, check a box or punch out a token? Is there a post-paid or self-addressed reply envelope to use? Ask him/her to do fill out and send the reply card right now because the expiration date will be here before he/she knows it. Convey to your reader that he really wants to try your product, but if he lets it go until "later," he will forget.

### The P.S.

Punctuate the call to action with the signature, then add a P.S. After the headline and first sentence, the P.S. commands the highest readership in the letter. Use this important space to repeat a key benefit and add a twist to or elaborate on something you have already said. Also repeat your call to action here in slightly different words.

Remember the mnemonic for the basic function of all direct marketing, but especially for letters, is AIDA.

- Get **A**ttention.
- Arouse **I**nterest.
- Stimulate **D**esire.
- Prompt **A**ction.

And as the saying goes - it's not over until the fat lady mails the order form!

## What does the Institute of Direct Marketing say?

The Institute of Direct Marketing has published a very useful booklet entitled "The Institute of Direct Marketing Pocket Organiser". It provides gems for anyone engaged in direct mail.

- Quick guide through the stages of planning and executing a successful direct mail campaign.
- Mailing list checklist.
- Creative brief checklist.
- Tips for successful direct mail letterwriting.
- Printer brief checklist.
- Layout and stationery usage.
- Mailing house brief checklist.
- Response Guides.
- How to select an agency
- Reasons why people buy.

### Direct Marketing Planning Checklist

A quick guide through the stages of planning and executing a successful direct mail campaign is as follows:

- Set Your Objectives - Be specific. State how many products you want to sell or how many leads per salesman you want, specify over what period of time.
- Set Your Budget - How much will you need to spend to meet the objectives?
- Outline Your Campaign Activity- Make sure you consider and plan for all the key stages – targeting, media selection, communication mix, print/production, fulfillment.
- Check on the Competition - Who are your competitors, what is their market position? What are they currently doing, what is their likely response?
- Identify Your Target Audience - What are their characteristics and attitudes? Existing customers or external lists that can match the profile of your target audience?
- Access Your Target Audience - Source the names for your direct mail. Select appropriate media. Identify any appropriate list or media opportunities.
- Develop Your Creative Approach - What message and offer do you want to communicate? What is the nature of the individual response you want? Again, identify any creative test opportunities.
- Design Your Mailing Package - What should the components be, eg letter, envelope, brochure, reply device?

# How to make your direct mail more effective

- Draw Up Your Production Schedule - What are the timing requirements for this plan? Identify key tasks, responsibilities and critical timings. Make sure all external suppliers are carefully briefed and schedules agreed.
- Brief Internal Personnel And Relevant Departments - Ensure all relevant departments are thoroughly briefed, eg customer service, order processing, warehouse, and that outline campaign details are generally communicated.
- Analyse and Evaluate Your Results - Once the campaign results are final, check them against your objectives. Check the results for statistical validity. Work through the financial implications of the results. What conclusions can be drawn and are there any lessons to be learnt for future campaigns?
- "Gone Aways" - What is the list owner's policy on undeliverable items? Is a rebate negotiable if the level of "gone aways" exceeds the generally accepted norm of 5%?
- Results/References - Who has used the list in the last six months and are results available to give an idea of the list's responsiveness? Are references available from satisfied customers?
- Rental Restrictions - Is rental subject to a minimum quantity? Is rental subject to list owner approval of the mailing package to be sent?
- The Cost of List Rental - What charges are included in the prices quoted? Are selection charges included? Are output charges extra (tape, labels etc).
- Lead Times - How soon can the list be supplied? Are selection counts readily available prior to order?

## Mailing List Brief – Checklist

The list used in a direct mail campaign is the single most important variable. It's vital for briefs to be thorough and for subsequent list proposals to closely reflect the brief. Here are a few pointers to help you structure your list brief.

- Product/Service Description - Briefly describe your product or service and outline product benefits and Unique Selling Proposition (U.S.P.).
- Target Market - What is your primary target market? Your secondary? What psychographic or demographic profile information is known about your target audience?
- Quantities Required - What are the minimum test sample sizes required? What is the roll-out potential of each list?
- Special Requirements - What special selections are required and what format will the list be supplied in, eg magnetic tape, disk or labels? Do you want telephone numbers to be supplied with the list? Is the list required for one-time usage, multiple usage or outright purchase? Can you address named individuals?
- Response Profile - How did the individuals on the list respond, by mail or telephone? How recently did they respond? What was the value of the transaction? Have they responded more than once?
- List Origin - How was the list originally built?
- List Quantity - How often is the list mailed? How frequently is it updated? Have Mailing Preference Service (MPS) names been suppressed from the list?
- Net Names - Are names available on a net names basis? Is it a set percentage quoted (85%) or is an actual figure negotiable?

## Creative Brief Checklist

The creative brief is critical to good creative input. Here is a checklist of headings and pointers to help structure a creative brief.

- Product/Brand - What is your product or service? Give a brief description with relevant and brief background information.
- Current Market Perception - How is your product or service perceived in the market place?
- The Objective - What do you want to achieve?
- Previous Communications - History and results, lists or media used, test results if appropriate. Include examples.
- Target Market - Who are you talking to? A "thumbnail sketch". Demographic and psychographic.
- Product Benefits - What are the key benefits? What are the secondary benefits?
- The Promise - What problem will it solve? What desire will it satisfy? (Rational or emotional.)
- The Offer - Price, incentive, terms.
- Any Special Offers - Discounts, special conditions, risk reduction mechanisms.
- Unique Selling Proposition - (USP) What are the unique characteristics that make your product/service better than the competition?
- The Competition - Who are you competing with? How does your product compare in strict production terms? How does your product compare in strict production terms? How does the competition speak?
- Tone Of Voice - Manner of communication – how should you speak to the target audience?

# How to make your direct mail more effective

- Positioning - How you want the target market to perceive the brand tomorrow, relative to the competition – versus how you are perceived today.
- Media - Plan of likely media to be used – Press, Internet, TV, Inserts, Radio etc.
- Direct Mail
  - Package Contents (give example of similar elements).
  - Size restrictions.
  - Response Mechanism (telephone, coupon, order form, direct debit, bankers order etc).
  - Test segments to be considered.
  - Total Cost per thousand (including postage).
  - Considerations – personalisation details etc.
- Budget - What financial restrictions are there on the creative work?
- Restrictions - Those governed by law, by client corporate guidelines or by agency policy.
- Physical Requirements - Exactly what do you require from the creative team – scans, headlines, finished copy and visuals, storyboard, scripts?
- Timing - When is everything required by? Have you allowed adequate time for approval procedures and revisions?
- Write in the present tense where possible.
- Use active verbs, not passive verbs, eg
- "Bookings will be confirmed in seven days".
- "We'll rush it to you in a week".
- Use bucket and chains to link paragraphs, eg  
"That's just one example, but....."  
"in addition....."  
"on the other hand....."
- Start with your benefit and offer as a headline on the front page.
- Turn negatives into positives.
- Don't use the salutation "Dear Reader".
- Give authority, eg "Approved by IBM."
- Avoid humour.
- Don't let the reader stop reading – end pages halfway through the sentence. End paragraphs with questions.
- Aim for visual interest, eg
  - Indented paragraphs
  - Italics
  - Tables/Charts
  - Bullet points
  - Capitals etc
- Build belief – by using testimonials, especially by quoting third party opinion.
- Be personal. Talk about you and I. But most importantly, YOU.
- Ask for action, repeatedly. And give people reason to act.
- Tailor copy to specific lists.
- Use a P.S. in your letters. And a P.P.S. if you wish. The end of the letter is the most read part after the beginning.
- Re-state your benefits before closing.
- Show others your letters and get their views and comments.

## Tips for Successful Direct Mail Letterwriting

The letter is the most personal part of the communication. Before you begin writing the letter, you should:

- Know your audience (talk to them). Think about their likes/dislikes, their problems and opportunities, their hopes and fears.
- Translate the characteristics of your product into benefits for your audience.
- Aim to establish one major benefit which will make your product/service unique from competition.

When writing the letter:

- Use Saxon words (short) not Latin words (long), eg

LATIN	SAXON
Information	news
Indicate	show
Immediately	now
Regulation	rule
Conversation	talk
Publication	book
- Use vivid words, not hackneyed, eg

HACKNEYED	VIVID
Tough	diamond-hard
Dislike	hate
- Use short sentences.
- Use short paragraphs and confine each paragraph to just one thought.

## Printer Brief Checklist

Printer briefs must be consistent to ensure that you can compare alternative quotes and they must also be specific. The following checklist will help you with your print specification.

- Quantity - Have you specified how many pieces you want produced (and included an acceptable number of extra copies)?
- Type/Weight of Material - Have you specified what type and weight of material you want the job printed on?
- Colours - Is it a single, two or four colour job? Is it to be printed both sides?
- Flat Size - What is the flat size of the piece before and after trimming?

# How to make your direct mail more effective

- **Folds/Finished Size** - Have you specified how the job should be folded? How many folds and the sequence? How many pages will the finished item have and what is the finished size?
- **Special Instructions** - Have you included clear details of any coding required? Any special finishing instructions: stitching, perforating, glueing, laminating etc?
- **Reproduction** - Are you supplying "trannies" or colour "negs"? If so, what size and how many? Will tint-laying be required?
- **Proofs** - Do you want to see proofs? If so, is a pre-press proof (running sheet) adequate?
- **Timing** - Have you agreed a schedule with the printer stating:
  - when artwork will be available?
  - when proofs are required?
  - final delivery date?
- **Delivery Instructions** - Have you included clear packing (codes, quantities) and delivery (addresses, contacts) instructions?
- Having agreed the specification and the price with the printer, make sure you clarify terms of payment, ownership of materials (eg separated film) and the storage of the printed material.
- Always insist on proofs and make sure you cut, fold and paste them to ensure everything works as it should. Make sure all relevant people agree and clear the proofs.
- If your job is printed both sides with one side of the sheet being exposed to the other by way of folds, cut-outs etc, if budget allows, have backed-up proofs. Sticking two sheets together can have a wayward effect when checking positioning.
- Consider different finishing processes. For example, an alternative fold may mean the difference between machine inserting and hand inserting into envelopes, resulting in considerable cost savings.
- Check if your printer charges for overs. If so, consider changing your printer.

## Tips for Better Print Buying

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- You can't be involved too early. By sitting in on preliminary meetings you'll have more time to critically assess the print requirements and may even prevent wasted effort on any unworkable scheme.
- Keep a whole range of samples – formats, paper samples, special finishes. Get on printers' lists to stay up-to-date with the latest developments. Also keep notes of as many prices as you can get.
- As far as possible work with standard sheet sizes, eg "A" sizes. This reduces wastage. If you must use non-standard sizes, use waste to print additional items at very little extra cost.
- Your production schedule is king. Draw up a detailed schedule for every component in your campaign or mailshot and then stick to it.
- Watch the weight of the paper you choose and at an early stage make up a "dummy" of each item in a campaign using the actual materials being proposed. You will then be able to ensure that your pack is within Royal Mail allowances.
- Make sure you use the right printer for the right job. The printer's machinery will dictate what he can and can't do cost-efficiently, so pick the printer who has the most suitable machinery.
- Keep tabs on your printers. Maintain details of the machines and samples produced by them. Make sure you visit them to check that they can offer all the services you require.

## Layout/Stationery

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A photostat of the artwork will, hopefully, answer a lot of questions, but these points are given here as an indication of what to look for:

- Is copy artwork available in advance showing laser position, toner exclusion area, perforations, peel-off stamps, cut-outs etc?
- What is the width and drop of each page of stationery?
- Will text be rotated?
- To ensure the lasered name and address fits into the window position, samples of the envelope should be provided.
- Is the job one-up or more than one record per page?
- Is there more than one stationery type for this job?
- What type of stationery will be used?
- Do you require samples?
- Is bursting/trimming required?
- What is to be done with excess stationery?

## Text Processing

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- Is the printer required to set text for laser printing? Will proofs for pre-print be required?
- Does the text contain imbeds? How should these be shown on a plain paper proof?
- What character style is required? Choice of style requires knowing if the job will be rotated, which in turn necessitates which rotation is required

- 90 or 270 (ie which edge of stationery will feed through first).
- Will all the text be in the same style?
- How should punctuation be handled (eg double or single spaces after full stops etc)?
- Is page shaping required?
- How many blank lines between paragraphs? (Norm = 1)

## Defaults

Defaults are essential to ensure that there will not be unacceptable errors in the event of an omission of data on a tape. For example, if a name has to print, but there is no name present on the records, what is to be put in its place, if anything?

- Default for the absence of a name?
- Default for the absence of any other specifically referenced fields?
- Can certain fields be expected to appear in the same position in each record (eg name always in the same field)?
- What action if text is too long for space (eg use a smaller character style)?
- What is to be used as a salutation if the name is unsalutable? As an alternative to printing a default, records can be omitted and listed in an exception report is required.

## Mailing House Brief Checklist

- If it is a large volume mailing, make sure the mailing house has been given plenty of advance notice (approximate mail quantity, pack description, mail date) so that they can build it into their production schedule.
- Allow for delays. Late delivery of tapes or printed material can mean missed mail dates. As the mailing house is at the end of the production process there is rarely flexibility if timing is tight.
- Provide sufficient “overs” of all printed material. Avoiding inconvenient shortfalls in mail quantity more than justifies the low print run-on costs.
- Clearly specify any special instructions prior to enclosing (eg folding, collating, hand matching, guillotining).
- Make sure everything is coded. Where components are very similar, this should be emphasised even if codes are different.
- Clearly specify the inserting sequence. A simple diagram can be used to illustrate the order in which components are to be inserted and which way they should face.
- Provide the mailing house with dummy sample packs and ask them to provide you with sample packs once all

components have been delivered (prior to enclosing). In addition, ask for “live” samples once enclosing is completed.

- Clearly specify the mail date, or dates if the mailing is to be dropped over a period of time. Where test panels are included in the mailing, insist that they are mailed simultaneously to avoid possible timing bias.
- Give clear postage instructions. Is the mailing to go out 1st class, 2nd class, Mailsort 2 or Mailsort 3? Does the outer carry a post-paid impression (PPI)? Do stamps need to be affixed or is the mailing to be franked? How is the postage to be paid?
- Finally, once the mailing has been dropped, ask the mailing house to confirm the mail date/mail quantities, and advise them to store, return or destroy any overs.

## Response Guides

If you hear people in the Direct Marketing business quoting an “Industry Norm” of 2% response to direct mail, don’t take them too literally. Chances are they have not been in the business very long. There are many factors affecting the response to a mailing campaign making it extremely difficult to give a meaningful statistic, even for a specific market. Note the following:

- Market - Are we addressing business people or consumers?
- Objective - Do we want them to buy, try, send for more details or simply give us information, eg return a questionnaire?
- Do they know us? - Obviously, the better our relationship with them the better the response is likely to be. If they have heard of us – through advertising for instance – their response will be influenced by their opinion of that advertising. If they have never heard of us this may affect their confidence in us and the likely response.
- Targeting - How easy is it to seek out the actual individuals to whom we wish to speak? How accurately does our list selection locate them?
- Offer - Are we offering them something in return for their response? A free gift, a discount or a free sample can have a dramatic effect. Competitions or prize draws can greatly increase response from certain groups of prospects.
- Timing - Is the mailing being sent out at a good time? This can simply be a factor of the buying pattern of the recipient (eg month end for salary customers, Financial Year start or finish for businesses), or may relate to other activities (eg an advertising campaign

or perhaps a competitor's campaign or offer).

- Creative - The calibre of our creative work. This is not simply a matter of originality or creative brilliance. The message must be clear, easily understood and relevant. Size, shape, colour and number of pieces enclosed, even a simple involvement device can appreciably affect response.
- Outside factors - Major news events can have a big effect on response, for better or worse.

The above factors, though not an exhaustive list, give an indication of the difficulties of giving an overall response guide, even for a single medium like direct mail. Some of these factors will also affect response to other media such as Press, Inserts, Door-to-Door Distributions, Product Dispatches etc.

## How to Choose an Agency

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- Why do you need an agency? Have a clear idea of why you are hiring one in the first place.
  - Size. Ensure that the agency you choose is the right size to handle your account. Too small and it may not be able to cope with all your requirements, especially with regard to important staff being on holiday etc, and staff turnover. Too large and the agency may not find your budget attractive enough.
  - Conflicting accounts. Be very wary if an agency is handling a conflicting or competitive account. Satisfy yourself that all necessary safeguards are taken.
  - Track record. How long has the agency been in business? What is their past performance in your particular area of business? Ask to take up references with their existing or past clients.
  - Areas of expertise. Has the agency experience in other markets which have relevance to your business?
  - Efficiency. What is your first impression of their offices and the agency representatives? How understanding were they of your industry and how sensitive to the issues you want to address? Will the commitment and enthusiasm initially shown carry on if they win the account?
  - Account Management. Do they genuinely expect to add to the marketing thought process? Do they fight their corner in a genuine disagreement or simply do as you tell them?
  - Above and below the line. Your direct marketing agency must be willing – and able – to work with other agencies in order that you benefit from fully integrated communications.
- Finance. How does the agency charge for its services? Does it require a monthly fee, demand a percentage of the takings, want a mark-up on production or a combination of all three? Closely study their Terms of Trade well before committing yourself.
  - Rapport. Do you instinctively trust and feel comfortable with the agency people? Are the people to whom you are initially introduced the same as those who will work on your account? This could be the most important factor of all.

## Reasons Why People Buy

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The psychology of selling and marketing is important. Research shows many reasons why people agree to or want to buy.

- They Want to Gain:
  - Popularity
  - Praise from others
  - Self-confidence
  - Improved appearance
  - Comfort
  - Advancement: Social/Business
  - Security in old age
  - Leisure time
  - Increased enjoyment
  - Personal prestige
  - Knowledge
  - Power
- They Want to:
  - Express their personality
  - Protect their family
  - Satisfy their curiosity
  - Win others' affection
  - Resist domination by others
  - Be fashionable
  - Emulate the admirable
  - Acquire or collect things
  - Take advantage of opportunities
- They Want to Avoid:
  - Effort
  - Risk
  - Worry/self-doubt
  - Embarrassment
  - Uncleanliness
  - Pain
  - Criticism
  - Losing face
  - Time wasting
- They Want to Be:
  - Good parents
  - Attractive to the opposite sex
  - Successful
  - Enthused
  - Creative
  - Efficient
  - Recognised authorities
  - Up-to-date
  - Gregarious
  - Sure of themselves
  - Sociable
  - Healthy
  - Hospitable
  - Influential over others
  - Individual

## Further Information

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues.

We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

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