

97 ways to get more response to your Direct Mail

1. Use a copy "hook" on your outer envelope... promise a benefit or making an intriguing statement about what your reader will learn inside. Tease them!
2. Never put a full stop (.) at the end of your headline. It's an invitation for your reader to do exactly that and turn the page!
3. Use a large, readable type size. Otherwise, no matter how compelling your copy is... it won't be read! Never go under 8 point. Ideally, use 10 or 12 for your body copy. Sub-heads should be 14. All body text should be in serif face!
4. Never, never, never, never (get the message) use huge type except on posters. Thumb through any newspaper and look at the ridiculous ads that you need to pin up on a wall to be able to read.
5. When writing your headline, don't stop with the first. Or you 10th, or your 50th, keep rewriting. Keep revising, improving. The longer you work at it, the more effective your headlines will be.
6. Keep your copy simple. Keep your words, sentences and paragraphs short. Avoid long or complicated words. Write in the same way that people speak. In other words forget grammar... remember reality.
7. Do all you can to grab your reader's attention and keep it. Use exciting words and use them well. Think of your mail pack as a Christmas tree with lots of opportunities that you make twinkle and shine. Don't be boring.
8. Give your copy news value. Use facts. Use names. Be specific. Tell who, what, what, where and how. Facts about product benefits are more powerful than claims. Use case histories, statistics, performance figures, names, dates, quotes from experts - any facts you can find. You'll find your copy becomes more believable and more successful.
9. Make your copy a dialogue, not a monologue. Copywriting is communicating, and that takes two. If your copy is filled with "I", "we" and "our company", don't be surprised if the reader ignores it. Your response level will be directly linked with the number of times you use that word... "You"!
10. Make your own copy inviting. Long copy blocks look hard! Break up your copy with subheads. Underline with colour, use bullets and capped words.
11. Remember the 10 magic words -
 - Free
 - New
 - You
 - Now
 - Win
 - Easy
 - Introducing
 - Today
 - Save
 - Guarantee
12. Before you put pen to paper, know your audience. Put yourself in your prospect shoes. What would you want to know about the product? What would make you buy it?

13. List all the needs that your product can satisfy and then "Dress Up" your product to address these needs and then present the reader with benefits.
14. Research your product until you find the unique benefit - the unique selling proposition your competition can't or won't match. The one big benefit of your product is what will make people buy - and it's what you should build your story around.
15. People buy benefits NOT features. Use the phrase "which means that..." To turn features into benefits. Know the difference between a product feature and a product benefit. And keep them separate. Your reader is less interested in what your product is than what it will do for him or her. Fill your letter and response device with all the ways your product will help the reader make money, have fun, save time, improve his or her life, etc. Save the necessary but less exciting technical stuff for the back of the brochure.
16. If someone can't read and understand a headline in 5 seconds, don't use it. Regardless of how good it appears to you!
17. Forget clever. Clever usually confuses the hell out of everyone.
18. Never be negative in your copy. Especially with fund raising. People will block off images of starving children. Instead, accentuate the positive benefits their contribution will achieve.
19. Use the P.S. to restate your major benefit. Often P.S. gets read before the letter. Don't you check to see who signed the letter?
20. Always use serif typefaces except for headlines. Serifs are the little curls and squiggles on type. They are there to lead your reader's eye to the next characters. What would a newspaper do? If in doubt as to typestyle or layout, pick up a newspaper. They have been designing easy to read copy for a lot longer than you.
21. Businesses don't write letters... people do.
22. Sometimes, your word is just not good enough. Reinforce your claims with testimonials. Ask satisfied customers for them. Use them with photos if possible. Use testimonials especially where your company or product is new or not well known, or when you're making remarkable claims about what you're selling. Time after time, testimonials have been shown to boost response.
23. Show your street address on your offer. Mail order is a suspect industry and always will be. People can't turn up at a post office box for a refund or repair.
24. Try Mailing to businessmen in plain white envelopes, this will usually get your package past the "over efficient" secretary.
25. The place where your prospect has to make the final decision is the place to cement the sale. Use involvement devices with your order form. Don't think you can't use stickers etc. for your offer. Even top executives will respond better to an offer with an involvement device. Try a die cut token that has to be punched out and stuck on or inserted into the reply card. Or rub off devices as used in sweepstakes... printed or simple puzzles... jigsaws etc. They work because they appeal to the child in us. Just don't make them too difficult or expensive.
26. Mail the same list more than once with the same offer. Time changes people needs.
27. Test a spare order form for passing to a friend. This can lift responses dramatically.

28. Test a reply envelope against a reply paid envelope. As a guide, down market offers work best with postage pre-paid and BRE in the pack. Offers to a business or upper socio-economic groups are less dependant on pre-paid BRE's. The reason is that they have easy access to envelopes and stamps at their office.
29. Have a postage-paid indicia made up of your logo. It will lift your response.
30. Have several people, including a 12 year old; fill out your response coupon. If they have trouble, don't be stupid enough to assume it's them. Make sure the response coupon has plenty of room to write. Avoid little boxes. Don't you hate them?
31. Make sure everyone in your organisation knows and understands your offer. Otherwise, you'll be in heaps of trouble when the orders start arriving.
32. Try offering an incentive for early respondents. "The first 100 orders will get...."
33. Make a mock-up of your pack before starting any artwork. Art directors should always make a working dummy. Spend a few minutes working out the folds of your mailing piece and double checking die cuts. It's better than having your printer, client or boss, send back a piece that's upside down, inside out or that just doesn't work.
34. Case histories are responsible for hundreds of fund raising success stories. And live examples or demonstrations can prove to your prospect just how good your product is - on the spot! If you can get this information, use it.
35. Remember that one picture or illustration can be worth a thousand words. A shot of a happy, large eyed child in a jungle classroom can generate more funds for third world causes than paragraphs of copy describing the organisations achievements. A shot of a family enjoying a spa will do more than pages of copy.
36. In both inquiry and sale campaigns, try to think graphically.
37. Make sure you understand paper sizes. Most paper manufacturers will provide your production department with a listing of standard sizes. Stick to them. Unusual paper sizes can blow out the cost of your mailing.
38. Don't go overboard when you design. Make your graphics work by having a single focus and cohesive design. Confusing layout and typography only make it hard for people to get in to your copy. They also make people question the quality of your product or service. Your response will suffer.
39. Art directors should get involved at the beginning of a project. Let your art director know what you are planning, thinking. You'll have a much more cohesive strategy when two minds work together to develop a concept.
40. Don't hide your product. Use photography and illustrations to highlight your product and its special features.
41. If you have good photography, use it. Photographs are more believable, realistic, detailed and informative than illustrations. Sometimes an illustration will work better. But, if your graphic idea includes people, especially people using a product, then use photography.
42. Mix photography with illustration when you're selling technical products. Computers and other equipment need to be explained in detail. Illustrations or diagrams are often the only way to illustrate

how the product works. But keep in mind the product is being used by people - at work, on their desk or in the field. Design your mailing to reflect the subject matter of the product. Layouts, illustrations, photographs, even typefaces can help convey the feeling of your product and strengthen your sales message.

43. Get on your competitors' mailing list. You never know what you'll learn.
44. Your existing customer is your best prospect. Write for them!
45. Dazzle then with a string of pearls. Your headline is the place to hook the reader with one dominant benefit. Then take the reader from one strong benefit to another, right through your copy.
46. Get to your benefits, quickly. Too many copywriters take too long. Be ruthless... you can probably cut two or three paragraphs from the very beginning and make the letter move more quickly.
47. Make your copy as long as it needs to be to tell the story. Good copy is never too long! A paragraph of bad copy is! Long copy will out pull short copy if everything you say is interesting.
48. The inevitable exception fund raising copy. Keep your message to a single page.
49. The most important sentences in direct mail are the first and last.
50. Watch out for bleeds - they are expensive. They often require oversize sheets of paper as well and the unnecessary waste from trimming. Bleeds are a trade off between cost and design attractiveness.
51. Make full use of the ink colours you've chosen. If you're paying for it, use it! Consider tints or screens for maximum impact.
52. Watch out for the creative "expert" who talks about "creative use of white space"! Don't leave large open areas without copy or art. You are paying for the space. Use it.
53. Use active sentences and phrases, no passive. One of the best ways to remove excitement from your copy and inject the boredom is to tie up your reader in passive language.
54. Always include a letter to personalise your package. A letter is more personal when it's dated. But instead of using "21st September" try "Thursday". That way, no matter what delays the pack encounters, it's never more than a week old.
55. Always use a typewriter type for your letters, never typeset. Typesetting takes away the personal feeling of your letter.
56. Don't waste money on a special paper if your project doesn't warrant it. For example, all envelopes look the same when they have a label glued on them. Only use top quality paper stock when every component of the pack needs to have the same "feel".
57. Always tell your prospect what they stand to lose by not acting now. For example, the chance to buy at the low introductory price... . The chance to buy, period, if the supply is limited.... The bigger profits, improved health, greater beauty or whatever your product or service confers. Fear of loss can work where desire for gain doesn't.
58. Make it hard for a reader to stop at the end of a page. End the page in mid-sentence or even mid-word. It forces your reader to turn over. Put "Over please", to make sure no-one gets the chance to think that

your message has ended. Number your pages in case they get mixed. Don't give your reader a place to take a breath or he/she may take a walk instead.

59. Use a money back guarantee. It's a powerful tool for overcoming suspicion. The stronger you can make it, the more it will increase your response.
60. Experiment with new printing techniques. Keep up to date on the latest printing methods. Familiarise yourself with inkjet, laser and variable data/image printing, printed plastic envelopes and unusual formats.
61. Premiums work! Everybody loves to get something for nothing, and you can make your response rates soar by offering the right premium. This is especially true if the customer doesn't have to send money with the order. It can be an irresistible offer. The more closely your premium relates to your product, the better it will be.
62. *"The person hasn't been born yet who can sit down and dash off a great piece of direct mail copy. It is hard work. There are no shortcuts. Almost without exception, the success of any direct mail letter is in direct ratio to the time spent on its preparation."* Bob Stone.
63. Stay in touch with your prospects emotions. Bob Stone, Chairman of Stone & Adler is one of the all time great direct marketers. He says you can divide all human desires into two categories. You'll strike a chord in the hearts of your prospects or customers by touching on one or more of these:

The desire to gain by:

- Making money
- Saving time
- Avoiding effort
- Achieving comfort
- Being healthy
- Being popular
- Enjoying pleasure
- Being clean
- Being praised
- Being stylish
- Gratifying curiosity
- Satisfying an appetite
- Having beautiful possessions
- Attracting the opposite sex
- Being an individual
- Emulating others
- Taking advantage of opportunities

The desire to avoid loss by:

- Avoiding criticism
- Keeping possessions
- Avoiding physical pain
- Avoid loss of reputation
- Avoiding loss of money
- Avoiding trouble

64. The less the commitment - the more likely the order. In your mail order offers, always consider:

- a. A "bill me later" option
 - b. Credit Card facilities
 - c. Instalment option
 - d. 1800 number
 - e. Even a deposit now and pay balance later option
65. Make it easy for your prospect to order your product:
- a. Offer a booklet or sample
 - b. Offer a free trial
 - c. Offer a free cost estimate
 - d. Offer easy payment plan.
 - e. Explain in explicit terms how to order and then make ordering as easy as possible and include two reply forms.
66. Your response device should help sell, not just be a mechanism for ordering. Don't count on your letter alone to make the sale. Where does it say reply paid envelopes can't be attractive? Put some more excitement into your packages by using more colour, borders, half tones, sunbursts, handwritten memos, coloured stock, etc. You'll be surprised what Australia Post allows!
67. Never proof read your own copy. You'll only see what you think you wrote.
68. Test your copy on someone who has not been made aware of your offer. Did they get the emphasis on the words that you wanted to emphasise? Did they understand your copy the first time they read it?
69. Use humour with caution. Attempts at humour in direct mail usually fail - especially with financially orientated products like life insurance. Prospects expect conservatism.
70. Don't reinvent the wheel. Every copywriter and art director should have a "samples" or "ideas" file. If you don't have one, make one.
71. Too many choices on a reply device can often confuse the reader to the point where he can't make a buying decision. However, two or three choices can offer options, one of which may appeal to your reader more than another. This is known as "closing on a minor point". Your prospect is asked to make a decision on a dozen white wine, a dozen red wine or a dozen mixed wines. NOT on whether he wants to buy the wine!
72. Can each piece of your mailing stand on its own? Each element should contain all the basic information your prospect needs to make a decision. The name of the product, the price, the special you're offering, payment methods and of course, the benefits. TWO EXCEPTIONS: the outgoing envelope and the business reply envelope.
73. Always include a Business ReplyPaid Envelope if you're requesting payment or confidential information. Australians will NOT complete reply CARDS requesting anything but very basic data. Keep in mind what you're asking for and make it as easy as possible for your prospect or customer to give it to you.
74. Respect the power of telephone or email response. Let's face it; the mail is a powerful selling medium. But it is not as fast or efficient as the telephone or email, especially when you are asking for the order. Always offer the three options.
75. Talk to your reader in a language he/she can understand. Keep your tone friendly but formal when writing to executives. Approach customers in a more casual style.

76. Use graphics to embellish your creative ideas. If you're selling insurance or a society membership, don't just include a simple enrolment form. Turn it into an Acceptance Certificate.
77. If membership is free, why not include the membership card with your offer?
78. Remember the old selling adage - tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em....then tell 'em you told 'em.
79. Once you've got your prospects attention, set the stage for your message. Even when you're writing a business letter, you can get in touch with your reader's emotions. Remind them of the frustrations they encounter when dealing with a ticklish situation caused by not having your product. Then point out, step-by-step, how each benefit of your product will eliminate those frustrations. Once and for all.
80. Tell your reader exactly what to do. Be specific. Use simple straightforward language.
81. The ideal word length is five letters. Don't "utilise" when you can "use"!
82. The ideal sentence length is eight words. Most sentences are. It's just that many writers forget to punctuate. Any sentence over sixteen words probably needs a tertiary education to be understood.
83. The best paragraph is less than five lines. If necessary, force a paragraph break. It's better than having a large block of type.
84. Make your copy pleasant to look at. Use Sub heads and Underlining . Colour . Bullets . No paragraph blocking. No ragged right Columns 2' - 3' wide (avoids eye strain)
85. Be active in words. Always think in the present tense.
86. Know what-it-is BUT SAY WHAT IT WILL DO FOR ME!
87. Always offer a money back guarantee. Very, very few people will take advantage of it but it will lift your response dramatically. And let's face it, if I buy your product and complain you'll give me my money back anyway. Make a feature of your guarantee.
88. Watch someone else open your dummy pack. Do they take out the components in the order you expected. World-wide, people open envelopes from the back. Try it... you'll be surprised. Therefore have your items inserted accordingly
89. Don't design to satisfy your own ego. Yes aesthetics are important. But your goal is selling.
90. Does the picture alone tell the story? If there were no copy, would I know the product for sale?
91. Use a bold face for your lead paragraph.
92. Never put copy in reverse. It will reduce your leadership by 70% or more! If you don't believe me, consider white type on black background. Very creative! But when was the last time you owned a white pen?
93. Use upper AND lower case for your headings. No-one gets taught to read using upper case text. Therefore we all find it hard to read. Don't believe me **USE UPPER AND LOWER CASE FOR YOUR HEADLINES. NO-ONE GETS TAUGHT TO READ USING UPPER CASE TEXT. THEREFORE WE ALL FIND IT HARD TO READ. NOW DO YOU BELIEVE ME?**
94. Start your body copy with a drop capital. You'll increase your readership by an average of 13%.

95. Use leading (lines of space) between your paragraphs. It's worth an extra 12% readership.
96. Don't set your type in pretty shapes like an apple. Or around a deep etched transparency. You're only making it hard for your reader.
97. Have the signature on your letter printed in blue. It will make it look more personalised. The extra printing cost is negligible.

And the top five are:

- 1. In simple, plain English: who are you and what are you selling?**
- 2. What's in it for me?**
- 3. What proof do you have that your product does what you say it does?**
- 4. What guarantees will you give me and how do I get my money back?**
- 5. Where and how can I buy it?**