

Marketing Commentary

Direct Mail 2: So Many Questions Left Unanswered From The Original

While we're on the subject...

Of direct mail, let's look just a little closer. Direct mail is, without question, the best medium for tightly targeting an audience. So, if we're trying to look at the components of a great direct mail program, we have to start with a great list. If you are in a bank, your MCIF is the heart of your list generation. If you are with any other type of business, your customer list is still the key.

But, where do you go from there? You can buy lists. If you do, target them as tightly as you can. Income, assets, home ownership status, employment, age group—these are just a few of the ways that you can target your purchased list. The more tightly you target, the smaller the mailing needs to be in order to generate a significant return.

When you build the contents of your mailing, keep the target audience in mind at all times. Don't fall into the trap of making it look good to the CEO or have an appeal to the majority of employees in your company. Make sure it appeals to those on your mailing list and don't worry about anyone else.

It should mean something to the target audience. Give it some meat and, like any other advertisement, make sure that it addresses real benefits for its readers. All too often, a direct mailing consists of a letter of introduction and nothing else.

Actually there is a time when this is OK. That time is when the mailing is only the beginning of a four or five piece bombardment. Never waste your time and money and mailing list on a single piece one-shot mailing.



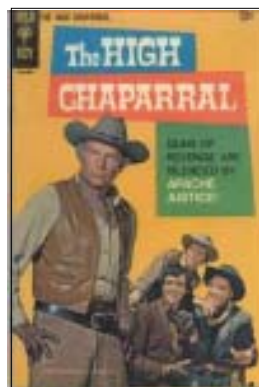
A letter is the beginning of the mailing. You should always try to include two more items. One good idea is a piece that they might have reason to hang on to. Something of real or perceived value. It might be a gift, it might be an idea, it might simply be something they'd want to share with others. The third is a response mechanism.

Without a call to action—and a means of acting—a direct mail program is just a mailing. It's not a sales mechanism. You must have a way for people to make their purchase, whether that purchase is the act of making a telephone call or is sending in an order form with thousands of dollars attached. If you don't ask for the business and give people a way to respond in the affirmative, you haven't completed your sales pitch. In a direct mail program, this is a serious failure.

Another area in which response mechanisms often fail is in asking the buyer to do something which either is or is perceived to be overly difficult. For example, people receiving wonderful offers for checking accounts are still hesitant to do anything about them because of the incredible difficulty of changing banks. Without some form of proof that the bank can make this process "almost painless"

no prospect the bank really wants is likely to make the change. Mortgages, checking accounts, investment accounts...if you have one and want to move it, it is perceived to be a very painful procedure. We have to find ways to make it seem easier.

Once you put the inside of the mailing together, it's time to work on the outside. As we have previously stated (just last week, I believe it was), if you think you can get rich by fooling people into opening a piece of mail, you've got another think coming. You can get people to open their mail, but if they open it and utter words to the effect of "those jerks" you haven't gained much. Just paper that's thrown away with a bit more force than if it hadn't been opened.



Make the outside fit the inside. Be honest. Address benefits. Don't pretend you're the

government or the Publisher's Clearing House or the IRS. If your company has a good reputation in the industry, let people know who is sending them mail. But, tell them why they should open it. Give them a good reason on the outside that matches the good stuff you've worked so hard to put on the inside.

If you can, if it's a small enough mailing, put a stamp on it. Send it first class. If you can't, if you need to send it bulk rate, keep in mind that the delivery date is totally up to the post office. If you have never received a piece of bulk rate mail after the expiration date of the offer, you are in a huge minority. Never send dated (or at least quickly dated) material by bulk mail. It goes when it goes and there's not a single thing you can do to change that.

But you can make sure what you send is effective. Just remember who you're sending it to and work on remembering what it is they want. Direct mail is a wonderful way to advertise. It gets a bad name from those who do it wrong. Make sure you do it right.

PARIS (Reuters) - Homeless people in Paris, who frequently have their possessions stolen, now have access to a secure location where they can store their important documents — cyberspace. Homelessness charity Emmaus said on Friday it had set up its first Internet centre in a day shelter in central Paris. The centre's dozen volunteers will show homeless people how to create email accounts and personal Web sites. "We allow them to create their own site so that they can store all their important documents in a virtual house," said Emmaus spokeswoman Helene Thouluc.

"For people who live on the streets and who get their things stolen all the time, this allows them to create a protected space," she added. The day shelter, which helps 500 homeless people a day, has nine new PCs donated by software giant Microsoft. Emmaus plans to open four more Internet centres in the Paris region early next year.

Well, They Certainly Do Suck

LONDON - Two self-styled vampires who bombarded a vicar with abusive phone calls, howled in the churchyard and posted obscene pictures around his church were sentenced to prison on Friday.

Benjamin Lewis, 25, was sentenced to 12 months in jail and Scott Bower, 26, to six months for the religiously motivated harassment of the Rev. Christopher Rowberry and his family.

Lewis's girlfriend, Natalie Gibson, 19, received a three-month suspended jail term for taking part in some of the abuse. All three had denied the charges but were convicted last month.

The abuse occurred over a three-month period last year in Totten, southern England. According to Lewis's journals, which were introduced during the trial, he had an unshakable belief he was a vampire and enlisted Bower as his accomplice.

"I answer to no mortal and I spit on Christian beliefs," he wrote.

Judge John Boggis said Lewis made obscene telephone calls to the vicar's family which included "howling noises," screeching sounds and mechanical

laughing. He also pinned "truly disgusting" pictures on bulletin boards around Totten's church of St. Mary the Virgin.

"This is a case of repeated victimization of a man who showed you tolerance and understanding," Boggis told the three.

Rowberry has said that when the abuse started, he attempted a dialogue by posting letters addressed "Dear vampires."

BUDAPEST (Reuters) - Police on Friday removed the corpse of a man believed to have hanged himself at least a year ago after builders and students at Budapest's University of Arts had initially mistaken it for a modern sculpture.

The body hung for a whole day in a garden building that had been re-opened for repairs before onlookers realized what it was and called the police, local media said.

The building, in campus grounds crowded with different types of sculpture, had been closed five years ago pending reconstruction work.

Is Nothing Sacred?!?

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany can no longer afford state aid to help its yodellers buy Lederhosen, the Bavarian government says, in a sign of how drastically public finances have deteriorated in Europe's largest economy.

"We no longer want to sponsor the Lederhosen with subsidies," Bavarian Premier Edmund Stoiber said, ignoring outcries from traditional folk groups, some of whom have threatened to boycott the opening parade of the Munich Oktoberfest, the world's biggest beer festival.

The Alpine state had previously provided the 300,000 members of its folklore groups with half a million euros in state funds to help buy traditional Bavarian attire such as the leather shorts — amounting, one newspaper said, to a subsidy of 13 percent per garment.

But even Bavaria, one of Germany's richest states, is under pressure to curb government spending after years of slow economic growth.

A good pair of goat suede leather Lederhosen will set you back 149.90 euros.

Sleeping Burglary Suspect Surprises Victims

OKLAHOMA CITY (Reuters) - An Oklahoma couple were surprised when they woke up and found a drunk burglary suspect asleep in bed with them, police said on Thursday.

The couple from the south Oklahoma city of Ardmore called police, ran out of their house and watched officers arrest the man who was still sleeping in their bed despite the sirens and commotion, police said.

Dan Johnson, 24, was arrested on the scene in the incident that took place on Sunday and was charged with burglary.

Officer Chad Anthony said in his arrest report that it took quite an effort to rouse the suspect from a deep slumber.

"After about two to three minutes, Johnson stood up. I saw that he was very intoxicated," he wrote.

The report said Johnson was found with a cell phone belonging to one of the victims in his pocket and \$4 in cash, also apparently stolen.

Johnson is suspected of kicking down a door at the residence and also trying to gain entry by using garden trimmers to pry open a door, the report said.

Police said the couple told officers a man they did not know had fallen asleep in bed with them.

Johnson and the victims would not comment on the incident.

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