



H-Paper

## **The Recipe for a Successful Direct Marketing Campaign**

**The H Agency** [www.theHagency.com](http://www.theHagency.com)

# The Recipe for a Successful Direct Marketing Campaign

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**The purpose of this H-paper** is to provide a recipe containing the basic ingredients of a successful direct marketing campaign. This paper outlines and clarifies the ingredients that others have developed so that you, the reader, can take these tried-and-true processes and create a better direct marketing campaign for your product or service. Then, through testing and refinement, you can improve your results even further.

- How can you engage and involve your readers more easily?
- What are the four most important seconds in the success of your direct marketing piece?
- Who are your most valuable prospects for a direct marketing campaign?
- What's more important to a campaign's success: copy, design, or audience?
- What's the most read part of a direct mail letter?
- How do you measure the success of your direct marketing efforts?

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## DIRECT MARKETING

**The purpose of direct marketing** is to communicate information about a particular product or service through some type of media (direct mail, e-mail, telemarketing, print advertising, television, broadcast fax, coupon) and generate a specific response (an order, an inquiry for more information, an appointment, a sale, etc.). Effective direct marketing is designed to be both measurable and quantifiable.

**Where does the recipe go wrong?** If direct marketing has such great potential for improving response to your marketing communications, why and where does it fall short in fulfilling its potential?

### **Problem #1 – Missing ingredients**

Much of what is called direct marketing today forgets to use many of the proven techniques and essential ingredients of direct marketing and therefore usually falls short with its results. Unfortunately, this also tarnishes the true value of direct marketing in many people's minds. Direct marketing works. The recipe simply needs to be followed and all the ingredients included to get the best possible results.

### **Problem #2 – Missing understanding**

According to long-time direct-marketing expert Joan Throckmorton, the direct marketing business is begging for creative leaders, “marketers and product managers, promotion directors, creative directors, copywriters, artists, and art directors with a solid understanding of the underlying creative principles of direct response...”

Direct marketing is an evolutionary process of learning and refining. You build on past experience, learning from what's worked and what hasn't. Good direct marketing requires a great deal of creativity—within a structured form. And **good direct marketing using proven techniques, procedures, and rules, executed well, can reap higher and more measurable response and sales than marketing approaches that don't.**



## DIRECT MARKETING

### PARTS OF THE RECIPE

#### #1 – Start a conversation / a dialogue

Even if you are marketing to large groups of individuals, your marketing message has a greater chance of being received when it sounds and feels like a personal conversation—like you’re communicating to one individual, not a group or audience. Like any conversation, your grammar and punctuation should be relaxed and reader-friendly. Contractions (you’re, we’ve, I’m) and even sentence fragments are appropriate. The more successful you are in creating this impression of a person-to-person conversation, the more likely the reader is to get involved and respond.

#### #2 – Lead with your strongest pitch

Joan Throckmorton in her book “Winning Direct Response Advertising,” says that the typical prospect reads for about four to five seconds before he or she decides whether to keep reading or toss your marketing piece in the trash. Your piece needs to grab your reader’s attention right away. So start your letter with your strongest sales point. This pitch line may be incorporated into a headline (in letters, this is called a Johnson Box, and contains your main message or pitch) or as the first sentence of your piece. According to direct marketing copywriter Bob Bly, some time-tested openers include:

- Asking a provocative question
- Going straight to the heart of the reader’s most pressing problem or concern
- Arousing curiosity
- Leading off with a fascinating fact or incredible statistic
- Starting the offer up-front, especially if it involves money—saving it, getting something for an incredibly low price, or making a free offer



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### #3 – Focus on the reader, not yourself

Like any engaging conversation, the content of your marketing piece should be more about the reader than the speaker (your products or services). Your readers are interested in what's in it for them. If you don't get to that point quickly, you'll lose their attention. If you're in a conversation and all the other person can talk about is herself, **her** job, **her** friends, and how wonderful **her** life is—you'll probably be turned off quickly. But, if that person showed an interest in you, your hopes and dreams, your likes and dislikes, then she would have your full attention.

### #4 – Guide your reader's eyes

Direct marketing copy and design should be easy for a reader to scan. Good direct response copy is airy, with plenty of white space. It's structured so that the reader can absorb important points easily with just a brief scan. Use eye-stoppers or "fixations" to guide the reader's eye through the body of a piece. Eye stoppers include headlines, subheads, capitalized words, bold type, underlined words and phrases set off by ellipses... like so... Direct marketing studies show that most readers scan a letter (or mailer) first from top to bottom looking for graphically emphasized words or phrases.

### #5 – Don't forget the P.S.

After scanning from top to bottom, your average reader next looks at the signature area to see who sent the letter and then at the P.S. before moving back to the top of the page. The P.S. is a sort of anachronism from another era when letters were hand-typed. In a direct marketing communication, the P.S. gets read about 80% of the time. So, summarize the main point of your message in your P.S. to give your reader the best opportunity to see it.



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### #6 – Give them a good reason to respond—the offer

In your marketing effort, the offer (also sometimes called the promise) is like the trailer for your movie, the sugar in your coffee, the icing on your cake, or the cover of your book. It's the motivator, the reason to act now, or the thing that your readers get when they respond. It could be a limited-time 15% discount, free shipping on orders over \$39.95, a free gift, or the secret to increasing your income, improving your lifestyle, or helping you lose 15 unwanted pounds in seven days. The offer gives your reader a compelling reason to respond.

### #7 – Consider what's in it for them—benefits vs. features

One of the oldest rules in direct marketing is to **emphasize the benefits of a product or service over its features**. Features explain what something does. They describe facts and figures about a thing and its operation—the way it's put together and the materials used to make it. Benefits are what these various things can do to improve a person's life experience. For example: Online access to your checking account is a feature. The **convenience** of having access to your money at anytime day or night and the **flexibility** to be able to pay bills without writing checks are benefits.

**Benefits are emotion-based.** They fill needs and satisfy desires. **Features satisfy intellectual needs.** However there are instances in which features will appeal more to certain audiences than benefits, such as high-tech products. Computer engineers like to see the facts and figures—the specs—before they make a buying decision.

### #8 – Use your best responders first

In direct marketing, **communicating to the right audience is more important to the success of your campaign than any other aspect, including copy and design.** Why? Consider the conversation analogy again. It's much more likely that someone you know will listen to you and respond favorably than if you're speaking to someone who doesn't know you at all.



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**Your most receptive audience is someone who already knows you**, someone with whom you have an established relationship. As a result, your existing customers will generate as much as twice as many responses as new prospects. Talking to your customers is like talking to your friends and neighbors. It strengthens a relationship over time. It builds trust and familiarity. If you've said something that interested them in the past, they're more likely to listen in the future.

### #9 – Choose a simple, friendly type font

The rule of thumb for direct marketing letters (as opposed to mailers) is simple: the size and type of the font should support easy reading and easy skimming. The general rule of thumb is that if it **looks** like a letter, then it's more likely to be considered a letter by your reader. For business letters, Times and Times Roman fonts are appropriate and studies show that serif fonts are generally easier to read by most people (which is why newspapers use serif fonts). Use 10 to 12 point size for optimum readability. For older audiences use larger type sizes.

### #10 – That picture is worth a thousand words, or not

Pictures and graphics can enhance your story, sometimes. Generational research from Idaho State University shows that different age groups respond differently to variations in language and pictures.

- **Younger audiences** generally respond more readily to graphics and prefer brief, simple, non-salesy copy. Graphics should show people actually using a product or service to suggest an outcome of the sale.
- **Older audiences** generally respond better when graphics are simpler and help identify the target audience by mirroring the target. These are people who grew up in a time when letter writing was more prevalent. They recognize a letter as a letter. Too many graphics make it look like an advertisement.
- **The higher the education of the reader**, the less important graphics become. For graduate-school level audiences, a straight, clean, formal letterhead can be more successful than a graphically heavy piece.



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### #11 – Test to see what works

Direct marketing works. **You know it works specifically because you can test its effectiveness.** How do you really know if one letter works better than another, or one advertisement over another, if you don't test? How do you know the cause of success or failure—the list, the creative, or the offer—if you don't compare. Without testing, you're only guessing. Maybe a small change in one thing could make a large difference in motivating a response.

The second part of this ingredient is **don't assume something will work based on its past results.** Here's an example from direct marketing expert Bob Bly—a direct marketing copywriter named Milt Pierce wrote a subscription package for *Good Housekeeping* magazine that was used successfully for 25 years. None of the alternative copy tested against it generated as many subscriptions. Yet, when Pierce used the same approach with other magazine subscription mailings, the response was far short of its previous success. The only way to know for sure what works in any situation is to test.

### #12 – Test only one thing at a time

The crucial thing to remember when testing is to keep your test scientific. **Change only one aspect of the communication piece at a time.** Mail the same creative to different audiences. Run the same ad in two different publications. Change the headline but leave the copy the same. Change the envelope teaser line and keep the inside contents the same. When you make several changes at once, it's hard to accurately measure the effect made by any one change.

### #13 – Track it... to measure your success

This may sound obvious, but the only way you can know if your marketing effort worked and how well it worked is to track your responses. **To track responses, you have to build a tracking method into the marketing piece.** A designated phone number, a promotional code, or a Web site landing page with a specific url are all possible ways to track responses for a specific campaign. Without a method of tracking or a basic level of response information, you can't be certain how your campaign performed.



## DIRECT MARKETING

### #14 – Sell, sell, sell

To paraphrase the well-known advertising leader and author, David Ogilvy, **the first rule of direct mail design is**, “If it sells, it’s creative.” In direct marketing, the form and style of your piece should support your main objective—which is getting the right message to the right audience at the right time.

### P.S. – One last thing

These are the most basic rules and guidelines for creating a successful direct marketing campaign. To recap in a few short points, here’s the basic structure for your piece with **the essential ingredients:**

- An introductory sentence that talks to the audience and its needs—to catch their attention.
- A quick move into how your product or service fills that need.
- Statement or list of main benefits (the “dream” of filling the need) that focus on TIME, CONVENIENCE, and a BETTER LIFE. These are the most common and essential benefits for almost everything.
- Close, call to action, signature.
- P.S., restate the offer, benefit, or call to action.



## DIRECT MARKETING

**There's always more to learn about direct marketing** and the best people to learn from are the ones who have done it frequently and successfully through the years.

Some suggested reading sources include:

- Throckmorton, Joan; *Winning Direct Response Advertising, How to Recognize It, Evaluate It, Inspire It, Create It*; Prentice Hall, 1986.
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# WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?<sup>TM</sup>

The H Agency is a strategic branding firm founded in 1990 by owner and creative director Winnie Hart and now with offices in New Orleans and Houston. The company has grown from a local New Orleans design firm into a regional strategic branding company that specializes in developing marketing programs and brand strategies for health and wellness, financial services, and consumer and retail companies.

The “H” in The H Agency stands for the things that make us unique — heart, horsepower, helpful, high-flying and heroic. Defining the core values we practice each day in our work and relationships helps us refocus our perspective, rethink our strengths, and refine our continued path to success.

For more information about how to make your next direct marketing project more successful, contact The H Agency, 504-522-6300.

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