

HIGHER RESPONSE MARKETING



HOW TO AVOID THE NINE MOST COSTLY MISTAKES WHEN CRAFTING YOUR KILLER SALES LETTER

Let's talk about writing sales letters for online marketing.

SAVE AS .PDF

Most of the rules that apply to regular direct response writing also applies to online marketing. But there are differences.

Last issue I covered my step-by-step FORMULA for writing online marketing letters. I want to revisit the topic but from the flip side. Since I've already told you what TO do . . . this issue I want to tell you what NOT to do.

Because you need both sides of the story to have a complete understanding.

Mistake One: Making your letters too short or too long

This is something that runs counter to logic. We assume that people are so busy they won't read long marketing letters. And that is true. People who have a low-level interest in your product won't read a long sales letter.

But they aren't solid prospects anyway. What you'll find is that people who ARE interested will read long letters several times, assuming your product represents a significant emotional or financial purchase for them.

What you want to do is write a letter that presents your case in a full, compelling way.

However, you have to be careful. My friend Jonathan Mizel, publisher of The Online Marketing Letter, insists on keeping letters to 24k or under. This is 8-10 pages of text in your word processor.

Reason one: If you send a sales letter longer than 24k to AOL members, AOL will automatically turn most of the letter into an attachment. Since a whole bunch of people don't know how to read attached files, this is a marketing crime.

Reason two: If you have a sales letter longer than 24k on your web site, it's too long to read online, which means that people have to print it out. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. I won't go into the technical problems. But often the letter won't print, or it'll lose formatting when in prints. So while you want your prospects to print and read your sales letters, don't count on it happening.

Mistake Two: Giving no reason to act immediately

You need to make a specific offer in your marketing letter that gives people a concrete reason to act immediately. Typically, this takes the form of scarcity and/or a limited time offer.

Try this experiment: Think of an activity you enjoy. Now imagine that for some reason out of your control, after the end of the current week, you won't be able to engage in that activity for the next year! Immerse yourself in that feeling.

Now, in contrast to how you felt only moments ago, how important is it for you to participate in that activity before the end of the week? I bet it has skyrocketed on your priority list.

That's the power of scarcity. How do you use this in marketing? By offering free bonuses with a limited supply. For example, you say, "My supply of these free bonuses is limited. I can only guarantee you'll receive them if you respond in the next 7 days."

Notice how I incorporated into that sentence another method of gaining immediate action: The deadline. I said that you need to respond before the deadline. By setting a deadline, you get people to act immediately.

Mistake Three: Focusing on your products and your company instead of your customer.

Imagine reading this:

Dear friend,

We're proud to introduce a new widget we've been working on for years now.

In fact, we've spent over \$1,000,000 researching this widget. But now, thanks to all this intensive research, we can produce over 100,000 of these widgets an hour.

But the best part is, when you buy one of these widgets, you'll get us -- the same reliable, quality, trustworthy service you've grown to depend on over the years.

To get the kick off of this sensational new product going with a bang, we're offering 20% on all purchases. Just call your rep for details.

Yours truly,

John Doe

Widgets, Inc.

You may laugh at that letter. But the basic trap is easy to fall into. One time a friend of mine (who knows better) called about a newsletter she had published and sent to a customer list. She was disappointed because it didn't produce any results.

When she read it to me, I immediately saw the problem. It talked about her, what she was doing, what new services she was offering, where she was going to be speaking -- all those things.

The problem is, her customers don't care about her! Who do they care about? Themselves! You have to talk about your customers, what their problems are, what they want and how you can benefit them.

Mistake Four: Failing to present a specific promise

Your sales letter needs to present a specific promise. In the big picture, what is

it you're going to do for your customers?

Save them money? How much money (on average) over what period of time?

Make them money? How much money (on average) over what period of time?

I remember a seminar I spoke at where one of the attendees sold real estate.

I asked this gentleman, "Why should someone buy real estate from you versus anyone else?" He said: "Because I've been in the business for years and I can do a better job."

Then I asked, "A better job means what?" "I can sell their home faster," he replied.

I queried, "Can you sell your listings faster than other real estate agents?" "Yes," he said.

"How much faster, on average?"

After pondering a moment he zipped back the magic words, "three months."

So, if he were writing a sales letter, he could say, "Dallas Realtor reveals proven system to sell your home 3 months faster...on average."

Now, since advertising in real estate is regulated, he may not actually be allowed to make that claim, even if it's true. But if he were allowed, it would be a strong promise.

Mistake Five: Poor presentation of the marketing letter

Another very common mistake I see people make in delivering sales messages online and in the regular mail is making a poor impression.

Have you ever received an email that looked like this?

Just today I received an email about a

service I was interested in.

But the email letter had the wrong formatting, so it wrapped incorrectly. This is how the sales letter looked!

The lines on the email wrapped just like the sentences above. If you've ever tried to format email, you can appreciate what happened to the sender.

But the appearance of the email killed my interest in the offer. In the same way, I've seen the same mistake happen in regular mail.

Countless times I have received sales letters that either were duplicated from a poor quality master or printed on a dilapidated photocopy machine.

With today's hi-tech copying machines, there's no excuse for this. Your sales letter must look clear and crisp.

Mistake Six: Neglecting to present a believable case for the product

With shows like 20/20, 60 minutes and all the rest, not to mention the constant stream of scandals we hear about, no small wonder people are skeptical the promises made in marketing letters.

Talk to potential prospects and find out if they believe what you're promising in your marketing letter. And if not, why not.

Here are several things you can do to separate your offers from the crowd:

a. If you're selling your product at a discount, explain why you're offering this special deal. For example, "August is our slowest month of the year. So I can afford to cut my price in August and only August. On September 1, the price returns to normal."

b. Do whatever you can to build the credibility of your offer. Consider these questions:

Can you get endorsements from recognized experts?

Can you present testimonials? (The more the merrier.)

Can you get recognized publications to review your product?

Can you support your case by quoting facts and statistics or articles in publications?

c. Present exciting but believable promises

Earlier I talked about presenting a promise for your product or service. That promise needs to be believable. If you make an outrageous claim or one that sounds outrageous, your credibility will take a hit you probably can't recover from.

d. Refer prospects to a web site.

If you're selling online, a web site lends credibility.

e. Obtain publicity for your product and/or publish articles in your industry. Having your product appear in print in the form of a press release builds credibility. You can quote what publications say about your product. You can also bolster your personal credibility by publishing articles in magazines.

f. Give the prospect a way to verify the accuracy of your information. Give the prospect a test he/she can use to instantly prove what you're saying is true. I think of an ad for a product on how to sell products using classified ads. The ad instructed you to turn to a back issue of a magazine and look at the classified ads. Then compare those ads with a current issue of the magazine.

This little experiment allowed the prospect to prove that these little ads were making money. After all, if they weren't making money, they wouldn't still be running, would they?

What experiment or test could you give to your prospects that would allow them to instantly validate the premise of your offer?

g. Use photos of your product and your location. If you have a nice office, show it off in a photo. It proves you have a legitimate, viable business. And a quality photo of your product eases the concerns the prospect has that your product doesn't really exist!

In my website I sometimes use a survey that asks for the reason the prospect hasn't bought yet from my site. One of the common reasons is, "I'm afraid you'll take my money and never ship a product." By showing a photo of your product,

you provide evidence that the product exists!

h. If you're selling an information product, use lots of bullets. If you're selling an information product such as a book, video or audio tape, list a number of bullets that describe what the customer will learn from the product.

For example, here are bullets from a sales letter I wrote recently that build credibility. Why? Because when the prospect reads them he or she thinks, "Wow this person must know what he/she is talking about. It sounds like I can really benefit from this."

This leads us to the next point . . .

Mistake Seven: Being too skimpy with bullets

Your online marketing letters should be loaded with bullets. As much as 50%-80% of your letter should be bullets.

The reason is that people skim your letters quickly online. Bullets are easy to read and stick out. Here are sample bullets from one of my sales letters:

- 6 ways to put your ideas into "forms" that people will pay cash for.
- Simple ways to come up with your moneymaking ideas.
- How to sort out the winning ideas from the turkeys
- What types of ideas make money – and what to avoid like crazy.
- Why you don't have to be a genius to make money in the idea business
- Secrets of "packaging" your ideas so you get paid more for them.
- How to get others to pay you for your ideas, know how, expertise and specialized knowledge.
- How to get others to pay you for the right to market your idea vehicles for you.
- Four ways to get free or dirt cheap trips.
- What to do to get tax deductions on trips.
- The one book your library has that has millions of dollars of "idea wealth vehicles" in it.
- How to identify ideas you already have that can make you a lot of money.
- How to "buy" experience cheap, so you reduce your learning curve by years.
- How to unleash your slumbering creative genius within. What it is,

where it is and how to tap into it. Plus, a specific method that proven to increase your idea power by a full 400% .

Of course, these bullets are for an information product. So what you do with them is arouse curiosity because this is a very potent motivator. It creates what psychologists call "cognitive dissonance," the feeling of mental imbalance.

In other words, bullets throw your brain off kilter until you find out what they're all about.

If you're selling a product that is NOT an information product, your bullets will be different -- they'll summarize all the problems you solve or all the results you get for your customers.

Just today, for example, I reviewed a mailing piece for a potential consulting client who sells textbooks to college professors. I noticed the existing mailing piece didn't have a bullet listing of all the unique advantages of the using textbooks.

As a result, my advice to the client will be to include a sheet in the mailing that lists in bullet form all the advantages of using the textbooks.

If you do email marketing, and you're sending out a "teaser" to your customer list to get prompt inquiries on a new product, you'll want to make the teaser mostly bullets.

Mistake Eight: Losing the prospect with a lackluster opening.

I like to open marketing letters with a single sentence first paragraph . . . followed by a few short paragraphs. This eases people into the marketing letter.

For example, look at the structure of this letter --

Dear Friend,

Are you scared of losing your job?

If you are, then you aren't alone. Just last week, X magazine reported that another x,xxx,xxx people are expected to be fired or downsized off over the next 12 months.

Could it be you? Imagine having to look for another job. All the hassle and heartache, not to mention the financial stress.

But now, you don't have to worry? Why?

Because there's a new book that reveals a proven system for keeping your job. it's called, "The 7 secrets of lasting job security." And I'd like to send it to you FREE for 30 days, for your review.

Notice how it slides you into the copy with a few easy-to-read paragraphs.

There are many ways to open a marketing letter. You can ask a question, elaboration on the headline, make a dramatic statement or tell a story.

But however you do it, you have to make certain of one thing: you're talking to

the prospect about something he/she is highly interested in.

As I mentioned earlier, the one thing you don't want to do is begin by talking about yourself, unless you're telling a story that illustrates how the reader can solve a pressing problem or get a result they want. In which case, you're still really talking about the reader through the lens of your personal example.

Mistake Nine: Neglecting to sell dollars for dimes

In a back issue of this newsletter, I presented the entire idea behind the dollars-for-dimes method of selling. Here's a quickie review: the idea is that selling is either the easiest thing you'll ever do or it's the hardest.

It's the hardest when you sell a dollar of value for a dollar. It's the easiest when you sell a dollar of value for a dime.

How do sell dollars for dimes? The easiest way is to package in problem-solving information with the purchase of your primary product. For example, you can offer 3 or 4 free reports with the purchase of your product.

But you aren't limited to reports. You could offer a toll-free problem solving number, a booklet of ideas, suggestions and tips, one or more audio tapes, a video, the rights to sit in on a conference call, free email consulting, or more.

I like to use free bonus reports or audio tapes as an incentive for acting immediately. And to add the dollars for dimes angle, what you do is add up the value of the free bonus items and show how the value of the free bonuses is equal to or greater than the price of the product.

If you were to stick literally to the dollars-for-dimes theme, your bonuses would be worth ten times the price of the product. In practice, a number of three to five times the value works well.

Summary and Action Plan

OK, that does it for this chapter. What I want you to keep in mind is this -- Don't focus on avoiding these mistakes. Focus on using the FORMULA as I gave it to you in the last issue. But then go over your marketing letter once you've written it and evaluate it according to the information I've given you in this chapter.

That way, you have a double-barrelled tool for making certain you cover all the right bases.

Here's a little checklist to make certain you use all the elements of THE FORMULA. For an explanation of these elements, refer to the last issue of this newsletter.

- Does your headline make a SPECIFIC promise of an end result?
- Does your headline use one of these words -- you, new or how? Does it use one of the proven headline formulas?
- Is your first paragraph only one or two sentences long?
- Does your first sentence talk about the reader and NOT about you, your company or your products?

- As a whole, does your letter focus on you, your company and your products or on your prospect, his/her problems and what he/she wants?
- Do you explain the advantages and benefits the prospect will get ONLY if he or she purchases from you?
- Do you explain the benefit to the prospect of every product feature?
- Do you talk in specifics about the advantages you provide the reader or do you lapse into vague generalities like "dependable, reliable or quality service"?
- Do you present compelling and virtually undeniable proof you can deliver on the big promise you made in your headline?
- Do you summarize the benefits of your offer with numerous bullets?
- When you present your price, do you take the sting out using a bargain appeal?
- Do you give free bonuses or a price discount for acting before a deadline?
- Do you explain why the free bonuses are so valuable to the prospect?
- Do you ask the prospect to NOT make a decision today?