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# *How Leo Tolstoy applies to successful direct mail*

By Hugh Chewning

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In his novel, *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy wrote, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

What Tolstoy was saying is that to be happy, a marriage must succeed on a number of levels including: financial, sexual, how to raise children, in-laws and religion. Every successful couple finds agreement in each of these areas. But an unsuccessful marriage can break apart when there’s disagreement in any one of these areas.

The reasons for happiness are same. The cause of unhappiness is unique.

Can’t we say the same about direct mail?

Every successful direct mail package is alike while an unsuccessful package can fail in its own way.

All successful mailings are the result of thoughtful list selection, a powerful offer, persuasive copy, an effective format and good timing.

Yet a mailing can fail when it lacks any one of these characteristics. We can have the most powerful offer and persuasive copy, for example, but when delivered to the wrong audience, it fails.

Successful direct mail isn’t rocket science.

We don’t need a new book with a clever title, a new buzzword or a 3-hour seminar to tell us what makes direct mail work. It’s the same today as it was 25

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years ago. And it's what will make direct mail successful 25 years from now.

Good list selection. An unbeatable offer. Persuasive copy. And an efficient format. All delivered to the right person at the right time.

Miss any one of these ingredients for success and your mailing fails. But each of them right and your mailing, like Tolstoy's thoughts on a happy family, will enjoy far more success.

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