



17 Ways to Improve Your Direct Mail Offer

By Hugh Chewning

Simply put, your direct mail offer is the “deal” you promise the recipient. It’s what you promise the reader and what you ask in return.

Your offer needs to be specific and to clearly state how it benefits the prospect. It includes the product—or for a fundraiser, the organization’s mission or project—the price or asking amount, terms, incentives, guarantee, etc.

And, of all the components of your mailing—other than the list—the offer is the most important element of your success. If you’re looking for breakthrough results, here are 17 quick ideas to consider:

1. Offer something free—a free gift for responding, a free trial period to test the product, free shipping, etc.
2. Offer something new. Along with “free,” “new” is still one of the most powerful words you can use.
3. “Flip-flop” your offer. Rather than emphasizing “You’re paying \$400 too much for auto insurance,” test “You can save \$400 on your auto insurance.” You can sell a product at “50% off” or offer the reader “Buy one and get one free.” You can offer a product for \$24.99, or test selling it for “\$29.99 with free shipping.” In each of these examples, the cost to the mailer is the same, but repositioning the offer can lead to a big difference in results.

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4. Use specifics. Rather than offering to save the reader \$400, offer to save him or her \$398.43. Although it's less of a savings, the specific dollar amount can attract more attention and give the offer added credibility.
5. For political fundraisers, rather than ask for money to "help elect" a candidate, raise money to "defeat" the opponent.
6. Use goals that people can relate to. For example, rather than raising money to feed millions of hungry people, ask for help to feed one hungry child. Rather than cutting taxes by billions of dollars, offer to save each taxpayer \$1,023.
7. Where possible, don't use percentages. What does it really mean to save 25%? Instead, offer to "Save \$19." Rather than "Sixty percent of all consumers agree," use "Three of every five consumers agree."
8. Test a premium. If you're already offering a premium, test a new one. (See "[Why Test Premiums...](#)")
9. Test new prices and/or asking amounts.

Provide a guarantee. Everyone can offer a guarantee; if you don't think you can, you shouldn't be selling the product. Even a nonprofit can offer a guarantee to use the donor's money wisely or promise to refund the donor's initial contribution if they ever become dissatisfied with the organization.

10. Include a trial offer. Like the guarantee, a trial offer limits the prospect's risk and reduces their concerns about responding.
11. Make the offer "For a Limited Time Only." By including a specific deadline in your offer, you can force the prospect into making a decision.
12. Offer "Early Bird" savings or gifts. ("If you act within the next 10 days, you get...")
13. Test "Yes," "No," or "Maybe" options with peel-off stickers that the recipient transfers to the response form, or include the options with simple check-off boxes. Giving the prospect Yes or No options typically increases response. And adding a Maybe option often boosts response even more.
14. Offering a "Charter Membership" gives the prospect added recognition

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and is a simple way to boost response for a new organization. Also, consider offering an “Introductory Price” as a cost-effective way to acquire new customers.

15. Offer a “Bill Me Later” option or installment payments. The “Bill Me Later” option is common for subscriptions, and offering installment payments can make large-ticket items seem more affordable.
16. Regardless of your offer, sell only one thing at a time. This is one of the oldest rules of sales—ignoring it can prove costly.

You often get the best results by combining two or more unique offers, so don’t be afraid to mix and match from the above list. If you find a premium that works, perhaps adding free shipping or a discount will increase the mailing’s net revenue even more.

And this brings up an important point. The measurement of success is net dollars. If you need to increase your mailing’s cost to sweeten the offer, don’t let the higher cost be the one thing that stops you. If you believe the new offer has a reasonable chance of increasing the mailing’s net return, it’s worth testing. Focus on net dollars. (See “[The What, When and How of Direct Mail Testing](#).”)

When you need breakthrough results, test your offer. Other than careful list selection, nothing will make a bigger difference in your success.

About the author:

Hugh Chewning is a direct marketing copywriter, strategist and consultant who helps consumer, nonprofit and business-to-business organizations acquire, retain and cross-sell customers. Located in Irvine, California, Hugh provides tested and proven tips on how to boost your campaign’s profitability in his free blog, [Direct Mail Insight](#). And for information on his free, no-risk package critique, visit his web site at www.cdmdirect.com.