



Your Direct Mail Letter's “John Hancock” Can Help Drive Results

By Hugh Chewning

Your letter signer is a person with a story to tell. A story that may give you new ways to relate to your mailing's recipients.

Successful direct mail is a conversation between two people – the letter signer and the mailing's recipient.

The more information you have about the mailing's recipient, the better the conversation you can have.

It's like going to a party and meeting someone new. You can captivate his or her attention for a few moments by talking about yourself. But if you want to hold their attention, you need to ask about their interests and direct the conversation toward them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Hancock' in a cursive script. The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large loop at the end.

**Knowing Your Letter Signer's Story Can Help
Drive Results**

This is why successful copywriters study mailing lists.

Understanding the demographics, interests and history of the mailing's recipients is the *listening* part of the direct mail conversation.

But your letter also has a *voice*. It's the voice of the letter signer.

The copywriter speaks for the letter signer. And by taking time to understand the “speaker's” background and experiences, the writer can provide new reasons for the reader to accept the letter signer as “one of us.”

Incorporating elements of the signer's life and language into the copy builds creditability and trust. Plus, it builds interest that pulls the recipient into

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the letter and keeps them reading. And the longer the reader holds onto your letter, the more likely they are to respond.

For example ...

- For an insurance offer, I learned that the letter signer had 7 children. Because people known to have children were a significant portion of our mailing lists, I dropped the traditional, more formal copy approach and wrote:

“... with 7 children of my own, I wonder what their future will be like once I’m gone. I like to think I’ve provided them with a good life, but ...”

The copy went on to describe the policy’s benefits. But early in the letter, I gave readers a reason to identify with the letter signer.

Did it work? Pretests recorded 62% more responses for this personalized copy approach.

- For a membership organization of veterans, I could – and did – write about the benefits of membership. But by quickly mentioning the signer’s experiences at boot camp, readers – who were veterans themselves – saw they shared a common experience with the letter signer, and they responded.

Renewal rates improved by 79%.

Getting to know even the most basic facts about the letter signer can pay big dividends. It helps copywriters write a better story and adds credibility to your offer.

Typically, facts about the letter signer are easy to obtain. The best way is to ask for an interview. Otherwise, I ask for a biography. And if I can’t get that, there’s usually an abundance of information on the Internet.

Check the organization’s website first. If the letter signer is the head of a business unit or organization, you’ll usually find a brief biography. Then search for speeches, articles, interviews and commentaries.

Whatever you find, make note of any themes, phrases or personal experiences that you can use to build rapport with the reader. You’ll gain authenticity in the words you write and discover new stories to relate to your readers.

So as important as list selection is to your mailing’s success – and nothing is more important – take time to gather background information about your

letter signer. It will give a more poignant, genuine touch to your copy and help drive results.

Your thoughts?

About the author:

Hugh Chewning is a direct mail specialist providing copywriting, strategy and consulting for consumer, nonprofit and business-to-business groups. For more free tips on how to increase your direct mail profits, visit his website, www.cdmdirect.com and subscribe to his blog, *Direct Mail Insight*.

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