

W25

"Conscience is that little voice that tells us someone may be watching."

—H.L. Mencken

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6 ways to avoid depressing response to your invoices

Initial response matters, says Editor-In-Chief Hallie Mummert of TARGET MARKETING—but it is only half the story in evaluating a mailing's success.

Pay-up—almost always generated by an invoicing series addressed to respondents—is equally important, or more so, say the green-eyeshade folks. Unfortunately, many invoices actually depress response, Mummert writes.

She quotes freelance copywriter Barbara Harrison and renewals/invoice expert David Rosen, who advise avoiding several common response-killing invoicing mistakes:

- **Never** let your customer think that he or she might already have paid your invoice.
 - Harrison strongly counsels against invoice copy that apologetically suggests that your invoice may have crossed in the mail with the respondent's payment of a previous bill. It simply provides an excuse for the respondent to toss the invoice.
- **Do not** jazz up invoices with entertaining material, Rosen urges.
 - If your goal is to achieve a paid-up order, he says, don't include anything that detracts from the point of your request.
 - Marketers should follow the practices of companies that live or die by effective billing—utilities, credit-card issuers, and insurance companies, for examples.
 - All invoices are mailed first class, he adds. So make sure you print that information on your invoice's outer envelope.
- **Do not** bore your recipient, Harrison says. Your invoicing mailers should vary in paper stock and the colors of your outer envelopes. It can make a positive difference in the attention your recipients pay to your bills.
 - Rosen thinks that later efforts in your invoicing series should not feature the word "invoice" on the outer envelope. Nor should you display your company name—which gives your customer a reason to discard your invoice. And, if you send another invoice after the "final" one, your credibility is dead.
- **Similarly, do not threaten** to use of a collection agency, unless you plan to hire one. It's not legal to threaten the involvement of an outside party if you don't intend to use one, says Rosen.
 - More, he notes, you sabotage the credibility of future billing efforts if you refer to a collection agency that never shows up.
 - If you do plan to use a third party to collect unpaid accounts, alert your customer to the fact at least two bills ahead of time, he advises.
- **Do not up-sell or cross-sell** late in your billing series, Harrison says. Once past the second or third invoice, she says, the advertiser should focus solely on getting paid.

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