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**Wednesday
Morning
Fax**
from
**The
Castle
Press**

6 ways weasel words sabotage advertising

Herschell Gordon Lewis, the famous marketing sage of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the author of 27 books, recently published an article in *Direct* magazine on legalistic qualifiers that deter response to advertising.

Headlined "Up To No Good," his article pinpointed how mealy-mouthed phrases such as "up to" damage an advertiser's credibility, trigger complaints, and water down sales pitches. Lewis cites these 6 examples:

■ **You may have won a cash prize of up to \$4,500!**

Maybe, and maybe not, Lewis says. He notes that your prize could be \$1, and the statement still would be literally true. "It's harmless enough, except for its contribution to the reader's overall skepticism about advertising offers."

■ **"Save up to \$22,000*."**

This copy, Lewis grumps, came from a mailing by a Lincoln-Mercury dealer. But the mailing never explained the \$22,000. And the asterisk dangled there, referring to nothing.

■ **Fake check mailing for "The sum of up to six thousand and 00/100 dollars"**

"Yeah, take that one to the bank," Lewis comments.

■ **Certificate for "Up to \$1,080" in phone minutes**

Buried in the fine print, Lewis writes, the reader can discover that the minutes are calculated at a very costly 45¢ each.

The Castle Press website supports direct file uploads to save you time and money.

■ **"Up to \$100 cash back"**

Bell South made this offer in a space ad. "In what appears to be two-point type," Lewis complains, "the phone company explains that it is offering a \$25 coupon to customers who sign up for premium services."

■ **"Earn up to 7,500 bonus miles inside*."**

A mailing from Frontier Airlines trumpeted this offer on its outer envelope. "Sigh," Lewis remarks. "The combination of that deadly word, 'earn' coupled with 'up to' and that cursed asterisk, bode no good."

Instead of "up to," Lewis, an internationally respected copywriter, suggests using the phrase "as much as." The difference may strike you as subtle, he observes, "but it's no more insignificant than the difference between salesmanship and duplicity."

In January, according to *The New York Times*, the Federal Communications Commission fined an Orange County company \$5.4 million for 489 violations, at \$11,000 a pop, for illegally faxing unsolicited advertisements.

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