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Press

10 ways to boost mail response

Direct mail produces orders or inquiries that can result in orders by motivating sales prospects to make conscious decisions to respond. However, Nancy Harhut of Boston's respected Hill, Holiday advertising agency, urges you to dig deeper into what moves people off the dime.

- **Respect for authority.** People tend to reply to mailings that seem professional, serious, and official, especially if "from" a widely respected person.
- **Curiosity.** Original, intriguingly expressed offers almost always generate higher response than dull, run-of-the-mill, plain-vanilla propositions.
- **Use of key words,** "Free," "now," "introducing," and other magic words work wonders in direct mail.

In your quest for originality, resist the temptation to abandon the tried and true. If it isn't broke, don't fix it.

- **Individual recognition.** Relevant personalization can lift response by several hundred percentage points.

Massage your database records to uncover what makes your prospects secrete hormones. Go beyond the obvious — names and addresses, for instance. Look at past behavior for clues to spark present action.

- **Involvement.** Devices such as peel-off-stick-on labels raise response because people like to touch things. That makes them active participants in a mailing,

Direct mail on average generates a 2.15% response rate for advertisers who seek orders or contributions

—Direct Marketing Association

not just passive eyeballs.

- **Signals that trigger response.**

Ms. Harhut says that most people say "yes" almost automatically to certain cue devices (coupons, for instance).

- **Offers that appeal to self-interest.**

Every part of your mailing should stress benefits. Cut out anything that does not.

- **Pain relief.** People are much more likely to respond to offers that promise to solve uncomfortable problems than claims to produce positive results.

For instance, Ms. Harhut advises, "Are you losing key clients?" most likely will outpull "Want to sign up more customers?"

- **Forbidden fruit.** When a limit is imposed on an offer — "No orders accepted after December 23," for example, or "Offer good for first 1,000 customers only" — it compels people to buy more, sooner.

- **Do what other people do.** Almost every customer considers himself an independent thinker. But most customers feel safer when they make the popular choice.

It almost never hurts — so it almost always helps — to include a long list of happy customers in your mailing.

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