

Benchmarks

16 DIRECT-MAIL WATCHWORDS

The late Chicago agency head and author Bob Stone wrote that in his more than 30 years in the marketing trenches these 16 direct-mail principles held true more than 90% of the time:

- **Your best customers** — probably only about 20% of your mail-derived total — will produce around 80% of your repeat orders.
- **A customer's second order** is more important than his first transaction with you, because a two-time buyer is at least twice as likely as a one-time purchaser to buy again.
- **Test "hotline" names.** If they don't pull, any other list select probably will not work.
- **Merge/purge names** from two or more lists will outpull names from any single list in which they appear.
- **Mailing to any list overlay** will boost response.
- **A follow-up mailing** to a list within 50 days of your first drop will pull 40% to 50% of the initial mailing.
- **Optional Yes/No** offers consistently generate higher responses than a "Yes" choice alone.
- **Negative-option offers** will outpull positive offers by at least two to one.
- **A credit-card option** will outperform cash-with-order transactions by two to one. In **catalog** selling, it will leverage orders upward by at least 20%.
- **Time-limited offers** citing a specific date outpull no-time-limit propositions almost always.
- **Free-gift offers** consistently produce higher response than discount offers.
- **Self mailers** certainly are less costly to produce than envelope-enclosed mailings, but virtually never generate more orders.
- **A pre-print of your next space ad**, in an envelope that also includes a letter and a response device and a reply envelope, will generate 50% more sales than a post-print advertisement.
- **A brand-new catalog** mailed to your existing customers will outperform a cold list by 400% to 800%.
- **Your average dollar value** of an order is easier to increase than your response rate.
- **In business-to-business mail**, the closure rate from qualified leads is two to four times as effective as cold calling.



The average conversion rate for a two-step mail promotion is just under 1%.

— Direct Marketing Association

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