

## Alan Rosenspan's Improve Your Response Newsletter

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\* \* \* \* 60th Edition \* \* \* \*

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Dear Friends,

It has been 9 years since I first I started this newsletter – and frankly, it hasn't changed much.

My purpose, then and now, is to share what I have learned about direct marketing, creativity, what works and what doesn't work – *and why*.

I wanted to give you specific ideas you can use, books you may want to read, mistakes to avoid, and also a bit of inspiration from time to time.

So far, I have written 527 pages (132,552 words – not counting these.) Without the pressure of an editor confining me to a formal style of writing, I've been able to talk directly to you in a relaxed and personal way.

Based on the feedback I've received over the years, most of you have enjoyed this. In fact, over the course of 10 years, we have received less than 70 opt-outs.

Now, this is our 60<sup>th</sup> issue – and I want to thank you for subscribing. In these days of ever-increasing blogs, countless newsletters and a tsunami of web-based information, I truly appreciate that you have continued to let me into your offices and homes.

All the best, Alan

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## SIPA Secrets

I just gave two presentations at the SIPA International Conference in June.

SIPA is the Specialized Information Publishers Association, and I was fortunate enough to attend a presentation by Jeff Pence of *The Farm Journal*.

As you may recall, *The Farm Journal* prints over 12,000 different versions of their magazine every month. Each version is a different combination of highly-targeted editorial and advertising.

*The Farm Journal* also has a number of highly successful websites, some paid and some free. Here's what they've learned about what works and what doesn't work.

- The goal of their sites are to "Engage. Educate. Entertain." Only then can they get you to visit, stay on the site, and make a purchase.
- The more user-generated content the better. (This is the "Engage" part) First of all, it's free. Second, it can be the most read part of your website.

For example, *The Farm Journal* has a blog called "crop Comments" where people write in their experiences with bringing in the corn, potatoes, etc. Sounds pretty dull to me – but farmers love it.

- They also have a section on "Ideas for \$100. or less" which is user-generated and gets great readership.
- Humor works. (That's the "Entertain" part) *The Farm Journal* has a new cartoon every day. It gives people a reason to visit the site each day. You may not be able to do a cartoon everyday, but a joke or humorous quote might work just as well.
- Analyze everything. Jeff recommended Google Analytics. This is a free service that tracks all of your referrals, ads, search engines, e-mail promotions and more.

I've signed up for this for my website – and I'll let you know how it goes. For more information, just visit <http://www.google.com/analytics>

And if you already use this service, I'd love to hear from you about your experience.

Jeff Spence also had a number of "e-pitfalls" to avoid. These included:

- "Just because you can, doesn't mean you should." You need to carefully consider every aspect of your web marketing and decide if it really contributes to your brand, readership or revenue.
- Be careful with technology. Make sure every link works, every blog can accept comments, and you have ways to make sure your site doesn't get over-loaded and crash.

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## **Deming on Direct**

Dr. Edwards Deming originated the idea of Total Quality Management (TQM) back in the 1950's.

This was a new philosophy that made everyone in a company

responsible for improving processes, products, services and even the environment in which they work.

Ironically, Deming's ideas were largely ignored by U.S. companies but embraced by Japanese firms.

"Made in Japan" used to guarantee shoddy workmanship, but in a few short years, following Deming's advice, Japanese companies began manufacturing superior products such as automobiles and electronics that soon dominated the world market.

Deming was a process-oriented consultant, who believed that every process could be improved. However, he also believed that "You can't manage what you don't measure."

*He should have been a direct marketer.*

We measure everything we do (or at least, we should.) And then we try to do it better, cheaper or both. And it all starts with establishing a "control."

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## **How to Beat the Control**

As you know, a "control" is your best-performing direct mail package, e-mail or print ad. It pulls the most response, or the best cost-per-response.

You may not know why it's working so well – but that's not important. What is important is that you keep using it.

Not until you get tired of it. Not when you hear your salespeople say "we're bored by it." You keep using it until you do something that works even better.

Some companies have used the same control mailing for years. The world record is held by The Wall Street Journal whose control letter "Two Young Men" was unbeaten for over 30 years!

You should always try to improve your response – but beating your control can be difficult. That's why I take so much pride when I am able to do so for a client of mine.



It could be a consultant. It could be a focus group. It could even be a business associate, friend or spouse.

You know your company and your products backwards and forwards. You will read volumes into every line and see things that may not be there. That's perfectly understandable.

But having an outside person review your work gives you an entirely different perspective.

Ask them what main messages they got. Ask them what are the benefits. Ask them about the offer.

And don't coach them – because you're not going to be there when your prospects read your piece; it's going to need to stand on it's own.

## **2. Determine the main benefit of the product**

There are usually a dozen benefits of every product and service – but you need to figure out which is the most important one.

For Life Line Screening, the benefits were: the screenings are painless; they take less than 10 minutes each; you don't have to remove your clothing; they cost much, much less than you'd have to pay at a hospital or medical center.

But there's another benefit that's far more important – Life Line Screening can save your life. And that was the benefit we focused on to beat their control.

## **3. Sell the offer, not the product**

Actually, there's a step to take before this – make sure you have a great offer.

I've written extensively about offers in the past, so I won't go into great detail here. But the three main things to remember are:

- Offer something money can't buy. It could be information. It could be a premium – but it should be

something your prospects can't (easily) get anywhere else.

- Offer something that accelerates the sale. You can offer everyone an I-phone and you'll probably get a great response. But you might not create many sales. People may respond just to get that I-phone.
- Offer something specific. More information a free brochure just doesn't cut it. Instead, offer a free 32-page brochure that includes 10 mistakes to avoid, 7 ways to choose, etc.

In many packages I have reviewed, the offer is either (A) weak (B) not featured strongly enough, or worse, (C) both.

For Scotts Lawn Service, we took their existing offer of a Free Lawn Analysis and made that the hero of the package. It's been unbeaten for five years.

#### **4. Apply "Best Practice" direct marketing techniques**

This is the area where an experienced company can make the most difference.

As David Ogilvy said, "The difference between a good surgeon and a great surgeon has nothing to do with their hands. A great surgeon *knows more* than a good surgeon."

Many companies, and even agencies, create direct marketing without knowing what's been proven to work, and what doesn't.

By applying "Best Practices" which we've learned from working with dozens of the most successful companies, we can almost always improve response. Here are three examples:

- An envelope package outpulls a self-mailer. If you're using self-mailers, you should test this as soon as possible.
- People have little time these days. Pulling your benefits out to the left-hand margin of the letter allows people to scan them quickly and always improves readership and response.

- The back of the letter is usually wasted. Why not use it for customer testimonials, a Q&A, or a summary of your benefits?

These are all proven techniques which have worked over and over again – and there are dozens like them.

## **5. Go one step further**

These days, it's not enough to simply get the basics right. You need a creative spark – a big idea – a great letter – to stand out and make a difference.

Our control for The Wine of the Month Club does just that. Every wine mailing looks and sounds the same, "We choose only the best grapes, from the most exclusive vineyards, at the perfect time..."

My letter took the opposite approach. It featured a provocative quote from Cellar master Paul Kalemkarian:

**"Why I reject nearly  
9 out of every 10 wines"**

...and why you should do the same.

It hasn't been beaten in two years.

Finally, this isn't part of my 5-Step Solution, but it is dramatically important in every direct marketing communication. And that's to ask the person to respond.

Sounds self evident? Many packages fail to do enough of this – they just assume people will understand.

So ask for the response. Ask more than once. Ask in a prominent place. If I've learned anything in life and direct marketing, it's you can't get what you want unless you ask.

Hopefully, these steps will help you beat your control. And of course, we would be delighted to help. Our costs are very competitive; we're easy to work with; and we can usually significantly improve response.

*And that's an example of asking a prospect (you) to respond!*

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## **Good Deeds**

In my seminars, I always stress that you should never make fun of your prospects or customers, even a good-natured way (if such a thing is possible.)

The Smile Train is an excellent example of a better approach. As you may know, this charity provides free surgery for children who are born with a cleft lip.

To quote from their ad, "It gives desperate children not just a new smile – but a new life."

The Smile Train does so many things right. They include testimonials in their advertising and direct mail; they tell you exactly how much your donation will help; they include suggested donations and even a box that reads:

\$ \_ We'll gratefully accept any amount.

But their recent advertisement went even further. The headline read:

**Of All the Good Deeds You Do  
In Your Entire Life,  
This Might Just be The Best**

They recognize that you are probably a person who has done good deeds in the past (otherwise, you wouldn't be reading the ad.) And they want you to know that they know it.

There are many clever headlines for non-profits. The Boston Globe Santa Fund ran a great ad last year. Their headline was "What do you give to a child who has nothing?"

But The Smile Train isn't trying to be clever – just successful.

And you can accomplish the same thing by making your

customers feel important, valued, and better than everyone else.

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## What's Your Policy?

Liberty Mutual bet the company on this idea. They based their entire marketing campaign on making people feel good about themselves and their actions.

Liberty Mutual is a Boston-based insurance company that has been enormously successful in recent years. Before that, they had very little name recognition.

And they were being outspent on advertising by the dominant players by a margin of 5 to 1.

"All of this was made even more daunting by the very low degree of interest and in particular, trust, the consumer has in the insurance category," Senior Vice President Steven Sullivan admitted to *BusinessWeek* magazine.

"We decided the best way to get this idea across initially was to celebrate acts of personal responsibility. And it demonstrated that when people do the right thing, one good turn begets another, making life better for everyone."

The first commercial elicited more than 3,000 positive e-mails including this one, which seemed to sum up the impact it was having on people: "I gained a lot of respect for your company...your commercials showed what little things people can do to show care for others and make the world a more civilized place."

The result was that in 2006, the first full year the spot ran, Liberty Mutual had the greatest growth in its history. Net premiums written grew 10%.

Liberty Mutual also took advantage of social media, with a blog at [whatsyourpolicy.com](http://whatsyourpolicy.com). They posed an ethical question every week, and received thousands of responses, answers and even a donation!

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## Non-Event

The New England Quilt Museum – of which my wife is a proud member – recognized that the economy might not be ideal for an annual fund-raising event.

*So they held a non-event.*

They sent out an invitation-sized mailing, which included the following copy:

“The Board of Trustees of the New England Quilt Museum cordially invite you to our first annual non-event in honor of Ms. Sew and Sew.

- There will be no cocktails at 6:00 pm
- There will be no dinner at 7:30 pm
- There will be no speaker before dessert
- Black tie is completely optional

“Mindful of the challenging economic times, we pledge that the cost of running this non-event will be kept to a minimum. One hundred percent of your donation will support our exhibitions, educational programs and outreach activities.

*Just think –*

*No heels to wobble on  
No hair appointment  
No schedule to juggle!*

“We invite you to join us by staying home, watching the Red Sox, going to the beach, or working on your favorite quilt.

“The cost? Only \$75 for a non-attending individual, \$125 for a non-attending couple. Plus your name will not be printed on a list at the door and will not be included in a printed program.”

*I hope it's a sell-out, don't you?*

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## **Opt out, Opt in, Opportunity**

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Thank you, Alan

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