



101 Ways to *Double* Your Response Rates!

Ivan Levison

Direct Response Copywriting

Dear Marketer in Search of Higher Profits...

Is it really possible to double the response rates you're currently getting from your email, direct mail, Web offers, and advertising?

The answer is a definite "YES!"

Is it easy?

The answer is a definite "NO!"

Sadly, there is no magic bullet, no abracadabra that you can intone over your copy to guarantee that it will make you money. But there is something powerful that you can do to improve the results you're getting.

You can try to improve every single aspect of your copywriting. That's right. When it comes to direct response copywriting, the secret of success lies in handling all the tiny details of whatever you're writing, carefully and skillfully.

Yes. The little things really do count. And if you handle a whole bunch of details correctly, together they can deliver huge improvements in your response rates. How huge? Let me give you an example.

A while ago I got this note from the Direct Marketing Manager at Lawson Software. He wrote, "Thanks for your *highly* motivating email letter that beat our control by 400%! Outstanding! You are Lawson's proven money-maker!"

How did I manage to quadruple Lawson Software's response rate? By having internalized a huge collection of data points about what works in direct response and applying them appropriately.

This report provides you with just 101 of the techniques I use every day on behalf of my valued clients. But of course, there are many hundreds more. And if you'd like my personal help in writing your email, direct mail, Web copy, or advertising, give me a call any time at (415) 461-0672. Or just call to say hello.

In any event, here are 101 ways to improve your direct response rates. Keep them in mind next time you are writing or evaluating direct response copy, and watch your response rates soar!

With all best wishes for direct response success!



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Want to turbocharge your response rates?

Here are battle-tested ways to improve your...

Envelopes

In a direct mail "package," the job of the envelope is to get opened. Here are some ways to get that important job done...

1 Don't feature your corporate name and address if it doesn't mean anything to the reader. For example, there's a good chance that the words "Quicken" or "QuickBooks" mean more to prospects than the name "Intuit." That's why it's O.K. to put your corporate name, return address, and logo on the back of the envelope. NOTE: Did you know that the only time postal regulations require you to include identification on the envelope is when you're mailing at the low rates available to fundraisers?

2 Load up your envelope with copy. There's no law that says teaser copy has to be just one line long. A while ago I completed a direct mail package for SunSoft that featured teaser copy fifty words long. Yes. That's a lot. But I was confident that our carefully targeted readers would be interested in the benefits of Solaris software. On that basis I made the decision to be aggressive on the envelope. It worked just fine.

3 Don't use any teaser copy at all. This is the exact opposite of the advice I gave you immediately above. So why the complete contradiction? Because there ARE times when a blank envelope will work just fine. If there's no writing on the envelope the reader HAS to open it in order to check out the contents. Which works best? LOTS of copy or NO copy on the envelope? There simply isn't the space for me to answer this in detail, so let me leave you with this general rule: For most purposes, when you're mailing bulk rate, give envelope copy a shot first.

4 Try using a different size envelope. If you're locked in to using #10 envelopes, try testing another size. The obvious choice is the 6 x 9 format but consider using a 6-1/2 x 9-1/2. It's a standard size too, and only costs a little more. Anything you can do to stand out from the other letters in the pile is a plus.

5 Give a window envelope a try. Very often a window envelope, with the personalized Business Reply Card showing through, will pull better than a closed face envelope. Consider giving this a test.

6 Use more than one window. There's no law that says an envelope can only have a single window. Sometimes a little second window can be used to grab the reader's attention. When should you use an extra one or two windows? When you have a four-color brochure or reply device, and can let some of the provocative copy peek through. Don't settle for what you've always done in the past. Stretch yourself and test something new. Who knows? It just might be a real money-maker!

7 Use the space on the back of the envelope. A lot of the envelopes I see completely ignore the back surface. This can be a mistake. You see, you never know how your package is going to fall on someone's desk. That's why it makes good sense to use both sides of the envelope if your printing budget permits.

Sales/Lead-generation Letters

The most important part of any direct mail package is the letter. It's where the real selling takes place. Create a persuasive, motivating letter and watch response rates take off..

8 Try using a headline above the salutation. A headline (boxed or not) can grab the reader's attention and pull them into your pitch with a terrific benefit. You can fill up to a third of the first page with your headline/subheadline intro. If the letter is personalized or more formal, consider dropping the headline.

9 Is it worth dating the letter? If you're going first class, date the letter. If you're going out bulk rate, you don't have to. The last thing you want is for your letter to arrive way past the date you've put at the top your letter.

10 Try personalizing the letter? Yes. Personalization can improve response rates but there are important cost issues to consider. If you're writing to "C-level" executives, personalize for sure.

11 Use a "Johnson Box." It's a centered rectangular box placed at the very top of the letter above the salutation. The Johnson Box includes copy that highlights the offer.

12 Put the right information in the Johnson Box. What should you include there? The offer. The main product benefit. The phone number to call or the URL to visit. The expiration date of the offer. The guarantee. Mix and match these as appropriate.

13 Use the Johnson Box in the right kind of letter. If you're writing a non-personalized letter that's going out bulk rate in a window envelope using teaser copy, a Johnson Box will fit right in. After all, it's part of the "classic package" format. (Don't scoff at it. It still works!) But if you're writing a first class letter, in a close-faced envelope riding first class, the Johnson Box will look cheap and out of place.

14 Make the Johnson Box the right size. If you're mailing an 8 1/2" x 11" letter (folded twice down to 3 5/8") you want the Johnson Box and AT LEAST the salutation line to appear above the fold. 2" deep by 3 1/2" wide is reasonable, but there's no firm rule here.

15 Use an appropriate box shape. You can make the box out of asterisks (*****) or use a fine-ruled line. For added impact, throw a screened-back second color inside the box. It's also perfectly fine to omit the actual ruled line and simply run a bold headline and subheadline at the top of the letter.

16 Use a box in the body of the letter. There's no law that says you can't throw your guarantee into a small box somewhere within the letter. Or a few testimonials. Or a short excerpt from a glowing product review.

17 Begin your headline with "Introducing" or "Announcing." Introducing a high-performance scanner for just \$49.95! Announcing a whole new way to edit color images!

18 Start your headline with "Now." Now the hottest PDA on the market is yours at half price! Now you can try our brand new management tools risk free!

19 Start your headline with "At last" or "Finally." At last! A network security solution with all the features you've been looking for! Finally, a proven way to boost Web seminar attendance!

20 Start your headline with "How to." How to back up your PC in half the time. How to slash the cost of managing your network.

21 Start your headline with "Why." Why you should call for a free Virus Alert Report. Why we're offering a no-hassle three-year warranty absolutely FREE!

22 Use the right "tone." Should the tone of your letter be conversational or more formal? It all depends, but generally a friendly, human, conversational tone of voice does work best. One of the biggest problems that beginning copywriters have is that they get uptight and start sounding pompous. Their work lacks personality and energy.

23 Start your letter the right way. Jump right in with enthusiasm and for goodness sakes, get to the point quickly. You should always talk about the offer on the first page and start hammering away at benefits.

24 Use graphic tricks to increase response rates. A letter should be inviting and easy to read. Use short paragraphs and don't be afraid to indent or use bullets. Underlining should be done sparingly. A second color can add punch, but don't splash it everywhere. A little goes a long way!

25 Go out in a blaze of glory. When you end your letter, feel free to invoke the deities or promise eternal life. But please... don't leave them with a flat: "To order, call 1-800-123-1234 or fax us your order card." That's flat and lifeless.

26 Be sure to add a "P.S." Postscripts get very high readership. Omit them at your peril.

27 Don't be afraid of writing a long P.S. If you're communicating important news or information, and can keep the reader with you, don't worry about length. I have written postscripts five sentences long and wouldn't cut a word.

28 Use underlinings or your second color. To make your postscript jump even more, grab your bag of tricks and pull out some graphic winners! Boldface, italics, handwriting, you name it. (As always, remember — a little goes a long way!)

29 Emphasize the call-to-action. What's one of the biggest problems a copywriter has to contend with? Inertia! So don't forget to get the prospect to act. Add the 800-number, right there in the postscript.

30 Don't simply call your guarantee a guarantee. That's flat and boring. If you're the copywriter, give your guarantee a little personality or individuality. Call it an "Iron-clad, no-questions-asked guarantee." Or a "No-risk (really!) guarantee." Or a "30-day unconditional Guarantee." Anything to brighten it up a little bit.

31 Make the guarantee as strong as possible. If you can live with a 30-day guarantee, why not consider going out to 45 days or 60 days? It definitely is worth testing. If you have few problems with returns, make the guarantee stronger and stronger.

32 Be clear. Be honest. Your guarantee should spell things out in simple terms and should never scare people away with legalistic clauses or "fine print." You know those T.V. commercials that local car dealers run? The ones with the eight sentences of unreadable type that flash on the screen for a nanosecond at the end? We want our guarantee to do just the opposite and make an unqualified promise of satisfaction.

33 Use a border around the guarantee. Never, ever bury a guarantee in body copy! That's a great way to lose one of the most compelling elements of your mailing. The guarantee should float as a separate element surrounded by a corny border, or at the least, a one-point ruled line. You want your guarantee to jump out and get read. Many companies ignore this rule and miss out. Don't let yours be one of them!

34 Try to offer more than one guarantee. Sometimes you can split a guarantee into several guarantees and thereby add value. For example, I wrote an ad for an Advanced Micro Devices chip that included a triple guarantee! The first offered a 30-day moneyback refund. The second offered a lifetime product performance guarantee. The third was a moneyback software compatibility guarantee. Now THAT'S an offer that overcomes sales resistance! In fact, I got a nice letter from Glen Burchers, the AMD Marketing Manager, who wrote to tell me that "in terms of reader response, this ad has been the most successful that AMD has ever run."

35 Include the guarantee on the reply device. Don't forget to make sure that your terrific guarantee is repeated on your Business Reply Card, coupon, brochure, wherever. Again, many companies fail to make the most of their guarantee, which is a pity.

"Lift" Letters

Definition: A lift letter is an additional letter added to a direct mail package. It's typically a small, folded slip of paper. And it works. It lifts response and so is known as a "lift letter." (You may also see it referred to as a "publisher's letter" or a "second letter.") Here's how to use one...

36 Keep it small. You don't want your lift letter to fight with other parts of the package. Therefore, stick with modest dimensions. 5" x 7" or 7" x 7" folded once works well. Or try 8"x 5 1/2" folded into thirds.

37 Fold your lift letter. Why? Because a headline on the cover by itself builds interest. And because the act of opening the letter creates a subtle form of involvement with your mailing.

38 Stick to one point. Because you're dealing with a small space, don't try to write a tome. Say one thing, but say it well and forcefully. Maybe you should hammer away at your guarantee. Or tell a "time is running out" story. Whatever you do, be sure to keep it simple!

39 Keep it personal. Remember: a lift letter is a real one-on-one communication — a final word from one human being to another. So keep it personal and human. That may mean using handwriting on the cover or "lightening up" on the tone of the copy. A lift letter is not the place to overwhelm the reader. It's the place to entice, cajole, entreat, and sometimes even do a little creative begging!

40 Have it signed by an "authority." Often it works well to have the lift letter signed by someone with a higher corporate status than the person who signed the major selling letter in the package. For example, if the main letter is signed by a Sales Manager, the lift letter can come from the Senior Vice President.

41 Don't forget the P.S. As I've said above, postscripts get read like crazy so consider including one in your lift letter. Note: the P.S. can be handwritten for a personal touch.

Brochures/Flyers

Your brochure, flyer, or pamphlet is a vitally important part of your direct mail package. It's the place to give prospects all the factual information they need to act. Here are some important points to keep in mind...

42 Keep the cover simple. Forget about trying to do too much on the front cover. All you need on that surface is one clean, clear concept that positions the material that's about to follow. Stay away from the clichés that everybody else is cranking out. Please, no more "committed to service," "dedicated to meeting your needs," etc.

43 Design the cover for maximum impact. Use large type on the cover of your fulfillment piece. That way, when you reproduce it on an envelope, letter, or HTML e-mail, it will be easy to read.

44 Give the cover a compelling title. For starters, instead of calling your document a White Paper, make the offer more exciting and lively. The goal is to make prospects feel that they **MUST** read what you've got waiting for them!

WRONG: *"Free White Paper on Network Security."* RIGHT: *"Get your Free Guide: How to stop hackers, crackers, snoops, and kooks from bringing down your network (They're trying to do it right now!)"*

45 Tell the whole story. The flyer's the place to do a total selling job. You simply can't do it in the letter. There just isn't room unless you're willing to go with a really long letter, and these days letters rarely exceed two page. The flyer is the place to explain the product in detail, overcome objections, and ask for the sale.

46 Consider keeping the inside front cover empty. It gives a brochure a nice, open look. White space never killed anybody. You don't have to jam in a message every chance you get. Besides, since the reader holds that easily-curved cover page at an angle when reading, it's not the place to go into excruciating detail about your product or service's many benefits. If you **DO** keep the inside cover clean, the facing page (page 3) is a great place to write some introductory, lead-in copy. It's the perfect spot to do a welcoming message, or provide a brief overview of what lies ahead in the piece. Keep the copy here short. No one reading your introduction wants to dive into *Moby Dick*.

47 Deal in spreads, not individual pages. With a nice-sized piece you can run your graphics across two pages and make use of the sweeping scale a brochure spread provides. Why organize your piece around individual pages when you've got visual impact built into the medium? Again, don't be afraid of white space. Your designer will love you!

48 Make sure the flyer's "look" is a match for the target audience. Obvious but often overlooked. If you're selling a low-end drawing program to a casual computer user, your flyer will look different than if you're selling a high-priced diagnostic tool to an MIS manager. The important point: Each flyer must capture the personality of the product.

49 Use graphics the right way. Make sure photography shows the product to best advantage. If you're selling software, don't settle for shots of the box or the screen. HUMANIZE your piece with some photos of people using the product. Another thing you can do to enliven your flyer is to put a talented illustrator or cartoonist to work to brighten things up. She or he can add a lot of punch and pizzazz to your flyer, envelope, BRC, you name it.

50 Don't forget the subheadlines. They're a great way to break up copy and give the reader a chance to see where you're headed should they not want to read every single word of body copy. A subheadline can make an emphatic statement, ask a question, or be playful or dead serious as the situation requires.

51 Use call-outs or captions to highlight reasons for requesting your fulfillment piece. Link these call-outs or captions to a photo of the fulfillment piece.

52 You can use a box for added impact. Everything doesn't have to flow in long columns of type. It often makes sense to drop some information into a one-point fine-ruled box. It gives the piece some extra visual interest.

53 Don't forget the questions and answers. As I've mentioned in past issues, a Q. & A. section is an excellent way to handle the questions that really trouble the reader. It's a way to deal with their concerns or resistance points "head on." What's the right length for a Q. & A. section? Here's the exception that proves the rule. One page is almost always enough. Five to eight questions ought to do it nicely.

54 Give your Question & Answer section a title. Never just say, "Questions & Answers" and let it go at that. Always try to warm things up with a little personality and add a "finished" quality. SOME HEADLINE TITLE EXAMPLES: "Five commonly asked questions about contact management software." "Do you know the answers to these important database questions?" "How to select tax preparation software — straight answers to tough questions. Do you have questions? We've got answers!"

55 Use interesting typography. You don't have to keep repeating the whole words "Question" and "Answer" every time. It can look extremely ugly. You can simply set the letters, "Q" and "A" in an attractive, bold serif typeface for some visual appeal. (Caslon, Palatino, Calligraphy, and Garamond work well.)

56 Use a conversational tone. A lot of Q. & A. sections I see are much too uptight and formal. A typical question might read, "Who can benefit from presentation software?" This is cold. Distant. Impersonal. Wouldn't it be better to risk sounding like a flesh and blood human being and ask a real question? — "So far I've been doing just fine using a flip chart. Can your software really save me time and increase the impact of my presentations?"

57 Use Q. & A.s to overcome obstacles to the sale. A Q. & A. section assumes that your readers have some doubts and uncertainties that have to be dealt with. As mentioned, the copywriting trick is to pick up on their concerns or skepticism, then overcome their doubts with facts and persuasive arguments. In other words, don't waste space restating benefits that are explained elsewhere in the brochure or flyer. Use the Q. & A. section to articulate consumers' concerns and deal with them forthrightly.

58 Don't have too many Q. & A.s. I think about five is a good number to deal with. If you add too many more it can start to get boring.

59 Include the guarantee. If you offer a solid guarantee, do ask a question about it. EXAMPLE: "Q. What happens if I order your software and find out that it doesn't meet my needs?" "A. No problem. Just return it within 30 days and we'll promptly refund your money, no questions asked. There's no risk or obligation of any kind."

60 Drop the Q. & A. section in a fine-ruled box. It's nice to set your questions and answers apart from the rest of your brochure or flyer. That's why I suggest you run a one point rule around it. The box adds visual interest and focuses readers' attention on what you've got to say.

61 Where should the Q. & A. section go? I think it works well towards the end of your piece — where it can have a summing up function. If you're really jammed for space you can always put it on the inside back cover.

62 Don't forget to sum up. It's the old story... "Tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em, tell 'em, tell 'em that you've told 'em." It is very important to summarize the points you've been trying to make. Otherwise your brochure just sort of trails off, leaving the piece without a sense of structure. You want to control your reader and score solid points. A summary can drive your major points home.

63 Restate the offer. Don't worry about being repetitious. You can't be certain which piece will be read first no matter how everything is nested and comes out of the envelope. That's why you want to tell the whole story on each and every piece in the package - even on the Business Reply Card. In fact, ESPECIALLY on the Business Reply Card. (Readers often grab the BRC first because they figure they'll get to the punch line fast and not have to wade through your entire letter. If the offer is of interest, they'll go on and read what you've got to say.)

64 Remember the call to action. Shocking to say, but many writers forget to tell the reader what to do! Do you want people to call a sales center, schedule an appointment, fill out and return a postage-paid business reply card, make a phone call, or place an order? Hey. You can't make them guess. You have to tell them and provide them with motivating reasons that will get them moving. This is where you have to (tastefully) apply direct selling techniques in a corporate identity environment.

The Fulfillment Piece

Let's say you send your prospect a letter urging them to request a brochure about your product or service. What you send back to them in response to their request is called the fulfillment piece. Here are some tips for "fulfilling" the right way..

65 Be sure to put the right message on the front of the envelope. It is imperative that you tell the reader right up front (literally) that the materials contained in the envelope were requested and are not junk mail! People know the name of your product -- not necessarily the name of your company. That's why your simple corporate return address all by itself may not mean anything to your prospect. You have to say something like: "Here's The WidgetPro Information Kit you requested!"

66 Don't waste money on a fancy envelope. The envelope that contains your fulfillment materials can be simple and inexpensive. In fact, I'd go so far as to say it SHOULD be simple and inexpensive. You don't want potential customers to be confused by a prospecting package that looks like "junk mail."

67 If you're just sending paper, don't enclose a bunch of loose data sheets. Put them in a special folder with a terrific title and promote that. Or what about creating an exclusive White Paper or Executive Report? Anything but a hodge-podge of random information.

68 Ask for the sale. When you do your original lead-generation mailing you're selling the offer, not the product. But when you mail the fulfillment package, you want the prospect to order. Lots of companies miss the boat. They include a two or three paragraph kiss-off letter with the fulfillment piece saying "Here's your information. Thanks for your interest," and that's about it. They simply don't give themselves the space they need to do what has to be done, namely: **KEEP MOVING THE PROSPECT THROUGH THE SALES CYCLE UNTIL THE SALE IS MADE!**

69 Explain what you've enclosed. The letter is the place to position all the elements of the package and explain what you've included and why it's of interest. Tell them, "here's what I've included for your review" -- then provide a short, bulleted list that explains what you've got waiting for them in the envelope. Remember, you should control your readers every step of the way and never leave them free to start rummaging around the package and thinking for themselves. As always, stay in control and tell them just what you want them to look at or do.

70 If you give readers a demo disk (or just about anything else), get them to try it out immediately! One of the most important things you can do is get prospects to give your demo a look-see while they're still interested -- not later on. If a reader puts your disk into the black hole between their monitor and the desk lamp it may never emerge again! This advice holds true for whatever you've mailed to them. If you send prospects an Executive Report, ask them to read it NOW. If you enclosed an important White Paper, ask them to review it NOW.

71 Include a well-thought-through Business Reply Card. If you want them to order on the spot, spend time creating an order card that works. This important item shouldn't be an afterthought. Here are some BRC pointers to remember: Make sure you state the offer clearly. A lot of people avoid the sales letter altogether and go straight to the BRC. Make the math easy to do. If your customers have to add up a bunch of numbers (cost of goods, shipping & handling, tax, etc.) be sure your art director has made life easy for them. Write with energy and personality (the way you always should!) When you're writing selling copy you always have to keep the energy level up and the benefits in the reader's face. Always stress that the offer is risk-free. Restate the guarantee right on the BRC -- in the copy or in a separate guarantee box. (You can do both.) Punch up the 800-number. Say, "For faster action call 800-123-1234" right there on the reply card. Use visuals to spur action and guide the reader. A well-placed red arrow can point the way to key chunks of copy (and higher order rates). Give your BRC an appropriate title. I don't like calling a BRC an "Order Form" or "Order Card." Try "Action Card," or give it a special name like "Preferred Customer Upgrade Card."

Direct Mail Frequency

How often should you mail to prospects? Here's a straight answer plus some ideas you can put to use...

72 Remail the original package to the same target audience. There's no reason why you can't do this. Timing is everything. You never know when your mailing will catch prospects just when they need your product or service. A simple, cost-effective remailing is well worth trying.

73 If you have the time, energy, and resources, you can send a campaign of new letters to non-responders. Each letter can stress a unique product or service benefit. The theory is, if one approach doesn't work, you go back to the prospect with a different pitch. Again, this is a very reasonable way to go.

74 If your offer is good for a limited time only, be sure to play that up. In your final letter you can say things like: "We will not contact you again about this special offer." "You must act immediately since this offer will not be extended under any conditions." "Your eligibility for this final offer expires on December 31, 2004." "This is the last time you will hear from us concerning this special offer. Call 800-123-1234 while you are still eligible!" You get the idea.

75 The last contact with the prospect can be a post card. It is inexpensive and your "Last Chance!" message is instantly visible. Show a clock ticking. Say: "Time Is Running Out!" Corny? Of course... but it works!

Email

Opt-in email is inexpensive and it can be tremendously effective but it has to be used properly. It should never be a letter masquerading as an email. Check out these tips for making your next email campaign a winner...

76 Don't use a weak "Subject" line. It doesn't matter how compelling your email offer is, or how brilliantly your message is written. If your subject line isn't working right, your email will never get opened and your campaign will be a failure. Subject lines should be kept short. (Never exceed forty characters including spaces.) This means that every subject line must communicate extremely quickly and have a little punch. Flat or cute is bad. Examples: BAD SUBJECT LINE: "Who's minding the store? Security info." GOOD SUBJECT LINE: "Five ways to prevent store theft." GOOD SUBJECT LINE: "Stop store thieves in their tracks." GOOD SUBJECT LINE: "Don't let thieves steal you blind."

77 Burying your Web address. This mistake is pretty obvious but people make it all the time. They stick their hot-linked URL (to the landing page) at the end of the email and don't include one near the top of their message. Wrong. Some folks don't want to plow through all your copy. They're ready to click through right to your site. Make it easy for them to do so!

78 Failing to identify the reader's pain quickly. Don't start your email by enumerating every feature and benefit of your product. (You're not writing a data sheet!) One effective way to roll into your message is to prove to your prospects IMMEDIATELY that you understand exactly what they're up against -- that you have the perfect answer to their problem. Here's an example of a classic problem/solution lead-in format: "Dear Physician: Have you ever been sued for malpractice? I hope not, because it can be a terrible, devastating experience. If YOU are concerned about protecting your practice, your income, and your reputation, download our free report immediately. It's called "Five Steps You Can Take Now To Avoid A Malpractice Lawsuit" and you can download it free right now at: <http://www.abc.xyz> ETC."

79 Keeping the email too short. Some people have a terrible fear that their email won't get read so they write two short paragraphs and run for the hills. Don't be so afraid! Prospects WILL read your email if it's got valuable information for them. The typical emails I write run a good seven or eight paragraphs in length... often with bullets too. They work just fine. Don't forget, if as I mentioned above, you drop a URL in early, prospects can click through without reading every single word. Some people, though, like to read what you've got to say and you shouldn't shortchange them.

80 Writing in a boring, flat style. This is a big no-no. As I often say, you have to write with a little energy and sense of fun. Example: Take a look at this email I wrote for Shockwave. When I sat down to write this email, I imagined that I was sending a note to a 21-year-old sitting in his messy dorm room. "SUBJECT: Shockmachine is FREE and it's AWESOME! Hey, have we got something for YOU. Shockmachine. Free. Now. It's dynamite, and it's waiting for you at: <http://www.shockwave.com/xxx>. Why does Shockmachine deserve a place on YOUR hard drive? Well, first of all Shockmachine is free so it will cost you absolutely nada. (Not a bad selling point!)" ETC. Fun to write! Sometimes, when you add a little attitude, you can cut through the clutter and get the reader on your side. Then you're halfway home!

Advertising

Advertising can be a huge waste of money if you don't handle things correctly. Here are some winning tips for creating direct response ads... not "image ads" that are filled with fluff...

81 Don't hide your offer. It belongs where people can see it! If you've got a software upgrade to announce, a demo CD you want to give away, or a brochure you think potential customers should read, go for it in the headline. Don't tease them. Don't entertain them. Let them know what you'll do for them!

82 Include a picture of what you're offering. Let's assume that you're giving away a demo CD of your software. I urge you to include a photo of the CD, packaging, written materials you will be sending along, etc. It makes the offer concrete and believable. Let's learn from retailers. They don't bury their goods. They put them right under your nose. That's a lesson we can apply in our advertising.

83 Get your offer into the very first paragraph. Take a look at ads with offers. You'll find that the writer usually throws it in as an afterthought at the end of the body copy. This is an incredible mistake. If you care about your response rate, put it up front. Let's face it. There's a chance that not every reader will stay with you all the way to the end of the ad, so give them important news about your fabulous offer, early!

84 Don't forget to say "FREE." "Free" is one of the true magic words in advertising. It always has been. It always will be. If you have something to offer that doesn't cost anything, it would be foolish not to highlight it!

85 Be sure to use testimonials. They can really build credibility. Stay away from initials used as signatures. "Your financial planning services saved me thousands of dollars. H.M., Detroit, Michigan" is old-fashioned and convinces no one.

86 Consider using a coupon. I know very well that people will respond to your 800 number and not to your coupon, but that's not the point. The coupon hash-marks let the reader know that something is being offered and causes them to get into the ad. Several years ago I saw a study that underscored the power of coupons to involve readers in an ad. My own experience confirms this. NOTE: Don't forget to make sure that your ad (with coupon) appears on the right hand page and that the coupon is placed in the bottom right hand corner. Weird and "creative" placement of coupons should immediately initiate a search for a new designer.

87 The magic words: "No Obligation." People always need to be reassured that they won't be hassled if they respond to your ad. "No obligation" and "no risk" are words worth remembering and using.

88 Don't be afraid of long copy. Who said you should keep copy short? People only believe that because they have no confidence in the writer's ability to sustain the reader's interest. As the saying goes, "The more you tell, the more you sell." If your budget is tight use smaller fractional-size ads.

89 Fractional-size ads can be very cost effective. My experience proves that you can get extremely good results with fractional ads. An excellent study published by the highly-regarded research firm, Starch INRA Hooper, came to the same conclusion. A while ago Starch completed a study of 535 fractional ads and found that they can be used very effectively indeed. Starch's findings? That the scores of the various fractional ads do not correspond directly to the relative sizes of the ads. That is to say, half-page and two-third page ads do not earn "Noted Scores" that are half or two-thirds of one-page ads. In fact, fractionals score considerably higher than their correlated size! Another interesting result... Starch discovered that one-third page ads actually scored *higher* than their half-page counterparts!

90 Use short, punchy headlines. Remember, in a fractional ad you don't have the space for *War and Peace*, so get right to the point with two, three, or four word headlines. When you keep the character-count short you can come up in type size and have your headline POP. This is VERY important! Official Levison-approved words for inclusion in short headlines: "Free," "Now," "New," "At last," "Finally," "Guaranteed," "No Obligation," "No Risk."

91 Boil the body copy down so it's lean and tight. One of my favorite short ads was written by Ernest Shackleton, the great polar explorer. The ad, which attempted to recruit volunteers for a trip to the South Pole, ran in London newspapers in 1900. Here's the complete text: "Men wanted for Hazardous Journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success — Ernest Shackleton." Did the ad pull volunteers? Shackleton later wrote, "It seemed as though all the men in Great Britain were determined to accompany me, the response was so overwhelming." What was the tremendous appeal of the ad? The promise of adventure and recognition, of course. But I think its real power derives from all that is NOT spelled out. It's a true masterpiece of British understatement and fabulous, intuitive copy-writing.

92 Use small ads for lead generation only. Let's face it. It's hard enough to sell off the page when you have a lot of space. When you have only a small space to work with all you can hope to do is get prospects to raise their hands and show their interest. That means you can offer free White Papers, Executive Reports, Demo Disks, Information Kits, a free Web Guided Tour, you name it. Once you've got their names in your database, you can follow up with telemarketing, attractive fulfillment materials, etc.

93 Spice up your ad with a little visual impact. A small photo or spot illustration can add a lot of impact and draw the eye to your message. Don't forget that you can add a hashmark/dotted line around your ad or a portion of it. This is a powerful graphic technique that you ought to try some time. The coupon dotted line communicates the unspoken message that there is hot information being offered and that you must act immediately.

Post Cards

The inexpensive, small post card definitely can be a useful tool. Check out these ideas for making it pay..

94 Use first class postage. You get fast delivery AND you can get your undeliverables returned. This keeps your list clean. (Be sure to imprint the words "Address Service Requested," as per United States Postal Service requirements, to take advantage of this service.)

95 Use a straightforward headline that contains a benefit. Make it pop. The headline is tremendously important.

96 Keep your message short. Don't try to squeeze in a ton of body copy.

97 Two colors are often sufficient. Generally speaking, if your budget is tight, there's no need to spring for four colors. I'd rather mail more frequently in black and red than less frequently with four colors.

98 Use the right kind of paper. Bright white, 80 lb. linen stock is a good place to start. No need for a gloss finish unless you're running four color.

99 Choose the right size card. You have many choices. A good basic size is 5 1/2" x 8 1/2".

100 If appropriate, run a bold little line at the top that says "Be sure to save this card!" Amazingly, some people will!

101 Check out the U.S. Postal Service offerings. You'll find useful information at: <http://www.usps.com/createmail>.



About Ivan Levison...

Ivan Levison is an award-winning freelance copywriter who has spent over twenty-five years writing direct mail, email, Web copy, and advertising for industry leaders like Microsoft, Intel, Fireman's Fund, Intuit, Bank of America and Hewlett-Packard. And for a bunch of great small companies too.

Levison's copywriting is not intended to build brand "image." He writes to generate red-hot leads that turn into sales. He writes to get people to sign up for your Webinar. To download your White Paper. To request your demo. To attend your seminar. To buy your product or service. In a word, Levison writes for results.

If *you* want results, like the kind he's delivered for countless clients over a quarter of a century, he invites you to get in touch at (415) 461-0672.

Right now is the perfect time!

When you work with Ivan, you're in good company.

// Ivan Levison stands out as a true software industry visionary. He has a deep understanding of how direct marketing influences software purchasing."

Seth Godin
Author of *Permission Marketing*

// Ivan Levison is my first choice for any direct mail or advertising assignment -- period. As anyone in high technology can tell you, he knows the business inside and out, has wonderful enthusiasm, and cares. And he's a heck of a nice guy to boot!"

Geoffrey Moore
Author of *Crossing The Chasm* and *Inside The Tornado*

// Ivan Levison is the software industry's leading direct mail copywriter."

David Webster
Publisher
Software Business Magazine

// At Intuit, we've made a commitment to head-to-head testing of creative resources. Ivan's performance versus other copywriters makes him popular with our direct marketers. They also say nice things about how easy he is to work with and how quickly he "gets it." But that stuff wouldn't matter without Ivan's demonstrated outstanding performance."

Bill Mirbach
Vice President, Direct Marketing
Intuit

// Ivan, I want you to know that the lead-generation letters and emails you've written for ACCPAC have been BIG winners and we are delighted with your efforts. All I can say is that I'm glad you're on OUR side!"

Peter Labes
Director, Sales Tools
ACCPAC

// The up-front response to the Abra Suite Management Buy-in Kit e-mail campaign you wrote for Best Software was phenomenal! Within 48 hours the response rate was TRIPLE that of our control package. This e-mail campaign generated more leads for our product in two short days than any other single lead generation program has generated for us in a full year!"

Kathleen Litschgi
Senior Marketing Manager
Best Software

// Thanks for copywriting the terrific e-mail invitation for our online seminar. The response rate was truly outstanding— 300% better than we expected!"

Janice Harter
Dynamics Marketing Manager
Great Plains Software

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