

Back to basics: 9 essentials for successful direct sales creative

The more of these elements you include, the better your response will be.

Once you have delivered your piece to the right targets, it is the creative elements that capture interest and propel readers to action. Stack the odds in your favor by making sure that any direct marketing piece you send is as strong as possible in all these areas.

1 A compelling headline

Like the teaser on the outside envelope, the headline has a very important job to do – not to sell the offer, but to sell the recipient on taking the time to read the rest of the piece. It boils down to answering the reader's only concern: "What's in this for me?"

2 Persuasive visuals

A picture is worth a thousand words, but only if it fully supports the other elements of your direct marketing piece. Show your product in use, and even better, show someone representative of your target audience enjoying the benefit that your offer delivers.

3 Personalization

Personalization can go far beyond using your recipients' names to catch interest. Take it further by using everything you know about them to make your offer, proof and visuals relevant to the particular needs of each recipient and group. Doing this well will boost your response more than anything else.

4 An interesting story

A good story gives a plausible reason for your offer, which helps people justify their buying decision with logic. It also dramatizes the benefits of the purchase. Use a conversational voice, as though you were talking to a friend, and use descriptions that help readers to picture themselves using your product or service successfully.

5 Testimonials

Your claims will always be far more convincing when they come not from you, but from customers just like your prospects. Make sure to include full names, company names and locations, and pictures if possible – this makes testimonials more credible.

6 An irresistible offer

The more valuable your offer, the better the response. The key is to tailor your offer to the needs of your target audience, rather than find an audience to suit your offer. It may take a more valuable offer to win a new customer than to get follow up purchases. Consider the lifetime value of a new customer as you set the value of the offer.

7 A generous guarantee

Very successful businesses have been built on boldly stated money back guarantees, because they lower the perceived risk of a purchase so effectively. As long as you deliver the benefits you promise, returns will be insignificant compared to the marketing benefits of greater response and happy customers.

8 A motivating call to action

Even people who want your offer and are ready to buy may put off acting on it, and then forget about it. Prevent this by creating urgency with a deadline or a restriction on availability. Support it with a plausible reason, or readers may feel manipulated and reject it. Guide the response with clear, specific directions to place the order.

9 Ability to track results

Keeping complete and accurate records is vital to success with direct marketing, so that you can make decisions based on solid facts. Test your mailings to find what works by changing just one detail at a time. When your piece is successful, keep using it until response drops.



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Don't settle for "just-looking"

If your standard greeting to shoppers entering your store is "Can I help you?" you will most likely hear "No thanks, just looking" a lot. Instead, try engaging shoppers in a conversation that is more helpful to them, and you may find it much easier to make sales.

Since your aim is to help people make the best choice and get the best value for their money, the first thing you need to find out is what they want. Ask an open ended question that reveals their interest. Something like "Thank you for coming in today, what can I help you find?" or "What are you hoping to find today?"

If the answer seems evasive or reluctant, that is actually good news! You will often encounter high resistance from people who are just about ready to buy but do not want to be pressured. Make them comfortable by focusing on what they need. Let them know that your role is to help them find the best value, and you are there whenever they are ready. Then give them space to browse.

If a shopper is more willing to enter into a conversation, ask them to describe the perfect end to their search. Based on this, make a suggestion: "I have a dress that you will look fabulous in!" or: "If you like mission, I have one of the most comfortable chairs you will ever sit in!" Make sure your suggestion fulfills the promise, or this approach will not work.

Finally, if your shoppers want to "think about it", it means they did not find their ideal solution. This is an opportunity to discover what they do consider ideal, or to offer a compromise. Ask which item came closest, and whether they could see themselves with it if they did not find a better solution. If yes, offer to put it on hold, or offer an extra incentive to buy, rather than simply letting them leave.