43 Tips for Generating More Sales Leads with Direct Mail

By John Cole

Corso Marconi 26
10125 Torino
Italy

Phone: (+39) 011 569 4951
Fax: (+39) 011 3713 1189
Email: info@CopyEngineer.com
Web: www.CopyEngineer.com

A Note to the Reader:

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Chapter 1:

Shrinking Channel Offers Growing Opportunity For Savvy Marketers

With their budgets slashed and added pressure to turn in positive results, marketing departments everywhere have shifted expenditures in search of higher ROI. The trend has been decidedly towards online media. Especially email.

Surveys indicate this trend will continue. A DMA benchmarking survey[i] found 70% of marketers plan to increase use of email this year. Of those, 51% said they would do so at the expense of other media.

But that strong shift appears to be setting up a big opportunity for savvy tech marketers—in one "old school" marketing channel that has fallen out of favor.

Of the media cited as likely to lose budget to email in 2010, the DMA found "direct mail will be the biggest 'loser', especially in B2B environments: over half of marketers investing more in email will take money from the direct mail budget."

But that might not be a wise move.

"Yes, email is *cheaper*, but that doesn't mean it's always *better*," says Kevin Miller, president of Frost Miller Group. "Email is particularly effective when the recipient knows the sender. When emails are sent unsolicited, though, their open rates drop dramatically." [ii]

In fact, a recent survey published in DM Bulletin[iii] showed email open rates dropping by more than 25% a year. As it is, the open rate in the technology sector is only 15%, according to Constant Contact's analysis of more than 200 million customer emails[iv]. So 17 out of 20 email recipients in high tech aren't even looking at the emails they get. "This is less a symptom of ineffectiveness as it is of overuse," says Miller. "As more marketers buy email lists and use them for prospecting, more people choose to hit delete since they don't know the sender."

As a result, email ROI is dropping. According to the DMA's latest "Power of Direct" economic impact study[v], email ROI was $43.62 on the dollar in 2009, down from $44.93 in 2008. It's expected to dip again in 2010, to $42.08.

And while that's still nearly three times the ROI delivered by non-catalog direct mail—$15.22 in 2009—direct mail continues to drive far more sales. Commercial e-mail drove $26 billion in sales in 2009—down from $26.4 billion in 2008—and is projected to drive $27.9 billion in 2010, according to the DMA[i]. In contrast, direct mail drove more than $675 billion in 2009. So the ROI advantage in email comes entirely from its low cost, not greater sales.—

And because email marketing is so cheap, any significant shift in funding toward email creates an exponentially greater increase in volume. So as long as this trend continues, we can expect to see email open rates and ROI drop with increasing velocity.

With this explosion of email at the expense of direct mail, some see more opportunity in the latter.

Because of the huge drop in direct mail (down 27% in Q3 2009, according to direct mail tracking firm Mintel Comperemedia[vi]), prospects are much more likely to read the physical mail they do receive. “With fewer direct mailers crossing prospects’ desks,” says Miller[ii], “those that are created can really stand out.”

“Although much B2B lead gen has moved online, direct mail is still very effective,” says Ed Gandia, a copywriter serving the software industry. “In fact, in working with clients on lead generation strategy and campaigns, I’ve found that response to direct mail campaigns can sometimes be higher than that of e-mail. Also, I find direct mail to be extremely effective in lead nurturing efforts—often much more so than e-mail.” [vii]

“Lately, direct mail has been in a bit of a decline, partly because of the economy and partly because email marketing has made inroads,” says legendary software copywriter Ivan Levinson. “My own feeling is that direct mail will be making a *huge* comeback as spammers continue to destroy a legitimate marketing channel.” [viii]

The greatest gains, however, will most likely be made by astute marketers who successfully integrate direct mail—and other channels like print advertising—with email. As noted in the DMA study mentioned earlier, “some 95% of those marketers who measured the outcome from using email together with direct mail reported this integration as a success.”

So to increase sales and market share, perhaps the best strategy right now is to use direct mail where email is weak—in reaching new prospects—while everyone else is trying to use email for everything, just to save money. As Bob Bly, author of *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Direct Marketing*, says, “When you’re doing the opposite of your competitors, you stand out more.”

Chapter 2:

13 Ways to Generate High-Quality Leads with a Sales Letter or Email

One of the most effective ways to generate B2B sales leads is with a brief letter or email offering valuable information to a well-targeted list of prospects.

Here are 13 different ways to use this technique to generate leads for your company.

Offer a free white paper or special report

Studies consistently show white papers to be among the most sought-after, most influential and most viral forms of technology marketing content. These trends were re-confirmed just last year in a survey by Eccolo Media[ix]. The 501 technology buyers they questioned rated white papers highest for both purchasing influence and frequency of forwarding to co-workers.

Eccolo also found that white papers were especially influential amongst executive decision makers, compared to more technical purchasing influencers. Fifty-one percent (51%) of decision makers surveyed rated white papers as very to extremely influential in their purchasing decisions.

Another finding was even more interesting: the influence of white papers continues to grow. Respondents reported their white paper consumption up nearly 12% from the previous year. This in spite of the explosion of social media influence during the same period.

The sum of these findings prompted Eccolo to call white papers, "*the 'über-collateral' in the marketing toolbox*," and to recommend that "*marketers' best use of their collateral budgets is to develop high-quality white papers.*"

So in spite of their wide-spread use, white papers are still one of the most effective offers for generating leads in the technology sector.

Tip: When offering a white paper in a lead-gen letter or email, sell the white paper, not your product or service. Business buyers generally seek out white papers in the early, information-gathering stages of the buying process. They're not yet ready for specific solutions at that point.

Offer a free tip sheet

A tip sheet is a series of short, practical tips on a particular subject.

Tip sheets are quick, easy and inexpensive to produce. They can usually be printed on one or both sides of a single sheet of paper, so they also make convenient hand-outs.

Tips should be written in a product-agnostic fashion, so they are useful in and of themselves. They must be practical, not a sales pitch for your product or service. If your product has been designed to facilitate the practice of some of your tips, however, it is perfectly acceptable to point this out *at the end* of your tip sheet.

A tip sheet may not seem like much, but if it offers solutions to problems that cause your customers pain, it can be a very enticing lead-gen offer.

Offer a free pamphlet, booklet or e-book.

Pamphlets and booklets are just extended versions of tip sheets. They offer room for more tips and a more in-depth treatment of each. They can also be offered in electronic format as e-books.

An easy way to produce a booklet is to take two or more related tip sheets you've produced, flesh out the tips with more details and examples, and combine them into one document.

A booklet has a higher perceived value than a tip sheet. You can take advantage of that, to make your offer more enticing, by putting a price on your booklet. Print that price on the upper right corner of the booklet cover. Then in your letter, be sure to point out to your prospect the value he or she will be getting, absolutely free, just for filling out a brief registration form.

Offer a free "how-to" article or guide

If you've published a good "how-to" article in a trade journal, consider re-packaging it as a "guide" or "special report" on the subject.

Ask your graphic designer to add an attractive cover and put in additional white space and illustrations to make the article seem more substantial, but also more reader-friendly. Showing the cover as an illustration in your letter adds credibility to your offer and tends to lift response.

Offer a reference manual or selection guide

If your company produces a range of components or tools, consider producing a "selection guide" or "design reference manual" that helps your customer choose the product that's right for his or her application.

Make it clear in your letter that your manual includes valuable "how-to" information your prospects will want to keep on hand for frequent reference. There are two reasons for this. First, it will increase response to your offer. And second, if they do hang onto your manual, every time they use it they'll be reminded of your company and your products, which will make them more likely to buy from you.

Providing solid information that helps customers do their jobs better, and make better decisions, builds trust in your company. That trust will make them more likely to choose your products when they need to make a purchase.

Offer a free case study

In Eccolo Media's technology collateral study, 79% of respondents rated case studies as moderately to extremely influential in their purchasing decisions. Thus, case studies ranked second only to white papers in their power to influence technology buyers.

Yet few marketers use case studies as lead-generation bait pieces. Possibly because they feel prospects won't register for them. In a survey by KnowledgeStorm and MarketingSherpa [x], only 44% of technology marketers required registration for a case study.

Yet in that same survey, 63% of tech buyers said they *would* be willing to trade their contact details for access to a case study. Buyers ranked case studies second only to white papers (79%) in registration value—far ahead of both demo software (38%) and webcasts (31%), which marketers had rated higher.

Business decision-makers love reading about how their peers have overcome problems similar to their own. If you have case studies that show off the benefits and ROI your customers get from using your products, consider using them in direct mail and email promotional offers.

Invite your prospect to a free, live teleseminar or webinar.

Some prospects prefer to listen, rather than read. And some want the chance to interact and ask questions. Teleseminars and webinars are ideal for this. And they're easy and cheap to set up.

Very important: Your webinar or teleseminar must be educational—not just a sales pitch for your product. You want your prospects coming away from your event feeling they've gained some new insights that will help them solve their problems.

Also bear in mind that you need to promote your free event almost as strongly as you would a paid seminar. Your letter or email should make it clear to readers what they will learn, and how important it is. You need to convince your prospects that it will really be worth their time to register for this event and fit it into their busy schedules.

One more tip: Promising to provide a recording and transcript of your seminar after the event will increase response. It lets you encourage those who can't attend the live event to sign up anyway, so they can listen to the recording later.

Offer a free podcast, podcast series or recorded webinar

Podcasts and recorded webinars are another way to appeal to prospects who prefer to listen or watch, rather than read. Plus, they address the time issue: prospects can download audio and video files and play them whenever (and wherever) they wish.

Podcasts are also a great way to re-use content. Recorded teleseminars and webinars can be promoted to those who missed the live event—for as long as the content remains relevant. Articles and white papers can be turned into podcast scripts, as well.

Offer a free resource guide.

A resource guide is small directory of information resources for practitioners in a particular field, grouped into categories. These make effective bait pieces for three reasons.

- **They don't have to be big to be attractive.** One or two pages of website links with short descriptions can be extremely useful to professionals who need the information such sites offer.
- **They're easy to pull together.** Your engineers probably have a host of such links stored in their web browser "favorites" lists.
- **They can drive traffic to your own website.** Since your guide naturally pertains to your company's area of expertise, it's certainly fair and justified to include links to information resources on your own website—even product information. Just be sure these constitute only a small portion of the total resources listed.

Offer a subscription to your company newsletter

Does your company newsletter or e-zine offer technical tips, case studies and other helpful information?

Why not send prospects a subscription invitation? Newsletter subscriptions make great offers: Not only do you capture leads, you get them to opt-in to receive further messages from you.

When offering a subscription, your letter or email should describe the types of informational content subscribers will receive. Perhaps highlight some recent articles.

You may also want to package a few, related “how-to” articles from past issues into a special report, and offer it as a sign-up incentive. Such incentives tend to boost response.

Offer a free trial download of your software.

For software companies, one of the most effective tactics for influencing technology buyers is to offer a free trial download of the product. In a recent survey by TechTarget and the CMO Council[xi], 87.7% of tech buyers rated trial software either “very effective” or “somewhat effective” in helping them with purchasing decisions.

Offering a free trial gives you the opportunity to “sell” the prospect on the features and benefits of your software without applying any sales pressure.

Offer a free “information kit”

A good way to get your product brochure into your prospects’ hands—and get them to read it—is to package it together with other valuable educational materials.

Nowadays, an offer of a brochure by itself has “sales pitch” written all over it. So even if you have a terrific brochure, using it as a bait piece can be a very hard sell. But put it together with a white paper and a case study, or any of the other materials listed above, and you have yourself an “information kit.” These make a very attractive offer for a number of reasons:

- A kit or package of different materials has a higher perceived value than a single report. The higher the perceived value of your offer, the higher the response you’re likely to get.

- An information kit lends itself to a high-value title. When asked to create a promotion for a line of hand-held computing devices for in-the-field employees, copywriter Steve Slaunwhite put the client’s brochure together with some application notes, checklists and other useful information and dubbed it a “Field Force Mobilization Kit.” Response was very strong.

- You can offer your reader a choice of media: either an electronic download, or a physical package—preferably including a CD- or DVD-ROM. CDs and DVDs have a higher perceived value than either print media or download. So even though most respondents will choose the download, your offer of a CD or DVD will boost response.

- Showing a picture of the various pieces of the kit adds credibility to your promotion and makes your offer seem more substantial and tangible.

- The sheer variety of solid information in your offer—along with the other reasons just listed—makes it much easier to craft a compelling message that entices prospects to take action immediately.

Invite prospects to visit your trade show booth

According to a recent TechTarget benchmark report[xii], nearly a quarter (24.9%) of marketing department budgets in the technology industry goes toward conferences, seminars and trade shows.

With so much at stake, you need to make sure these events are worthwhile for your company. So, how can you improve the odds that likely prospects will show up at your booth?

Send them an invitation.

Personalized invitations are probably the best way to get prospects to visit your stand, view the presentations you're making, and attend any special events you're hosting. They're also a great way to draw attention to new products you'll be unveiling—even if the recipient can't attend.

For sending invitations by mail, your best list is key prospects and customers within a 100-mile (160-km) radius of the exhibition hall. Be sure you can filter your mailing list by country, state or province, and postal code.

Consider including a carry card in your mailing. A carry card is something your prospects can carry to the expo, that reminds them to visit your booth. You might enclose a personalized invitation to a hospitality suite, executive briefing or networking event. Or a numbered entry in a live drawing. Or a coupon that can be exchanged for a free gift. The important thing is that it gives prospects a good reason to stop by, so your staff has a chance to talk with them.

Finally, make your mailing do double duty. Since many recipients won't be able to attend your trade show, give them another choice. Piggy-back a second offer onto your mailing. Invite them to sign-up to receive a recording and transcript of your presentation, for example. Or offer them a free trial download of the new software release you'll be unveiling. Just make it clear how the recipient can take advantage of this secondary offer, so you can capture the lead.

Chapter 3:
Mailing Lists: Rent vs. Build—the Pros and Cons

For delivering marketing messages to a precisely targeted audience, two of your most potent weapons are direct mail and email. But to use either effectively, you need a precisely targeted mailing list.

To obtain a high-quality mailing list, you have two basic options: rent or build. Here's a quick guide to the pros and cons of list renting versus list building to help you decide which is best for your business.

Note: By "list building", in this case, I mean building either through research, or through offers on your website or in your normal advertising that allow prospects to "opt-in" to your house list.

Advantages of Renting

Saves Time. Through a list broker, you can rent the mailing lists of publications to which your target audience subscribes, like Aviation Week or Aerospace Design and Manufacturing. The broker can filter these lists—by what are called "selects"—by industry, job function, geographical location, etc. You rent only the names that match your selection criteria. It pays to use a reputable broker, like Esperian or Edith Roman, who can guide you in B2B list selection.

High Volume. If you sell to a fairly broad audience within your target verticals, you can reach a large number of names through rented lists. Major trade publications have thousands of subscribers.

Disadvantages of Renting

Rental Costs. You pay for every name you mail to, every time you mail to them. The exception being those names who respond to your promotion: they become part of your "house" list, so you never have to rent them again.

Less than optimal targeting. The available selects may not be as granular as you would like. Say you're an avionics test equipment maker, and your ideal prospects include VPs of Engineering, Directors of Avionics, and Avionic Systems Managers. You may find that the best available mailing list select for a publication your target audience reads is "engineering management." In this case, you'll end up paying to mail to entire engineering departments, not just the avionics sections.

Advantages of Building

Precision Targeting. If you build your list by researching your target market (more on this in the next article), you can match your names as closely as you like to your ideal customer profile—in whatever verticals you wish. Opt-in lists can be precision-targeted if you make sure your offers appeal almost exclusively to your target audience.

Precise targeting pays off in better response rates and higher ROI, and is crucial to the success of your mailings. At least 40 percent of that success depends on the quality of your list, according to marketing legend Freeman Gosden in his book, *Direct Marketing Success*. More recently, the Sales and Marketing Institute estimated that figure to be even higher—between 50 and 75 percent.

No Rental Costs. You can direct mail your hand-built list as often as you like, with no rental charges or commissions. For email, of course, you must build an opt-in list—otherwise, you're spamming.

Lower Mailing Costs. Because your hand-built list is so well targeted, it doesn't have to be nearly as big as a rented list to get the same number of responses. You mail fewer pieces and get higher ROI.

Disadvantages of Building

Labor intensive. If you build your list through research, tracking down the right names requires persistence and resourcefulness. If you opt to build through advertising, you have to create effective promotions that motivate prospects to respond and give you their addresses. Either way, building a substantial B2B mailing list from scratch takes some effort.

Takes more time. Especially if you're building an opt-in list. But with the right offer (See the article, "How to Double or Even Triple Response to your Ads, Emails and Direct Mail", later in this issue), you can cut this time dramatically.

Bear in mind that the two methods are not mutually exclusive. If you have a promotion that's worked very well to your hand-built house list, for example, you may want to try sending it to a well-targeted, rented list. Chances are, you'll get good response from likely customers on that list—and thus add substantially to your house list—even though your response rate may not be as high.

Chapter 4:

A 5-Step Process for Building a Precision-Targeted, Rent-Free, B2B Mailing List

Most B2B technology companies wait for prospects to come to them—to find their website, respond to an ad, visit them at a trade show, etc.—before adding them to their mailing list. This is the "opt-in" method. Most of the rest will mail to rented lists, and then add the respondents to their "house" list.

But there is a third list-building method that has major advantages over either opt-in or renting.

Building by hand, through research, is the best way I know to build a precision-targeted mailing list. It turns the targeting of your list into an exact science. And precise targeting has proven to be the best way to drive high response and ROI with direct mail and email.

When you hand-build your mailing list, you get to choose every single name that goes in it. So you can match the names on your list to your ideal customer profile, something you can't do with either an opt-in list or a rented list. That means that even though your hand-built list is likely to be smaller, the names on a hand-built list are much more likely to respond to your offers and become customers.

According to Bob Bly, author of *The White Paper Marketing Handbook*, most B2B lead generation mailings yield response rates of one-half to three percent.[xiii] But copywriting coach Chris Marlow reports that small businesses using hand-built lists sometimes see response rates of 5 to 10 percent, and even as high as 20 percent.[xiv]

In other words, with a hand-built list you generate more leads, and thus more sales, with lower mailing costs. So you gain significantly higher ROI.

In the remainder of this article , I'll show you a simple 5-step list-building process that I've had some success with, along with a number of tips for precision-targeting your list.

Step 1—Build your ideal customer profiles.

More than likely, you already have an ideal customer profile in place, in which case you can skip to Step 2. If not, this is the place to start.

Work with your sales team on this. You need to know exactly who your best customers are.

First, you need to determine what kind of companies they work for. What industries are they in? What are their specialties and capabilities? What size are they?

Then you need to discover their job titles. Who are the major players in the purchasing decisions for your products? Who are the decision makers? Who are the key influencers?

You want to build an ideal customer profile for every segment you market to, so you can precisely target your promotions to each of those segments.

Step 2—Set up your mailing list database or spreadsheet.

Next, you need a place to collect data on the companies and names you want to mail to.

A database is best for storing your house list. You can easily sort the records—by vertical, job function, etc.—for mailings to different audiences. You may want to use your CRM database, if you have one. But a spreadsheet works just as well for collecting data.

In fact, if you outsource your list research, or assign it to personnel who shouldn't have access to your CRM database, a spreadsheet is probably best. You simply give the assignee the list of data to collect, and they create the file.

If you use a spreadsheet, consider creating separate lists for different sectors of your market.

Data to collect on each company should include:

- Company/division name (depending on whether the whole company or just certain divisions are part of your target market)
- URL of company/division website
- Industry (for segmentation purposes if you market to multiple industries)
- Main phone number of company/division
- Sales phone number (more on this in Step 5)

Data to collect on names within each company should include:

- Name
- Job title
- Mailing address of subject's office or plant
- Email address
- Phone number
- Sources of name data (company URL, LinkedIn, Jigsaw, Hoovers, etc.)

You may also want some measure of company size—annual revenues or sales, or number of employees—if you plan to segment your mailings in this way, or if you want to determine which of your products or services is likely to interest a given company. Number of employees is generally the easiest figure to obtain.

Listing the source of name data is useful for double-checking and updating your mailing list. John Coe, President of Database Marketing Associates, Inc., says that 8 years of continuous research by his company has shown that, "62% of business people have one or more changes in their situation (business card) in the last 12-month period. It splits down the middle as one half or 31% change companies, and the other half change jobs or locations within the same company." [xv]

Most of the company data will be readily available from company websites. The individual contact data will take more digging, but I'll give you a few tricks for that when we get to Step 5.

Step 3—Find lists of companies that include likely prospects for your offering.

To start your research, you need to find lists of companies in your target markets. These can be easily obtained from a number of sources, including:

- **Industry directories and databases.** These provide data on thousands of industry suppliers, including information on capabilities, company size, key executives, etc. Available online, they allow you to filter their data according to a number of criteria to best match your target market. Aerospace industry databases, for example, include Aviation Week's World Aerospace Database and Airframer.com. A paid subscription is generally required for complete access to their data.

- **Business directories and databases.** General online business directories, like Hoover's Online, ThomasNet, and ZoomInfo provide data similar to the industry databases, but for a wider range of markets. Again, you'll normally have to pay a fee for full data access. Some of these, like Hoover's and ZoomInfo, also provide contact information for people within those organizations (see Step 5).

- **Industry and professional association membership lists.** Many industry associations, like the Aerospace Industries Association, put their list of member companies on their website, often with links to member websites. Some professional associations provide members with a complete membership directory. A few even permit members to mail promotional materials to their list.

- See the AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD) website for links to 28 such trade organizations in 20 countries across Europe.

- **Trade show exhibitor lists.** At what trade shows do your best customers exhibit? Check the online exhibitors lists to find similar companies and links to their websites.

- **Trade magazines.** Leaf through the trade journals of your target markets. Articles, advertisements, advertiser lists, "fastest growing company" lists, program supplier lists, etc., can all provide the names, and frequently the contact data, of potential new customers.

While not exhaustive, this list should provide you with a good basis to begin your research.

Step 4—Search your lists for companies that match your ideal customer profile.

Once you have one or more lists of companies in your target market, the next step is to search through those lists for companies that are likely to become customers. That's where your ideal customer profile comes in.

Compare the information you find on each company on your list with your ideal customer profile. If you're using an industry database or online business directory you'll have most of the data you need right at your fingertips. Otherwise, you'll want to visit the website of each company on your list. If a company seems like it would be a good prospect for your product or services, add it to your mailing list. If not, skip it and go to the next one.

Each time you find a company to add to your list, fill in the "company" fields in your mailing list database or spreadsheet. Then go on to Step 5.

Step 5—Find the right names at your prospect companies.

Finding the right people to mail to is the hardest and most tedious part of this process. But with the following tips, you (or the person you assign or outsource this task to) should be able to find several names at each company on your prospect list who are likely decision makers or influencers on the purchase of your offering.

Start your search online. There are quite a number of places to search for your ideal customers at a given company, including:

- **Company website.** Depending on what job titles you're looking for, the prospect company's website can be a good place to start. Especially for smaller companies.

  If you're looking for C-levels and senior VPs, try the "About Us" page. You'll often find a subpage with management profiles. Small tech companies will frequently list a number of engineering titles here, as well. And some even provide email addresses.

  Do searches on your targeted job titles using the site search facility. This will often turn up names for these titles in press releases, white papers and other documents posted on the site. Make sure these documents are recent, or verify these names through another source, such as LinkedIn or Jigsaw.

  For websites without a search facility, try this Google trick for website searches: In the Google search box, type the job title you're searching for, followed by "site:", followed by the company URL, without the "www" (and without a space after "site:") and hit Enter. For example, if you were searching for avionics managers at Boeing, you would type in the Google search box: "avionics manager" site:boeing.com, and hit Enter. Google will return every instance of your search terms on that website. You'll usually have to experiment with your search terms, as job titles vary from company to company.

- **LinkedIn and other business networking sites.** If you have an account on LinkedIn, Spoke or a similar business networking site (and if you don't, you can sign up for free), you can search that site for prospect names. LinkedIn is the largest of these sites, with over 60 million members, so I recommend you start there.

  Simply type the name of the company and the job title you're after into the LinkedIn search box. Put the company name within quotation marks if it combines two or more common words. Likewise for the job title. Be sure "People" is selected in the LinkedIn search box, and hit enter. A list of LinkedIn members will appear, ranked according to relevance of their profile content to your search criteria.

  LinkedIn's search facility lets you filter by current company, location, industry and other factors. I find the current company filter the most useful, as it limits your results to members who indicate they currently work at your target company. The filters show up on the "Find People" page with your first set of results. The Advanced People Search lets you search specifically against the title and company fields in member profiles.

  In your LinkedIn search results, some of the entries will show only the job title, or job title and company name, but not the person's name. Say you're searching for directors, managers and chief engineers in avionic system test and integration, and your LinkedIn search turns up an entry with the heading "Avionics System Test and Integration

Manager at ABC Corporation." When that occurs, you can often find the individual's full public profile using my Google trick for LinkedIn: Just open another browser window and do a Google search on that exact phrase, "Avionics System Test and Integration Manager at ABC Corporation," enclosed in quotation marks as shown. Google will frequently return one or more entries from LinkedIn, either a profile or a directory, that includes a name as well as the title. Check these names to make sure the position is current.

LinkedIn does have its limitations as a list-building tool. Profiles rarely include business mailing addresses or phone numbers. They do list the metropolitan area where the member lives, which can be helpful in determining the company office where the member works. Email addresses, however, are available only to members' connections and are frequently personal rather than corporate.

The beauty of LinkedIn is that, because of its size, you can usually find several names and their job titles within any given company. Plus, it's free. And once you have a name and title, it's much easier to find contact data with the resources that follow.

- **Jigsaw and other business directories.** Jigsaw bills itself as "the world's largest database of up-to-date, downloadable, & complete contact information." It's a business directory built by members, who supply contact information on their business acquaintances—sort of a big, business card bulletin board. As I write this, they claim to have "over 21 million complete B2B contacts"

  In exchange for supplying contacts, members earn points they can spend for contact data supplied by other members on businesses and individuals. You can also buy points under a number of affordable plans, and there are enterprise solutions, as well.

  Hoovers, demandbase and ZoomInfo's PowerSell offer similar services for building precision-targeted prospect lists. While these are fee-based, they can really speed up the list-building process. Plus, you own rather than rent the contacts you pay for.

- **Google and other search engines.** Google will often turn up contact data in places where business directories, networks and corporate websites won't reach. If you have a name, title and company, just type that data into the Google search field and hit 'enter'. I've had Google return individuals' complete contact data in conference contact lists, in papers they've presented at conferences, and in press releases posted on trade journal sites and elsewhere.

- **Telephone.** When online resources fail to yield complete contact data, or you suspect that data might be out of date, pick up the phone. Call the main number where you think your prospect works and ask the receptionist to confirm the individual's office mailing address. If asked for a reason, you can simply say that you have some information you believe the individual will be interested in, but you want to make sure the individual still works there and confirm his or her mailing address before sending it out.

  If the switchboard is completely automated or the receptionist can't help you, try calling the sales number. (That's why it was included in the data list in Step 2.) Sales professionals can sympathize with what you're trying to do and will usually be willing to help out, if they can.

Conclusion

Admittedly, building a B2B mailing list by hand can be a bit tedious. (You may want to outsource the task to a virtual assistant, or assign it to a group of university interns.) But as mentioned earlier, the rewards in terms of higher response rates, lower mailing costs, more leads and sales, and higher ROI… can make it well worth the effort.

Chapter 5:
How to Write a Sales Letter that Gets Maximum Response

When you sit down to write a new promotion for your company, one of the most important decisions you have to make—really a whole set of decisions—is how to organize the material. Because how you present it greatly affects how people react to it. And that ultimately determines the response your piece will generate and the return you'll get on your investment.

But how do you know what to say first? What comes next? What goes in the middle? How to conclude?

Well, you're in luck. In the world of direct response marketing, those questions have long been answered.

Direct response copywriters follow certain formulas or *sequences* that have been proven over the years, decades even, in millions of promotions. Some of these sequences are specific to certain types of promotions, like sales letters or case studies. Others are general formulas that work for many types of marketing projects.

Today, I'd like to introduce you to one of the latter, one of the most effective and versatile of these "persuasive writing formulas." It can be used for ads, sales letters, emails, web pages, brochures…even trade journal articles. It's the formula I use most often. In fact, I'm using it right now as I write to you.

This handy five-step formula for writing copy that sells was developed by Bob Bly, the reigning "dean" of business-to-business copywriters. I doubt anyone has written more on direct response B2B marketing than Bob. He calls his formula "The Motivating Sequence." Here's how he describes it in his book *Business to Business Direct Marketing* (second edition) [xvi]:

Step 1: Gain the prospect's ***attention***.

Step 2: Engage the reader's interest by identifying a ***problem*** the reader has or a need that must be filled.

Step 3: Position your product, service or company as the ***solution*** to the reader's problem.

Step 4: Offer ***proof*** to convince skeptical readers your claim that you can solve their problem is true.

Step 5: Invite the reader to take ***action*** toward implementing your solution. This might be to request more information or to order the product or service.

Let's look at an example. The following advertisement is one I wrote to promote my own services. After you read the text we'll break down the steps.

(1) **More Leads and Sales...with Less Stress.**

A better way to get your marketing communications written and approved on time.

(2) As an aerospace marketing professional, you know how tough it can be to get sales literature approved on schedule. It's difficult to find writers who can handle the unique challenges of promoting a technical product or service.

(3) That's where I can help.

(4) I'm John Cole, the copywriter/engineer behind CopyEngineer. With 20 years experience as an avionic systems engineer, I'm used to quickly coming to grips with new technologies and cutting-edge systems. Plus, I have extensive training in both direct response copywriting and business-to-business marketing communications, having learned directly from such legendary copywriters as Michael Masterson, Bob Bly, Clayton Makepeace, Herschel Gordon Lewis, Paul Hollingshead, John Forde and Steve Slaunwhite.

Whether you need a sales letter, case study, white paper, advertisement, article or brochure, I'll write you a compelling piece that gains easy approval in the review process…and grabs the attention of engineers, buyers, and executives alike.

(5) For a free, no-obligation quote on your next project, more information, call (+39) 011 569 4951. Or email me at info@CopyEngineer.com. You'll get your project approved on schedule—and more leads and sales—without the stress.

Getting attention (1) is most often accomplished with a headline, as I've done here. Since I'm targeting aerospace marketing professionals, I try to gain their attention by stating a benefit (or two in this case) that will appeal to them: increasing the ROI they get from their marketing communications, while making their job easier.

You can get attention in other ways as well. If a headline is inappropriate, a simple salutation like, "Dear Aerospace Marketing Professional:" can do the trick. If you're sending a mass mailing, you might put some benefit-oriented "teaser" copy on the envelope to encourage your prospect to open it. Your job here is to identify your prospect and let him know this message is for him.

Next, you **identify a problem or need (2)** your prospect has—one that your product or service solves or fills. This should be brief, just enough to engage the prospect's interest and let him know you understand his problem.

Then, once you've identified the problem, you immediately and swiftly **position your product or service as the solution (3)**. This is often just a short transition sentence like the one I've used in this example.

One of the reasons the Motivating Sequence works so well is that business readers are always on the lookout for information that will help them solve their problems, improve their productivity and make their jobs easier. By identifying your prospect's problem and offering a solution at the outset, you let him know, right up front, WIIFM ("What's in it for ME?").

Now that you've grabbed his interest, you **offer proof you can indeed solve the reader's problem (4)**, as you've claimed. As Bly states in *Business to Business Direct Marketing,* [xvii] "This proof can be any of the following:

- A description of product benefits and features
- An explanation of how your service is rendered
- Testimonials from satisfied customers

- A list of prestigious clients
- Research or laboratory test results that prove the superior performance of your product
- Case histories that demonstrate the success your product or service has had solving problems similar to the prospect's problem
- The credentials, track record, and experience of your company
- Awards, licenses, degrees, certifications, affiliations and other demonstrations of your reputation, expertise, and stability"

In our example, I've opted for credentials and experience, because I want to position myself as a superior alternative to my prospect's two usual choices for writing highly technical marcom projects: ad agency or freelance copywriters who don't have technical expertise, and engineers within her company, who normally have no training in copywriting.

Finally, I make my **call to action (5)** by inviting the reader to call or email me for a free quote or more information. This is where you discuss your offer and how the prospect can take you up on it. You'll notice that I bracket my call to action with strong promises of what my prospect will get if she heeds it. And I've included the reply mechanism, my phone number and email address, so the prospect knows exactly <u>how</u> to respond.

As Bly says, "The action step is the simplest portion to write, yet it is the most frequently omitted by the inexperienced marketer. Avoid weak closes such as 'We look forward to serving you' or 'Let us know how we can be of service'."

So there you have it—The Motivating Sequence. Try it out the next time you have to write a promotion for your company. Just follow the steps I've listed above, and you'll have that piece ready to go in no time.

Want another example? Go back and have another look at this article. I use the headline (and the subject line of the email) to get attention. The first three paragraphs pose the problem: how to organize a B2B promotion that sells. Three more short paragraphs position The Motivating Sequence as the solution. The bulk of the article offers the proof, as I describe the steps and how to use them. And I conclude by inviting you to try the formula yourself.

Take-Away Points

The easiest way to write copy that sells is to "follow the formula." And one of the most effective and versatile of these formulas is "The Motivating Sequence."

An easy mnemonic for remembering the sequence is "**APSPA**" (**A**ttention, **P**roblem, **S**olution, **P**roof, **A**ction).

Chapter 6:
My #1 Tip for Effective B2B Headlines

A couple of years ago, a client showed me the trade magazine in which an article I'd written for her had been published. She seemed pleased.

I felt sick.

Unbeknownst to me, and to my client, the magazine's editor had replaced the headline I'd written with a much shorter one of his own. Probably to match the magazine's "design-driven" style.

Why did that upset me?

It wasn't a matter of ego. Instead, I felt deeply sorry for my client. She'd been robbed. In my opinion, that editor had cut significantly the number of inquiries the article was likely to generate.

Because as just about every advertising expert will tell you—an attention-getting headline is the most crucial element in any advertisement.

And let's face it, even though they're meant to inform rather than make a sales pitch, an article placed by a company in a trade publication is *still* an advertisement.

Famed copywriter and ad executive David Ogilvy, founder of Ogilvy & Mather, had this to say about headlines in his book, *Confessions of an Advertising Man*:

> *"The headline is the most important element in most advertisements. It is the telegram which decides the reader whether to read the copy.*
>
> *"On the average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar.*
>
> *"If you haven't done some selling in your headline, you have wasted 80 percent of your client's money."* [xviii]

So today, I'd like to give you my #1 tip for writing effective B2B headlines…

Always use a *benefit* headline, never a *teaser* headline.

Headlines can basically be divided into two types: benefit headlines, and teaser headlines.

A teaser headline tries to do what the name implies: tease you into reading the ad, email, sales letter, or whatever. Here are some examples taken from a recent issue of Aerospace Testing International (ATI):

We Go Above & Beyond.	[Ad for piezotronic sensors.]
Time Flies.	[Ad for vibration, pressure and shock sensors.]
We're Driven!	[Ad for RF/microwave instrumentation.]

As you can see, these headlines are virtually meaningless without the underlying body copy—or at least the visual. The copywriter is hoping you'll be intrigued enough by his clever (or clichéd) turn of phrase that you'll keep reading to discover what it means.

"Do teaser headlines work?" asks copywriter Steve Slaunwhite in *Secrets of Writing for the Business-to-Business Market*.[xix] "They do—*sometimes*. But all too often, it's a long shot. Put yourself in the reader's shoes for a moment. He's a busy manager. His desk is piled to the ceiling with work. The phone is ringing. His in-tray is overflowing. He has 44 unread e-mails, and it's only 10 a.m.! Does he have time to decipher your witty headline? Probably not."

"I believe that teaser headlines suffer from a fatal flaw," writes copywriter Ivan Levinson in his e-zine, *The Levinson Letter*. "They are essentially a bet, and a bad one at that. The writer bets that the reader will check out the body copy simply because the headline is so darned intriguing. Sadly, this is a bet that is often lost." [xx]

So unless you enjoy rolling the dice with your marketing budget and career, I'd suggest you spend your time crafting the other type of headline. The type of headline that sells consistently. The *benefit* headline.

A benefit headline implies or expresses a benefit to the reader. Here are some examples of benefit headlines from the same issue of ATI:

Wiring Fault Found.	[Ad for a portable wiring tester]
Measure Strain Without Stress	[Ad for strain testing instruments]
Effective cost savings by replacing film	[Ad for x-ray inspection systems]

Headlines like these say to the reader, "Hey, read this and you can improve productivity, make your job easier, save money, get things done faster, get an edge on the competition, comply with regulations, etc."

Notice how the benefit headlines above, unlike the teasers, seem directly related to the products they promote. Benefit headlines help prospects "identify themselves" by offering them something they're looking for. They tell the prospect, right up front, what's in it for him.

How to craft a benefit headline

One tried and true technique for crafting headlines is to determine which benefit your product or service provides is most important to your customers, and use that benefit as the crux of your headline.

But the benefit doesn't always have to come from the product itself.

Professionals are always looking to gain useful knowledge that will help them do their jobs better and more easily. So if your marketing piece offers helpful information, say so. Use phrases like, "How to..", "7 Reasons Why…", "5 Great Strategies…" and "Free Report" in your headlines. They signal that specific information is available, and will lure prospects into your body copy.

If your product or company has a unique strength that sets it apart from the competition, emphasize that in your headline. Don't use generic 'corporate-speak' like we saw in those 'teaser' examples above.

Why advertisers (misguidedly) use teaser headlines

Now, you may be asking yourself, “If teaser headlines are so risky, why do I see so many of them in ads and other marketing materials?” Slaunwhite says, “I suspect it is because many copywriters and ad agencies are under pressure to be ‘creative’. They want to demonstrate their original thinking to clients and colleagues. And what better way to do that then to come up with a mind-twister of a headline.” [xix]

My own theory is that many companies leave their advertising in the hands of ad agency art directors or graphic designers who believe people don’t read. To them, copy is just another design element. The result is often a short, generic headline that ‘blends well’ with the opening visual…but does little to sell the product.

But if you really want to boost leads and sales and get a good return on your marketing budget, use a headline that *works*…not one that’s just ‘creative’. Because as Ogilvy is often quoted as saying, “If it doesn’t sell, it’s not creative.”

Take-Away Points

If you want your advertising and other marcom to generate leads and sales, use benefit headlines, not teaser headlines. Insist on them from your ad agency or PR firm.

Chapter 7:

How to Grab Your Prospect's Undivided Attention and Focus it on Your Sales Letter…in 3 Seconds or Less

You've just drafted a handful of benefit-driven headlines for your next sales letter. You've picked out two or three that look fairly promising.

But each…just seems to lack something.

You're wondering to yourself, "Will any of these really work? Can I be sure? How could I make them better?"

Well, just keep reading, and you'll never have to ask those questions again. In this chapter, I'll introduce you to a proven 4-point process for turning any ordinary headline into a response-driving, blockbuster headline.

Why you need a hard-working headline

Your prospect has just sent off an important proposal. Now he's got 10 minutes before his weekly staff meeting. He picks up the trade journal that's been waiting for him in his inbox the past four days. He begins leafing through it. He comes to the page with your ad.

You now have *3 seconds* to capture his attention.

Remember, your prospect's in a hurry. He wants to dismiss your ad and move on. He's only going to read things that seem important to him.

Plus, there's another factor working against you. Your prospect is bombarded by hundreds of sales messages every day. And he's seen most of them before. So, like the rest of us, he's trained himself to make a quick decision on whether or not to read your advertisement.

His brain wants to *categorize* information—so he can make that quick decision. Bill Bonner, president of Agora Publishing, calls this tendency the Categorical Imperative. It means that if your ad looks similar to others your reader has seen, his subconscious mind will quickly say, "Oh, this is just another one of *those*…", and prod him to move on.

And studies show he'll base that decision largely on your headline. As advertising legend David Ogilvy pointed out, "On the average, five times as many people read the headlines as read the body copy." [xviii]

So how do you make sure your headline will break through the clutter and grab your prospect's attention?

A 4-Point Plan for Crafting Killer Headlines

Master copywriter, marketing consultant and entrepreneur Michael Masterson has identified four 'ingredients' that make for powerful headlines. He calls his formula 'The Four U's'—because powerful headlines are *<u>u</u>seful*, *<u>u</u>nique*, *<u>u</u>ltra-specific* and *<u>u</u>rgent*.

Let's look at each of these four ingredients briefly. Then I'll show you an example of how to use them.

Useful. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the best headlines are those that offer your prospect some kind of benefit. You want to appeal to his self interest. You want to answer his subconscious question, "What's in it for me?", immediately.

Unique. A powerful, attention-getting headline says something new. Or, if it says something the reader has heard before, it says it in a fresh, new way.

Uniqueness helps you get around your reader's Categorical Imperative filter. By saying something new to your reader, or in a way he's never encountered, you stymie his brain's ability to categorize it immediately. This creates intrigue and draws him into your copy.

Ultra-specific. Fine details also create intrigue. And credibility as well.

If you just say your product is "the best" or your company is "the world leader," it sounds like hype—you offer the reader no reason to believe your claim. But if you say your product "reduces vibration by up to 53%," or "extends MTBF by a 75% or more," you've made a statement of fact—and you've implied you'll reveal evidence to back it up. Details in the headline give your prospect specific reasons to delve into your copy.

Urgent. Adding urgency means giving the reader a reason to act now rather than later.

If your headline makes an offer, you can create urgency by adding a deadline, or noting supply limitations. "Offer ends May 30," "for the next 60 days," "to the next 50 customers" and "while supplies last" are examples of urgency elements.

In B2B, urgency is often induced by warning of potential loss of productivity, ROI, sales, precision, effectiveness, opportunity, etc., if the prospect fails to adopt your solution or chooses one of your competitors'.

Urgency can also be expressed in terms of savings or profits that can be accumulated over time using your product or service. For example: *"After over half a million hours of air using AVBLEND, we've had no premature camshaft failures."*

Applying the Four U's

The Four U's technique works best when it's used to strengthen and refine a headline—after you've come up with the initial idea. And the best way to show how you how to use it is to work through an example.

Let's say you're selling a new lubricant specifically formulated for high-speed machine tools. Its primary advantage is that it makes these expensive tools last far longer than any other lubricant currently on the market. You want to get that benefit across to your reader immediately. And the basic headline idea you've come up with is:

New High-Tech Lubricant Makes Machine Tool Parts Last Far Longer

So that's our starting point. Now, the first thing to do is score our headline against each of the four U's on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = weak, 4 = strong). It's usually not possible to make a headline rate a 4 on all four U's and still be easily readable. But if your headline doesn't merit a 3 or 4 on at least <u>three</u> of the tests—it's probably not as strong as it could be.

So how does this headline stack up?

You set out to capture the product's main benefit, making expensive machine tools last longer. That's pretty important to your target prospect. So for Useful, let's give it a 3 for the moment.

Is it Unique? Hmm…hardly. It looks a lot like the type of claim made thousands of times every day for thousands of different products. There's nothing that really makes this claim stand out. For uniqueness, I'd give it a 1.

Is it Ultra-specific? Well, it does mention that it's a lubricant for machine tools. We'll give ourselves the benefit of the doubt and rate it a 2 on specifics.

And how about Urgency? Is there anything in this headline that gives the reader a reason to act—or even read the ad—now rather than later? I don't think so: 1 for urgency.

Obviously, our headline needs a bit of work. So now let's see what we might do to make it stronger, focusing on one U at a time. We'll start with Ultra-specific.

I'd say the ending of our headline, "…Parts Last Far Longer", is pretty vague. How much longer? If we don't know, we should probably find out. But let's say we have extensive test results showing that, over a wide variety of operating conditions, our product has made machine tools last anywhere from two to six times longer, compared to the leading brands. We might change our headline to:

New High-Tech Lubricant Makes Machine Tool Parts Last Up to 6 Times Longer

That's better, isn't it? It immediately makes our claim seem more credible. Because we couldn't make that statement unless we had some proof to back it up. What's more, by being Ultra-specific, we've also made our headline more *Useful*. Our prospect now knows just how much he can save.

So with just one small change, we've elevated our headline to at least a 3 for Ultra-specific and close to a 4 for Useful. Not bad.

But looking at it again, it still isn't very Unique. We're still running the risk of our prospect filtering it out.

How can we fix that? Well, 'High-Tech Lubricant' is a phrase our prospect has probably read dozens of times. So it might be useful to think about what *makes* our lubricant 'high-tech' and try to include that in our headline.

Let's say our product contains a metallic substance that causes it to form a magnetic bond with metal surfaces that experience a lot of friction. No other product has it. So we might turn this property into a new terminology no one has seen before. Our headline could then be:

New 'Polarized Oil' Magnetically Adheres to Wear Parts in Machine Tools
Making Them Last Up to 6 Times Longer

There. Now we have a solid headline that is strong in three of the four U's. It's unique, useful and ultra-specific. In fact, it's a classic B2B headline, often used by Bob Bly (in *The Copywriter's Handbook* and other books) to illustrate a headline-writing technique he calls, "Create a new terminology." So I wouldn't want to presume to improve upon it just to add the fourth U (urgency).

But that brings us back to a point I mentioned earlier. Often, it's just not possible to make your headline rate highly in all four U's—without making it so wordy that it loses much of its attention-getting power. But if you feel your headline still needs to be stronger, there are ways to get around this problem.

One way is to use a subhead under your headline.

If your product is brand new, you may want to offer a special introductory price to encourage customers to give it a try. Putting your offer in a subhead adds urgency without diminishing the readability of the headline itself:

New 'Polarized Oil' Magnetically Adheres to Wear Parts in Machine Tools
Making Them Last Up to 6 Times Longer

Special introductory offer:
Save 25% on orders placed before March 31.

Special offers can work very well as subheads. Because in the instant after your prospect has read your headline—while he's deciding whether or not he'll read on—you give him an added incentive to read now rather than later.

I encourage you to use 'The Four U's' any time you need to write a headline. This focused, step-by-step method will save you hours of brainstorming, and help you turn mediocre headlines into powerful, response-boosting headlines…that lead to greater sales.

Take-Away Points

Every time you write a headline, use 'The Four U's' formula—useful, unique, ultra-specific and urgent—to make it as strong as it can be. It's a proven tool for grabbing the attention of more prospects and boosting response.

Chapter 8:
10 Great Ideas for Writing a Powerful B2B Headline

The most effective way to write a strong B2B headline is to brainstorm a list based on proven formulas. Then you pick out the ones that look the most promising and refine them until one really stands out.

Previously, we've talked about why you should use a benefit headline, rather than a teaser headline. And how to refine a headline using the "4 U's" formula. So in this chapter, I thought I'd give you a list of 10 proven headline formulas you can try the next time you need a headline, title or subject line—one that really grabs your prospects' attention—along with examples of each.

1. Start with the words "How to."

Business readers are always seeking ways to solve problems, increase profitability or gain a competitive advantage. They want solid, "how-to" information. So headlines that start with "How to" naturally attract attention.

Following "How to", you simply promise your target audience a solution to their problem, or an attractive benefit they can gain: "*How to find and repair fuel leaks 30% faster*." "*How to slash avionics integration time by connecting your databus to an Ethernet LAN*."

"Whenever I'm stuck for a headline," writes Bob Bly, author of *The Lead Generation Handbook*, "I type 'How to' on the page, and what follows those words is always a decent, hard-working headline: good enough to use until something better comes along." [xxi]

2. List the reasons why.

"Reasons Why" headlines grab attention because they make a promise of multiple benefits to the reader: "*Three good reasons to contact LTI about your shearography NDT needs.*"

3. Use a number.

Numbers, too, draw attention in headlines. Numbers typically signal bite-size chunks of information. See the title of this article, for example, or the reasons-why headline shown above. Number headlines may also offer easy-to-follow instructions: "*5 Steps to Safer, More Cost-Effective Engine Testing*."

Quick, easily digested information is exactly what time-starved business decision-makers are looking for.

4. Use a customer testimonial.

Testimonials not only provide instant credibility, they also attract attention in headlines, for two reasons.

First, studies have shown reader's eyes are drawn to quotation marks. Headlines with quotation marks are read more often than those without.

Second, business readers are interested in knowing how others have gained benefits from a product or service. And testimonial headlines signal a "success story" is about to be revealed: *"After over half a million hours of air using AVBLEND, we've had no premature camshaft failures."*

5. Use the word "Discover."

Discover is a powerful headline word because it promises to reveal new or hidden information that may be valuable to the prospect: "*Discover a powerful and affordable desktop surfacing solution that works entirely within AutoCAD*."

6. Promise to reveal a "Secret"

Secret is another powerful headline word. Like everyone else, business readers like to be let in on secrets—especially ones that can give them a competitive advantage.

The word "secret" also pairs naturally with "discover": "*Discover the secret profit centre hidden in your business...*"

7. Offer free information.

Free information offers are one of the best ways to generate leads. They get the attention of business readers.

When you have a white paper or other free information piece to offer as a contact incentive, make that offer the focus of your promotion and headline: "*FREE White Paper: How to Reduce Your Procurement Costs by 22% With a Web-Based Procurement System.*" In other words, sell the offer, not your product or service.

8. Make an invitation.

Invitation headlines work well, because they harness the power of exclusivity. Business people like to be invited to join an exclusive group: "*You're invited to spend the evening with the most influential decision makers in the software industry today*."

9. Mention an award, rave review or endorsement.

Business buyers want the best. They want something proven, something that offers a high probability of strong ROI. Awards and endorsements give them the proof they need to justify their purchase and put their minds at ease.

So mentioning an award, a rave review or an expert recommendation in your headline tells prospects they should have a look at what you have to offer: "*Named by Aerospace Testing International as one of the Top Ten Innovations of 2009*."

10. Ask a question that reminds the reader of a problem.

Question headlines cause readers to stop and think. If the question is relevant to them and thought-provoking, they will be drawn into your promotion. "*Are labor-intensive simulation updates causing slips to your test schedule?"*

Chapter 9

How to Double or Even Triple Response to your Ads, Emails and Direct Mail

Want to significantly increase your response rate and ROI from your lead generation campaigns?

Use a bait piece.

What's a "bait piece," you ask?

A bait piece is any information product you offer for free, as "bait", to "lure" your prospects into giving you their contact information. It can be a white paper, a special report, a case study, a podcast, a recorded webcast… any informational content that relates to your product or service, and that your prospect will find useful and valuable.

"By offering a bait piece, you can generate inquiries from many more prospects than would otherwise respond," writes Bob Bly in *The White Paper Marketing Handbook*.[xxii] "A bait piece offer can easily double or triple the response versus the same direct mail promotion without a bait piece offer."

To effectively generate quality leads for your business, **a bait piece must meet two criteria**. Your bait piece must:

1. Be valuable to your target prospect, and
2. Be related to your product or service.

To be valuable to your prospects, your bait piece should show them how to solve a problem they have. Studies show business buyers seek out white papers, case studies and similar content to help them solve problems and make purchasing decisions.

To be related to your product or service, naturally, your bait piece should address a problem that your product or service is good at solving. If your bait piece addresses a problem your target market has, and that your product or service solves, you're more likely to generate inquiries from qualified prospects.

Bait pieces are effective at selling your product or service, because they let you sell indirectly. Instead of trying to sell your product or service, your advertisement, letter or email "sells" the free information by explaining how it will help your prospect solve his or her problem. The bait piece then convinces the prospect that yours is the best possible solution, and positions your product or service as the ideal method, or a critical component, for obtaining that solution.

A bait piece multiplies responses in a number of ways:

Appeals to more prospects. Advertising your product or service appeals only to those with an immediate need for it. Advertising free information appeals also to those who may need your offering in the future. This greatly expands your pool of likely respondents.

Starts the relationship in a positive way. By offering your prospects information that can help them solve a pressing problem or need that they have, you appeal to them as thinking human beings, rather than talking down to them the way most advertising does. Since you're not asking anything in return—other than contact data, which doesn't cost them anything—you appear altruistic, rather than self-serving.

Eliminates buying resistance. Most people today feel bombarded by advertising and are skeptical of advertising claims. By offering free information, with no obligation, you avoid making prospects feel like they're being sold.

What this means, going back to Bly's response statistics, is that by offering a bait piece you can:

Double or triple your number of leads generated by each mailing or advertisement,

Reduce by 50% to 67% your advertising or mailing costs to generate the leads you need for a given volume of sales, thus doubling or tripling your ROI,

Add names to your house mailing list two to three times as fast, if you're promoting your bait piece with ads or mailings to rented lists.

Consider using a bait piece in your next promotion.

Chapter 10:

Get Fat, Get Noticed: How to increase response by adding some "bulk" to your direct mail.

One of the big challenges of marketing with direct mail is getting your prospect to open it.

One way to overcome this obstacle is to include a "bulky item" in your envelope, something that adds some thickness—perhaps a curious bulge—to your mailing.

Some may scoff at this technique as "cheesy" or undignified. But it doesn't have to be. And the fact is, *it works*. According to Chris Marlow, a freelance B2B copywriter with extensive direct response agency experience, open rates tend to be in the high double digits for such packages—close to 100%. [xiv]

The reason? Dimensional mailings stand out from other mail. They get attention, and *they get opened*.

The downside, of course, is the added cost. But if your list is well-targeted and your offer enticing, significantly higher open rates will mean significantly higher eventual sales. You're likely to be paid back many, many times over.

How to choose a "bulky item"

Your bulky item should relate in some way to either your product or service, or to the theme of the package you're enclosing it with. It's also a good idea to choose something that's useful, so your prospect will hang onto it and remember you by it—like the items you hand out at trade shows. A wide variety of corporate promotional items suitable for mailing can be found at sites like www.impactpromotions.com.

By way of an example, here's an idea you might want to try. Say you've put together a free information kit offer—a white paper, a brochure, a couple of case studies, etc.—and you're going to offer it to a well-targeted list of 500 hand-picked prospects. In the envelope, you include a small flash drive on a lanyard, both imprinted with your company logo and web address. Then, in your letter, you tell your prospects you're giving them the flash drive so they can easily share your information kit with colleagues once they've registered and downloaded it.

Of course, your prospect could simply forward his or her colleagues the link to your landing page where they can download your information kit themselves. In fact, you might even mention that in the letter. Because the point of including the flash drive in the envelope is <u>not</u> to provide storage for your free information kit. It's to make your prospects curious about what's inside your envelope, so they'll open it and read your letter.

And here's another plus. Because you don't want your bulky gift to be destroyed or lost in the mail, you'll send it in an insulated envelope. This makes it stand out even more. Now, it's not just a letter…It's a package!

And who can resist a package with their name on it?

Want to make sure your next lead-generation mailing gets open and read by the maximum number of prospects possible? Consider adding some "bulk" to it.

Chapter 11:
9 Ways to Grab Leads who are "Too Busy to Read"

I call it the Business Prospect Paradox.

In the world of business-to-business marketing, your prospect is a reader. Reading is a big part of his job description. He *must* read to make informed buying decisions on the products and services he needs to do his job properly.

Yet in our so-called "Information Age" (or "Information Overload Age")—with so much data available at the click of a mouse, so much promotional material overflowing his IN-basket and competing for his attention—your prospect doesn't have time to read most of the information he receives.

And he knows it.

That's why the vast majority of today's business readers are *scanners*. Chances are, you're one too, as I am. We quickly scan our mail, our email, our trade publications, looking for something that piques our interest, something that might be useful to us…and quickly discard the rest.

And we don't stop there. When an article or promotion does grab out attention, we don't just start to read. We scan the piece itself to see if it really has what we're looking for. We search quickly for clues, trying to determine if its worth our precious time to read further.

That's why it's of utmost importance that we optimize for scanners. Make the clues easy to find. Otherwise, our promotions will just end up in the trash.

So, I'd like to give you 9 tips for making your promotions "scanner-friendly"—nine proven copywriting techniques that will greatly increase your chances of getting your time-pressed business prospect to read your next campaign.

1. Grab 'em by the eyeballs with a big promise in your headline.

One of the most effective ways to grab a scanner's attention is to promise him something that he really needs or wants. Make him a promise that your product can deliver on. Preferably something that relieves a big professional pain he's feeling.

Putting a big benefit in your headline—one that's important to your prospect—is probably the single best way to grab his attention (as we talked about in Chapter 5).

2. Usher 'em in with benefit-laden deck copy.

When you've hooked your scanner's attention with your headline, he immediately wants to know more. But he may not be ready to commit to reading the fine print yet. So you might want to "set the hook"—by elaborating on your headline or adding some additional benefits—in the deck copy.

The "deck" is the text found directly underneath the headline that is set in a smaller point size than the headline but larger than the body text, frequently in bold type. The eye is naturally drawn to it after reading the headline. So, it's a good place to sell your scanner on reading your promotion before he gets distracted by something else.

The deck serves as an usher or doorman. It assures the prospect he's in the right place, tells him what's in store for him, and invites him in. It works with your headline to answer your prospect's overriding question: "What in it for me?" Answer that question well and you'll turn that scanner into a reader—and probably a lead as well.

3. Tell a condensed version of your story in the subheads.

Another good technique for reeling in scanners is to summarize your sales message in subheads placed throughout the copy. In Tested Advertising Methods, John Caples writes:

> *"Here is a solution to the problem of long copy versus short copy that should satisfy the champions of both sides of the question. Put a brief selling message into your headline and subheadings. Put your detailed message into small print. In this way, you accomplish two things: (1) You get a brief message across to glancers with your headline and subheads. (2) You give a complete message in small print to the person who is sufficiently interested in your product to read about it."* [xxiii]

Subheads also help in another way. They give scanners multiple "entry points" into your promotion and multiple reasons to read. Different prospects will have different problems, thus different reasons for needing your product or service. If a particular subhead really hits home, your scanner may start reading at that point and eventually respond—even if he never goes back and reads the beginning of the piece.

By highlighting each of your product's main selling points in a subhead, you greatly increase the chances your scanner will find something that will make him want to stop and read—and respond to—your message.

One last thing about subheads—and this applies to deck copy, as well: you should treat them just like headlines. Apply "the 4 Us" to make them as powerful and enticing as possible.

4. Capitalize on the attention-getting power of illustrations with captions and call-outs.

Put a caption under every photo and illustration, in every promotion and sales support piece you produce.

Scanners browse photos. And when one catches their eye, they immediately seek out a caption. Take advantage! Don't just describe the picture. Use your captions to sell.

And if your photo or drawing illustrates multiple benefits, use callouts—bits of copy overlaid on the illustration—to highlight them.

5. Use bullet lists to summarize benefits.

The time-challenged scanner is looking for a summary. And he knows a bulleted list is a good place to find one. Bulleted lists are a great way to highlight a lot of selling points, especially when space is limited.

But don't bore your prospect with a dry list of features. That will just give him a reason to dismiss your promotion and move on. Instead, tell him what those features mean to him. Attach benefits to them.

Or better yet, make a bullet list of benefits rather then features. But in each bullet—if there's room—give some idea of how your product achieves those benefits through its unique features.

6. Use sidebars to highlight important information.

Sidebars—those fact-filled boxes that appear along the margin of the page—are honey-traps for scanners. Use them to provide in-depth information on important features and benefits or to showcase awards, success stories or testimonials from satisfied customers.

Be sure to include an attention-grabbing headline at the top of your sidebar. And use an illustration, if possible.

7. Use pull quotes to make "buried treasure" visible to the scanner.

Pull quotes are the bits of text you see re-printed (quoted) in the margin, or in an inset along the margin, near the point where they appear in the body copy. They are usually set in larger type, possibly in a contrasting color to draw attention. Like sidebars, their prominence makes them prime targets for scanners.

Pull quotes are good for highlighting facts that set your product apart from the competition and provide an obvious benefit to your prospect.

8. Make your promotion "reader-friendly" with plenty of white space.

Documents packed densely with text are intimidating to read and hard to scan. Your prospect is more likely to want to scan your brochure or promotion if there are is a lot of white space on each page.

Use wide margins. They make the document look more inviting. They also give you space for pull quotes.

Write short paragraphs and put extra space above subheads. The added white space emphasizes the fact that the text is broken up into easily-digestible sections. Ignore the rules you learned in school about constructing paragraphs. Use any excuse to chop long paragraphs into shorter ones. Most should be from one to five lines in length. And vary paragraph length to make the text look more interesting.

9. Add a P.S. to the end of your sales letter.

Finally, if you use direct mail to promote your products or services, always try to include a compelling P.S. (post script) at the end of your sales letter. Most people are conditioned to turn immediately to the end of a letter to find out who has written to them. So the P.S. gets high readership. And successful direct marketers know the P.S. is often the first thing the prospect reads when he opens the package.

There are many ways to use the P.S. You can restate your product's benefits. Highlight your offer. Add more credibility with a strong testimonial. Give your prospect a reason to act now rather than later. Anything that might compel your prospect to stop scanning—and take a few minutes to read what you have to say.

Naturally, I try to incorporate as many of these techniques as I can into every promotion I write. So if you'd like some help converting more of your prospects from "scanners" into leads, just give me a call at **(+39) 011 569 4951**. Or email me at **info@CopyEngineer.com.**

Take-away Points

Your time-pressed business reader tends to be a scanner. He wants to find what he's looking for fast. If he doesn't, he's likely to dismiss your promotion and move on.

So it pays to make your promotions "scanner-friendly" using these 9 techniques:

1. Promise your prospect something he craves in your headline.
2. Support your headline with benefit-laden deck copy.
3. Put a "condensed sales pitch" in your subheads.
4. Use captions and callouts to harness the power of your illustrations.
5. Summarize your sales points with bulleted lists of benefits.
6. Feature compelling information in sidebars.
7. Uncover important points using pull quotes.
8. Use white space to break up text into easy-to-read chunks.
9. Put a compelling P.S. at the end of your sales letter.

Chapter 12:
What to Tell Your Reader at the End of Every Sales Letter

All salespeople, even raw trainees, know there is one specific thing they must do at the end of every sales presentation: *They must ask for the sale*.

Salespeople are trained that if they don't ask their prospect to take action right then and there, he or she may never do so…and all their hard work will have been for nothing.

The same rule applies to advertising and marketing.

After all, isn't advertising—and all other promotional material—just "salesmanship in print", as advertising pioneer John E. Kennedy called it back in 1905? Isn't the whole point of marketing to persuade customers to buy your products or services?

At the end of every promotion, if you want prospects to respond, you must "ask for the sale." You must tell them precisely what their next step should be, and how to take it.

You need a strong "call to action."

What is a call to action?

In direct marketing, the "call to action" is a short statement at the end of a promotion that tells readers what to do if they're interested in what you've just described:

> *For more information, visit: www.acmeproducts.com/megaprobe*
>
> *To speak with one of our engineers about your application, or to arrange an on-site demonstration of SuperWidget, call us toll-free at 1-877-555-2345.*
>
> *To download the new trial version of TestWorks—so you can see for yourself how it can slash your testing time by half—visit www.testworks.com/trial and click "download."*

A strong call to action has the following characteristics:

- Tells the prospect the next step you want them to take
- Gives them clear, concise instructions for taking it
- Focuses on customer benefits

Notice how each of the preceding examples meets these criteria, with an increasingly stronger focus on customer benefits as you move down the list.

And there are ways to make your call to action even stronger. You can give readers a reason to act now rather than later. Or you can give them a reason why it would be a mistake not to act immediately. Limited seating at an event, registration deadlines and limited-time offers are all reasons to act now. Reminding prospects of how much money they could be saving, or their risk of losing a competitive advantage, are examples of reasons why it would be a mistake not to act.

A strong call to action improves results

For more than a century, direct marketers have known that clearly defining the next step they want their prospect to take boosts response. Yet, as I'll explain in a moment, this lesson seems to have been lost on many of today's B2B technology marketers.

Of course, B2B selling is typically a multi-step process, so in most cases you won't be asking directly for the sale. But you should be asking your prospect to take the next step in the process.

Why do B2B marketers often fail to do this?

"Many executives feel it's somehow in poor taste to clearly spell out what you want the reader to do, and when," says Bob Bly, author of *Business to Business Direct Marketing*. "But to increase marketing results, that's precisely what you must do: tell the reader what the next step is and give them instructions for taking it." [xxiv]

"Why do I need to do that?" you may ask. "My prospect isn't stupid!"

That's true. But it's also true that they have more things to do than they can keep up with, and more things competing for their attention than they could ever possibly sort through.

You simply can't expect business prospects to figure out what to do next, once they've finished reading your promotion. They don't have time to think about it. There's too big a chance they'll be distracted and defer the decision. And in most cases, a decision deferred is a decision that never gets made. That's why you need a strong call to action.

Neglect creates opportunity for savvy marketers

It's truly amazing how few technology marketers use a call to action in their promotions.

In a recent tech industry white paper survey I conducted, only 52 (28%) of 185 white papers I reviewed encouraged the reader to take any kind of action. And in 21% of those, the call to action was very weak, typically inviting me to visit their website (homepage)—the same website from which I had just downloaded the white paper.

In preparing this article, I looked at every technology advertisement in the latest issue of a popular aerospace industry journal. Less than 33% (14 of 43) included a clear call to action. Most only listed company contact information.

This is actually great news for you. Because if you are using this technique to get your prospect to take the action you want—and your competitor isn't—the better your chances of getting the inside track on the eventual sale.

Different strokes for different folks

Another thing B2B marketers need to bear in mind when preparing a call to action: Prospects reading the same piece may be in different stages of the buying process. In other words, it often pays to make multiple calls to action to accommodate different segments of your target audience.

Here's a good example I found in one of the ads in that trade journal I reviewed. For prospects in the information gathering stage, there was an invitation to visit the company's booth at an upcoming trade show:

Come see us at Aerospace 2010, May 18-20, Hamburg, Germany, Stand K40

For prospects in the product selection phase, it directed them to a *specific page* on their website:

For more information or to order a catalog, visit sensing.honeywell.com/tm/aerospace

Note how each of these statements asks for action, and is very precise about what action to take.

Your Call to Action Strategy

So here's your strategy for your next promotion, and every one thereafter.

Before you even speak to your writer, decide on the exact action you want your reader to take when he finishes reading. Be very specific. Do you want him to visit a particular page on your website for more information? Visit a landing page to download a white paper or a trial version of your software? Call your sales department to make an appointment for a demonstration?

Decide on the next step you want your prospects to take. Tell them exactly how to take it. And give them a good reason for doing so. You'll get better results from your promotions.

Chapter 13:

Some Like it Hard, Some Like it Soft: Different Offers for Different Prospects

How do you separate prospects who are "ready to buy" from those who are "just looking"… *AND* get both to respond to your promotions?

The answer is simple: with a different call to action—or offer—for each group: a *hard offer* and a *soft offer*.

In this chapter, I'll explain the difference between the hard offer and the soft offer in B2B lead generation, and why you want to use one of each kind in most of your promotions.

The Hard Offer: Sending "Ready" Buyers to Your Sales Team

In lead generation, the **hard offer** is a call to action that results in some form of personal contact between the prospect and the seller, in a situation where some selling can be done. It appeals to prospects who have an immediate need for a product or service like yours, wish to buy fairly soon, and want to "sit down and talk" with vendors.

The hard offer typically reads something like this:

> *To speak with one of our engineers about how KlugePlus can help you solve your software development problems, call us TOLL FREE at 1-800-345-9876.*

Alternatively, the hard offer may invite readers to provide contact information, so a sales representative can contact them to set an appointment for a sales call or product demonstration.

The Soft Offer: A Wide Net for Capturing "Future" Buyers

The **soft offer**, on the other hand, is an offer of free information, which can be requested through a response mechanism that requires no personal contact with the seller.

The free information can be a product brochure, a white paper, or any other information that would be of interest to your prospect and help sell your product or service in some way. The response mechanism can be a reply card or a link to an online form. The most important thing is that the prospect can request your useful information *without having to speak to <u>anyone</u>*.

A soft offer will often be worded something like this:

> *For a free information kit describing how KlugePlus can slash your software development time and costs by 30% or more, simply visit us online at www.KlugePlus.com/infokit, and fill out the brief request form.*

The soft offer gets a high level of response, because it lets the prospect find out more about what you have to offer—and tell *you* they "may be interested"—without feeling sales pressure of any kind. It attracts prospects who have no immediate requirement for your offering but think they may in the future, and prospects who have an immediate need but want to gather information before speaking to a salesperson.

The Error of the Single Offer

Many B2B marketers severely limit the effectiveness of their lead-generation promotions by employing only one offer (or no offer at all).

Including only a hard offer greatly depresses response. You lose the vast majority of prospects who don't have an immediate need for your product. They won't call, because they don't want to talk to a salesperson at this point. Thus, you lose the opportunity to follow-up and nurture their interest until they *do* have a need.

In contrast, using only a soft offer gives you no way to separate the "ready to buy" from the "just looking." You get many more leads, but you don't know which are ready to hand off to sales. And sales reps do NOT want to follow up on stacks of leads who are nowhere near a purchase decision.

One exception: If you're promoting a white paper, you'll want only a soft offer—the offer of the white paper. White papers are more heavily consumed in the early stages of the buying process, and you don't want to depress response to your white paper offer by pitching your product or service. You will, however, want both a hard and a soft offer *at the end of the white paper*, following the blurb about your company.

The Solution: Two Different Offers for Two Different Prospects

The solution is very easy to implement. Simply decide what action you want each of your prospects—your "looking to buy soon" prospect and your "maybe later" prospect—to take. Then, state those actions concisely, one right after the other, at the end of your promotion.

Having both a hard offer and a soft offer lets you funnel sales-ready leads directly to your sales team, while capturing "longer-term" leads for nurturing. Use this technique in your next promotion.

Chapter 14:
Better than FREE: The Free-on-Free Offer

Another great way to boost response and effectively generate leads with direct mail and email is with a “double” variation on the free information offer, called the “free-on-free” offer.

The classic example of the “free-on-free” is the e-zine sign-up offer: You offer your prospect a free subscription to your e-zine or newsletter. Then, as a bonus for signing up, you also offer a free white paper, report or e-book on a topic your prospect is interested in.

A free report *on top* of a free subscription. Hence the name: free-on-free.

The reason the free-on-free works is because it offers your prospect more value than he was expecting. You entice him with all the valuable knowledge he’ll gain from your primary offer. Then, just when he’s ready to decide, you pull out your second offer. It’s the same tactic used in those late-night TV “infomercials” where they keep saying, “*But wait, there’s more…*”, just applied in a more subtle way.

The free-on-free offer is one of the most effective ways of building an e-zine mailing list. But you can use it for other lead-gen offers as well. And in variety of combinations.

Here’s an example. Say your latest lead-gen offer is a new white paper. On top of that you could offer a subscription to your e-zine. Then you mention that, as a subscriber, the reader would also receive an additional bonus: a special report, tip sheet, or whatever your e-zine sign-up incentive happens to be. Now you’ve got a free-on-free-on-free offer!

Take a tip from the infomercials. For promoting your e-zine, or for your next lead-generation campaign, try a free-on-free offer.

About the Author

John Cole is a freelance business-to-business copywriter specializing in lead-generation and demand-generation content for the technology, software and aerospace industries.

Before shifting his career focus to marketing, John worked 20 years in the aerospace industry as an avionic systems engineer and project manager. He now combines his extensive technical experience with skills in B2B, direct response and online copywriting to help high-tech companies generate more quality leads, and move those leads down the sales funnel.

If you have a direct mail campaign in mind, or any other project coming up that needs to appeal to business decision-makers and pass muster with engineers, why not give John a call at **(+39) 011 569 4951**. You can also email him at info@CopyEngineer.com. Or use the contact form at www.CopyEngineer.com/contact.

Find out how John Cole can help you turn that project around more efficiently, and make it more effective. He'll be happy to discuss your project with you, and provide a FREE, no-obligation quote.

Corso Marconi 26
10125 Torino
Italy

Phone: (+39) 011 569 4951
Fax: (+39) 011 3713 1189
Email: info@CopyEngineer.com
Web: www.CopyEngineer.com

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