101 Streetwise Strategies

Tips and ideas for
more effective direct marketing

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Contents

But wait, there's more!

Functions of Direct Marketing

1. Direct marketing is a comprehensive system of media and methods designed to elicit a response from a prospect or customer in order to develop or enhance a "client relationship."

2. In lead generation or "two-step" marketing, our goal is to convert a "suspect" into a "prospect" through list or individual qualification. Then we want to convert our prospect into a "customer" with an initial sale. Our customer is transformed into a "client" through repeat sales and, finally, if our customer service and follow-up methods are effective, our client becomes an "advocate" — a source of new sales to other prospects through word-of-mouth recommendation by providing testimonials, case studies and more.

3. The task of direct marketing is to create a database of customers to whom you can sell additional products at higher response rates and with greater cost-effectiveness.

4. It is difficult, if not impossible, to sell a product under $100 to cold lists at sufficiently high rates of response to show a profit. Direct mail just costs too much, and "cold" lists simply do not respond much beyond 2% gross — often much less.

5. It is often advisable to prospect at a loss in order to build a customer file that will later respond at rates of 10%, 15%, 25%, or more. We want to get Pareto's Law working *for* us instead of *against* us.

6. Think of direct response as a process of obtaining marketing information, paid for (in whole or in part) by sales.

7. Direct Marketing is a stimulus/response transaction. We have to get a response — not just agreement. In order to get our prospect to act, we must provide a mechanism for action; a stimulus. AND THE STIMULUS ISN'T THE PRODUCT — IT'S THE OFFER!

8. It is the offer that you stick in the window. It is the offer that you "sell" to your prospect as a quick and easy, guaranteed way to explore for himself the various claims you've made for the product. Or, in lead generation, as a way of indicating interest in a particular product or service category.

9. The offer is the "deal." The quid pro quo. The free 30-day trial, the demo, the free issue the free report, the free on-site needs assessment, video, calculator, chance at a sweepstakes prize, the special, limited-time price. Send no money now, or charge it to your credit card, bill it to a company PO#, or enclose your check with iron-clad money back guarantee.

10. One dynamic you'll want to consider in framing your offer is the "Quantity/Quality Ratio" – the universal truth that you can't have it both ways. The higher the quantity (volume) of response, the lower the quality (interest level) of the respondents, and vice versa. There are "hard" offers and "soft" offers, and several levels in between. The harder the offer (cash up front, no deals), the more highly qualified your prospect or buyer will be, but there will be fewer of them. The opposite is true of a soft offer.

11. The offer is a kind of neutral turf. It's a place where the prospect and the marketer (buyer and seller) can meet without risk or obligation and where the prospect feels he can obtain some sort of value. The 30-day free trial or in B2B, some form of related information. Information that's altruistic in nature. Facts, tips, data that will be useful independent of the product.

12. List testing is the single most significant element in any direct mail program's success. It represents roughly 40% of the success of your program. We start with mail order or direct mail buyers whenever we can, because experience shows that "response" lists — those that include the mail purchase behavior — yield significantly higher rates of response than "compiled" lists.

13. The ultimate purpose in direct response is to build our own personal marketplace. One that we can go back to again and again and sell follow-up, aftermarket, or new products at much higher rates of response than the 2%, 1 %, or less we typically experience in the prospecting phase.

14. Advertising sells products — direct sells offers.
Advertising creates markets — direct discovers them.
Advertising changes behavior — direct models it.
Advertising is heavily emotional — direct is heavily factual.
Advertising copy tends to be short — direct copy tends to be long.
Advertising design is complementary and image-driven — direct design
    is disruptive and functional.
Advertising creates sales — direct creates customers.

15. The bottom line in direct marketing is that we need a response (an order, an inquiry, a donation), and we need it NOW! Agreement with our proposition is not enough. And that dynamic is what makes direct response the challenging form of marketing that it is.

Response by Design

16. Direct mail design must cut through the clutter of all the other mail we receive each day (more than 200 pieces a week for some executives). It must then interrupt the incessant conversation we all have going on in our heads about the morning meeting...the unanswered e-mails, the phone messages waiting on the desk...the sick child at home...and that guy at the party last night. It must override all our daily concerns and elicit – not just <u>agreement</u> with our proposition, but prompt an <u>action</u> in the form of an order, a request for information, a donation...something. And it must accomplish all that in the next 5 seconds!

17. In order to prompt a response, design must be <u>disruptive</u>. It must be <u>proactive</u>. It must reach out to the reader and involve him or her. Predictable straight lines, soothingly complementary colors and white space don't do that. As *Target Marketing* editor Denny Hatch once put it, "Neatness rejects involvement."

18. Starting with your outer envelope, size and shape can play a role. Because size is often associated with importance, 9x12's can repay their higher cost in increased impact.. B2B mailers who regularly use #10's should test larger #12's and #13's to achieve size impact without losing the look and feel of a "business" communication.

19. Poly envelopes appeal to the tactile and visual senses for B2C mailers, providing a tempting, "peek-a-boo" hint of the contents, as do multiple windows in paper envelopes with stickers, tokens, and illustrations showing through.

20. Brown or gray kraft stock signifies monetary or informational value.

21. Simulated checks don't fool anyone anymore— but they project a value image nonetheless, as do stamps, while copy snipes and bursts introduce unexpected visuals into your design to seize and hold attention and promote involvement. (See "disruption," #17 above).

Just Your Type

22. Just because there are a million typestyles available on a CD-ROM doesn't mean you have to use them. Type should never call attention to itself. It should be "transparent" to the reader. The two most reliable and widely used typestyles are Times Roman or Courier (serif) for text and Helvetica (sans serif) for heads. Other text faces include Century Schoolbook, Garamond, Caslon, Goudy, and Palatino. Display or headline faces include Antique Olive, Avant Garde, Futura, and Univers.

23. Reverse type (white type dropped out against a black or dark background) and type set in italics are especially hard to read as is black type on a deep red background.

24. Do not mix more than two typefaces or families on a page or panel or maybe even for an entire direct mail package. Use bolds, lights, mediums, Roman, and extended styles of the basic typeface for variety.

Color Facts

25. Remember "Roy G. Biv" from grade school? Stands for the basic spectrum: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Warm to cool. More significant, it goes from the most active part of the spectrum to the least active. That means red gets people's attention, violet doesn't. Warm colors are perceived "warmly" (i.e, inviting and friendly, often used for B2C promotions). Cool colors are perceived "cooly" (i.e., distant and authoritarian, often used for B2B promotions).

Penny Wise

26. While we always work to reduce our costs in direct marketing, there are certain minimum thresholds of look and feel that must be reached or all that will happen is you'll join the ranks of those who say, "We tried direct mail once. It didn't work." Trying to do direct mail "on the cheap" is self-defeating.

27. Of all the considerations that go into a mailing, be sure to reserve funds for list testing. If you can't find your market, it doesn't matter what your Widget is. And the only way to find your market is to test lists. The more lists you test — at a minimum of 5,000 names each — the better. With each additional list you test, you're buying yourself valuable insurance.

28. Whether you make a profit on your first mailing or not, remember that you are buying names. At a profit maybe, or at some cost tempered by sales. That customer list is your store. It's your database. It's your treasure chest. You make it grow by remailing your best list/offer panels and testing new lists incrementally in each successive mailing.

29. Many first-time marketers want to use self-mailers because they appear to be so much less expensive than envelope packages. But, all other things being equal, you can measure self-mailer response in tenths of a percent compared with envelope packages that typically start at 1%.

30. 40% of the success of your mailing depends on the quality of the lists. The other 40% is the offer, and 20% is the creative. But Shakespeare himself couldn't write a successful mailing if it were sent to inaccurate lists. "Junk mail," I like to say, "is an offer sent to the wrong person."

31. Your <u>house list</u> will always be your best responding list. Your house list is composed of your customers. They have bought something from you at least once. They can be presumed to be familiar with your company and your product, and satisfied with both.

32. A <u>response list</u> is composed of people who have responded to a direct marketing offer. Preferably by buying something, but perhaps also by requesting information, or businesspeople who have completed and mailed a qualification form for a free subscription to a controlled-circulation business publication.

33. <u>Compiled lists</u> are those that are assembled from existing data sources, either public or proprietary. They can also be custom compiled from special sources or combinations of sources. Compiled lists start with phone books from which names and addresses are captured in volume, then spot-verified by telephone. White pages yield consumer names (three-line addresses), and yellow pages yield businesses (four-line addresses). R.H. Donnelly/ Metromail is the principal compiler of phone book lists.

34. Largely because they lack mail order purchase behavior or it cannot be quantified, compiled lists usually pull at lower rates than response lists — but then, they usually cost less. In many markets, especially B2B, compiled list are the principal source of names.

35. The newest addition to the list universe is the <u>e-list</u>, gathered either from e-mail signups or directly from the World Wide Web. The common standard for e-lists today is the "opt-in" list, indicating that the individual has agreed to have his or her e-mail address available for receipt of offers. However, there are many slips between the "opt" and the "in" so tread cautiously. In fact, "double opt-in" is now the gold standard (after your own house list, of course) in e-lists.

36. Most lists are rented in minimum quantities of 5,000 names, which for most mailers is about the right test quantity per panel. Some very popular lists double that minimum to 10,000. You don't need to mail to all the names you rent, however.

37. For budgeting purposes, estimate lists at $100 per thousand ($100/M) and you'll be pretty close. Some are more, some are less. Compiled lists may average slightly less, $85-$90/M. High-tech lists tend to start at $100/M and can easily double that.

38. If you're renting a number of lists from one source, you may be able to negotiate a "net names" agreement, paying only for those names that survive a "merge-purge" or de-duplication process.

A "net-net name" agreement runs the lists against certain specified screens for bad debt, certain zip code suppression, income, and other factors. Usually, you need to be mailing large quantities to make these types of screenings pay out.

40. "Hotlines" are those names that have come onto the file in the last 30 days or 60 days or whatever, depending on the list. That is, they are the most recent names on the file. Most list data cards will indicate the monthly hotlines available. Because hotlines normally pull at higher rates that the core list, they cost more.

41. In mailing business lists, you'll need to decide how reliable your names are. If you're satisfied the names are accurate, mail them. If the names are doubtful, use the title instead, since the title will likely still be there, even if the person isn't, and the piece may get passed along to the new person using that title.

42. N.C.O.A. stands for National Change of Address, a constantly updated database generated by the U.S.P.S. and administered by selected service bureaus around the country. Wherever you get your lists, you want to be sure they have been run against the NCOA database for accuracy. Approximately 20% of Americans change their addresses every year, and any list deteriorates at about 50% per year.

43. Other forms of "list hygiene" include:

CASS (Coding Accuracy Support System) is a software program that will standardize your addresses, especially where lists have been enhanced. Make sure your data processor uses only CASS-certified software.

Zip+4 To take full advantage of carrier sort discounts, you must append Zip+4 and carrier route data with CASS-certified software.

PAVE (Presort Accuracy, Validation, and Evaluation).Your list must also be pre-sorted according to the Domestic Mail Manual. PAVE is another software program that will save you much time, aggravation, and money.

Barcodes The USPS requires that reply envelopes be bar coded if they are being carried by an envelope that is itself getting barcode discounts. Also try to use delivery point barcodes whenever possible. This is an extension of the Zip+4 barcode in which the last 10 bars represent the first two digits of the street address. Since the barcode is read instead of the printed address, the mail needn't meet OCR standards — granting you some additional leeway in envelope design.

ACS is a less costly alternative to ACR (Address Correction Requested). It provides electronic return of an undeliverable piece for 20 cents instead of the 50-cent rate for hard-copy address returns.

44. A rule of thumb for statistical reliability in list testing is to mail sufficient names to obtain at least 50 responses. If you anticipate a 1% response, that would indicate a 5,000 name mailing. If you anticipate fewer responses, increase the quantity accordingly.

45. Other "musts" include: key code every list so you can track results, test no more than one variable at a time so you'll know where the spike or drop came from, mail all tests at the same time, test, in order of importance; lists, offer, price, creative, format, season.

Getting Results

46. There are several psychological "stops" in pricing, starting at $50, then $100, $150, and so on. The higher the price of a product, the more "push" you need behind it, in terms of both the package the sales letter and brochure, the proofs or testimonials, the illustrations, and so on. You likely won't sell a new or complex idea at $200 with a postcard, for example – but you could get an inquiry in a 2-step program.

47. In direct marketing, we use extensive testing to try as much as possible to let the customers tell us what they are willing to pay for our product or service and how they prefer to pay it.

48. After list and offer testing, you'll want to seriously consider format testing, which can be significantly more costly because now you're getting into issues of printing, mailing and postage, none of which ever go down.

49. Many first-time marketers like to use self-mailers because they appear to be less expensive than envelope packages. But, all other things being equal, we measure self-mailer response in tenths of a percent compared with envelope packages that typically start around 1%.

50. Dimensional mailings are a near sure-fire, if expensive, answer to the problem of getting attention and getting the package opened. Few people can toss an item interestingly packaged in a custom box, or even in a jiffy bag, without opening it.

51. Dimensionals are most effective where you have a high gross margin product or service and the mailing is tightly targeted to relatively small lists of select decision makers.

52. In a first-time-mailing, with no sales history, you'll want to figure your break-even rate. Add up all your mailing/product costs, take your net revenue per sale, and determine what response rate you will need in order to break even on the mailing. If it comes to 10%, call Houston. You have a problem.

53. Direct marketers are often willing to give a little on the front end in order build a database from which to generate back end profits. "Direct mail is a process of gathering information, paid for by sales."

Lists – 40%-50% of Success

> *"I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought."*
> — King Henry IV

54. 40% of the success of your mailing depends on the quality of the lists. Another 40% is the offer, and 20% is the creative. Shakespeare himself couldn't write a successful mailing if it were sent to inaccurate lists. "Junk mail is an offer sent to the wrong person."

55. Your house list will always be your best responding list. It's composed of your customers. They have bought something from you at least once. They can be presumed to be familiar with your company and your product, and satisfied with both.

56. If you're primarily into lead generation your house list may also consist of inquirers — people who have written or called directly to obtain information. If you're a fund raiser, your house list is your donor file.

57. A response list is composed of people who have responded to a direct marketing offer, either by buying something or requesting information.

58. Compiled lists are those that are assembled from existing data sources, either public or proprietary. They can also be custom compiled from special sources or combinations of sources.

59. Both business and consumer lists, response and compiled, are available in data banks — large databases of lists that have been compiled, de-duplicated, and enhanced or overlaid with census data and various other types of demographic and psychographic (i.e. lifestyle) data.

60. Consumer lists can be enhanced with such demographic overlays as driver license data, median age, median home ownership and value, make and value of car, household data and more. Psychographic or lifestyle characteristics include hobbies, special interests, product ownership, etc.

61. The newest addition to the list universe is the e-mail list, gathered either from e-mail contacts or pulled from the World Wide Web. The common standard for e-lists today is the "opt-in" list, indicating that the individual has agreed to receive other offers via e-mail.

Double opt-in means the prospect has agreed specifically to receive offers from you.

Lists are rented for one-time use only. List owners protect their lists by seeding them with dummy names and otherwise monitoring their usage.

64. Most lists are rented in minimum quantities of 5,000 names. Some very popular lists double that minimum to 10,000. You don't need to mail to all the names you rent, however.

65. Estimate list costs at $100 per thousand ($100/M) and you'll be pretty close. Some are more, some are less. Compiled lists may average slightly less, $85-$90/M. High-tech lists tend to start at $100/M and can easily double that.

66. Whatever the base price, special selections can increase that price quickly. State selections, male/female, income, and other segmentations each add $5, $10, or even $15/M to your base cost. Some negotiation on price may also be possible.

67. If you're renting a number of lists from one source, you may be able to negotiate a "net names" agreement, paying only for those names that survive a "merge-purge" or de-duplication process.

68. "Hotlines" are those names that have come onto the file in the last 30 days or 60 days or whatever, depending on the list. That is, they are the most recent names on the file. Most list data sheets will indicate the monthly hotlines available. Because hotlines normally pull at higher rates that the core list, they cost more, but be careful about including hotlines in a list test – they may skew the results.

69. In mailing business lists, you'll need to decide how reliable your names are. If you're satisfied the names are accurate, mail them. If the names are doubtful, use the title instead, since the title will likely still be there, even if the person isn't, and the piece may get passed along to the new person using that title.

70. A rule of thumb for statistical reliability in list testing is to mail sufficient names to obtain at least 50 responses. If you anticipate a 1% response, that would indicate a 5,000 name mailing. If you anticipate fewer responses, increase the quantity accordingly.

71. N.C.O.A. (National Change of Address) and other forms of list hygiene are essential to effective mailing. These include CASS (Coding Accuracy Support System), Zip+4, PAVE (Presort Accuracy, Validation, and Evaluation), and ACS, a less costly alternative to ACR (Address Correction Requested).

72. Key code every list so you can track results, test no more than one variable at a time, mail all tests at the same time.

73. Items to test, in order of importance are lists, offer, price, creative, format, and season.

74. If you go into the mail expecting that the revenue from your initial test will fund the next level of testing, you're likely to be disappointed. You should have sufficient capital to test mail, adjust lists, offer, or creative based on results; and re-mail and re-mail again before seeing any substantial revenue.

75. Always eyeball your lists before you mail. You might even pull some names at random and call them to verify that they are who you think they are. And remember that the list owner will require a sample mailing piece before approving the list rental. Plan ahead.

Writing Response Copy

76. We want our writing to be crystal clear to the reader, whatever it takes. We also want it to move smoothly from the outer envelope teaser to the order form (or telephone, or web site). Any major interruption in our reader's train of thought, and chances are we'll be derailed. A confusing sentence, an illogical statement, an unclear description of how the product works or what we want the prospect to do, and it's all over.

77. Good copywriting has a rhythm that helps move the reader along. Alliterations in text, short statements and comments, use of contractions ("you'll" instead of "you will"), rising and falling inflections, all contribute to a sort of iambic pentameter for copy that makes reading more of a pleasure, and less of a chore.

78. The Roman poet Cicero said, "If you wish to persuade me, you must think my thoughts, feel my feelings, and speak my words." To accomplish that, we write in second person (you) and we stress <u>benefits,</u> the language of the *buyer,* rather than <u>features</u>, the language of the *seller.*

79. When determining the differences between benefits and features a helpful reminder is the admonition: "Tell me about my lawn, not your grass seed."

80. When trolling for benefits in your product another guide is the old saw, "Early to bed and early to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy, and wise." One way or another, we all want to be <u>healthy</u> (physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially); <u>wealthy</u> (make money, save money, project wealth); and, most of all, <u>wise</u> (smarter; more productive; more professional; a better leader, mother, father, lover, housekeeper, bowler, etc.).

81. Effective copy will always reflect, in one way or another, insights into your prospect's day-to-day home and family or business life. In business environments, how will your newsletter/ezine's industry data (feature) help him or her plan more effectively(benefit? In consumer contexts, will brighter teeth (feature) lead to a great relationship (benefit)? A feature becomes a benefit when it intersects the life of a human being, with favorable results. It's the favorable results we want to present to prospects as a benefit.

82. Benefits are far more significant to us than dry features that may or may not be relevant. How something improves my life, personally or professionally, is of greater interest to me than the technical nuts and bolts that drive the process. Benefits get past the mind's gatekeepers with greater reliability than do features and all the other image flotsam and message jetsam that bombard us every day.

83. Madison Avenue's motivational gurus have long held that most purchase decisions are emotionally based, but that the justifications are rational. No one is going to admit that he or she is buying a product in order to be better than the next person. Rather, we justify our purchases with such rational benefits as saving money, saving time, saving work.

84. When translating these dynamics to a direct mail package, the emotional benefits are usually too subtle and complex to use up front — as an envelope teaser, for example, or the headline on a letter, or even in a brochure whose function is to show the product in use.

85. Those "trigger" statements are best left to the short, rational benefits. The emotional benefits can be either carefully suggested or baldly stated in the letter, depending on the setting. This may be why the letter in a direct mail package is widely accepted as the selling document. It sells because it taps that emotional component of the purchase decision.

86. Showing how the product relates to individual productivity…how it keeps one ahead of the curve…how it boosts personal and professional performance while it saves time, saves money, improves accuracy, or whatever, is where the appeal becomes emotional even as the justifications remain rational.

87. If you're selling to plant superintendents, maybe your chemical cleaner will save money, time, and work, but the final payoff is a maintenance department (and a plant superintendent) that got the job done! Draw that distinction, and you'll tap the emotional component of the decision-making process. (But be sure to include the savings pitch as well so plant super can justify the purchase on a cost basis.)

88. This dual impact can be especially useful in lead generation. In order to get a suspect to raise his or her hand and become a prospect, we usually offer a free document of some sort — information related to the product or industry that will benefit the reader immediately by bringing him or her up to speed (wise) on some aspect of the business. The material is altruistic in nature with a value that transcends both the company and the product. The prospect, in short, can take the information and run, and he or she will have something worthwhile, whether or not they ever contact you again.

89. Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, once said, "Everyone has a sign hanging around his or her neck that says 'make me feel important.' If you can do that, you'll be a success not only in business, but in life as well."

90. There's also a well-known direct mail quatrain from our good friend Anon.:
Tell me quick and tell me true,
or else, dear friend, the hell with you,
Not how this product came to be —
But what the darn thing does for me!

Determining Your Package Format

91. The term "self-mailer" denotes any format that doesn't require an outer envelope. An oversized postcard is a self-mailer. So is a double postcard. Beyond that, self-mailers can be designed in any format that, when it's in its final folded form, is legally mailable. An 11" x 17" flat folded in half to 8 1/2 x 11 is a common format. Another is to take that piece and fold it in half again to 5 1/2 x 8 1/2. The USPS requires self-mailers to be wafer-sealed at least once, and other specifications apply to addressing areas, etc.

92. Tempting as they may be from a cost perspective, self-mailers are "look-at" pieces, not "read carefully" pieces, so if your product pitch and information is at all detailed or complex, you'll need to support it with the more robust real estate of a direct mail package.

93. A pure consumer product sell will likely dictate a "full" package: four-page letter; four-page, four-color brochure (or larger); lift letter; and order form. A business-to-business lead-generation offer may not need a brochure at all, or may be kept to two-color. Often a letter and reply form are all that's required. Consumer packages tend to be larger and flashier, with more "push," and therefore are more expensive than business-to-business packages. Consumer packages range from business-size #10 to more oversized #12 and #13 envelopes to 6" x 9" and 9"x12". Business-to-business packages tend to be #10 business sized or, on occasion, a 9" x 12" First Class business-type envelope.

94. Components are tested one at a time: Envelope size and/or teaser, letter length, brochure or no-brochure, lift letter or none, are common package tests.

95. If for some reason you can't test all those components, then you need to give yourself the best shot out of the gate and include all the components in your early mailings. What you don't want is to spend $xx to launch a product (or to try direct mail for the first time) and end up with more questions than answers. (Would it have worked if we'd included a color brochure?)

96. In business-to-business, your level of push will depend on what part of the food chain you're aiming at. The higher up the chain, the more conservative your look and feel should be, and usually, the less costly the package. The vice is also versa.

97. The greater the commitment or involvement or purchase I'm expecting from the recipient, the more "format" I have to deliver to him or her to help the person decide. A $5,000 direct purchase is going to require a series of mailings, and unless you're basically augmenting a salesperson's efforts, you'll need to put into the package much of what a salesperson would deliver face-to-face.

Sell the Offer

98. In direct mail, we sell the offer, not the product. The free trial, the no-risk 30-day preview with money-back guarantee, the free in-house consultation or survey, the limited-time 2-for-1 deal, whatever. These are the mechanisms of response.

99. We support the offer basically with benefits, product information, and "reason why" persuasions urging the prospect to act now! These are the mechanisms of motivation. We support them with testimonials, research, and/or test results, then wrap it all in a credible guarantee and a call for action (i.e. ASK FOR THE ORDER!).

100. Another important consideration is the lists you're using. If you're mailing house lists, you may not need as much "push" as you would for cold lists. House names know you and, presumably, trust you to some degree.

101. When you've tested your way to a profitable list, offer, and format, you'll have, in effect, a business-in-an-envelope. It's a business that will take care of you for as long as there's a market for your product. And remember, direct mail is a back-end business. However successful you may be, you'll be building a list of responsive customers. Be sure you have something else to sell them.

But wait, there's MORE!

You know no direct mail writer worth his indicia is going let you go without a BONUS! So here's yours:

Ten Copy Do's and Don'ts

Don't warm up or "introduce" yourself or your company. Begin immediately writing about the reader and her problem, and how your product will benefit her.

Don't expound on the state of the industry/world, etc. It may come across as preaching, especially to the converted. (If he doesn't already know what you're telling him, he may be too removed from the process to be a good prospect.)

Don't use puns. They rarely translate to the reader's context.

Don't ask questions in teasers and headlines that can be answered yes or no. That gives control of the communication to your reader.

Don't use your product name as a headline by itself (clever as it may be), without appending benefit or offer copy to it.

Do build your teaser/headline around a major benefit.

Do "preview" the offer up front and "merchandise" it throughout your letter.

Do test teasers to target your market.

Do use the product name in the corner card and letterhead rather than the company name. (IBM, AT&T and such excepted.)

Do quantify claims as much as possible. Percentages of performance, number of dollars saved or earned, minutes and seconds of time, etc. lend credibility.

Adapted from **Streetwise Direct Marketing,** by George Duncan, Adams Media, 2001.

About George Duncan

George Duncan is an award-winning direct mail writer and consultant in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He is frequently numbered among the top direct mail writers in the country.

He began his career as promotion manager for Esquire magazine and for the next sixteen years, held promotion manager and copy chief positions with such leading direct marketers as Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, Columbia House (CBS), Grolier Enterprises and Xerox Education Publications.

George started his own freelance copy and consulting business in 1976 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He later relocated to Peterborough, where he provides a full range of direct marketing services to a national roster of publishers, software companies, and marketers of business-to-business and consumer products and services.

George's work has been recognized nationally by the John Caples Award (twice), The Direct Marketing Association's Echo Leader Award, the Folio Circulation Direct Mail Award, and MASA's John Howie Wright Cup, the Newsletter Gold Award for 2002, plus regional awards by the New England Direct Marketing Association and New Hampshire Ad Club.

A graduate of Fordham University, Duncan is co-founder and past president of The Vermont-New Hampshire Direct Marketing Group, a member of The New England Direct Marketing Association and a founding member of the Software Association of New Hampshire. He is a former Director of the New Hampshire High Technology Council and chaired the Council's Marketing Forum. In 2003 he was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Vermont-New Hampshire Direct Marketing Group.

George's book, *Streetwise Direct Marketing,* was published in 2001 by Adams Media. He has had numerous articles published in marketing and trade publications and on marketing Web sites. How-to articles and additional information are on his Web site at **http://www.duncandirect.com**

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