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Nine No-noes of a Direct Mail Letter

Tommy Yan

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It began as another meeting with a potential client. She started writing eight years ago for a company and today holds three administrative positions as well as being the chief copywriter and editor.

I displayed some writing samples and she loved them.

Then I got a chance to look at a direct mail campaign they were sending to their database. It consisted of sample post cards, invitation cards, four-color flyers, door hangers, and a bulletin leaflet all stuffed inside an attractive 9" x 12" graphic-intense envelope. And there was a single page cover letter: which was the weak link.

Why is that? Because it was lacking so many important elements of a killer direct response letter.

Your letter must be the strong link in your direct mail campaign. It has the power to double, triple, or quadruple sales for the same postage. It has the ability to paint compelling pictures and persuade your reader to take action. Nothing else in your campaign can match your letter's power to convert prospects into customers.

Let's make your letters produce more money. Let's take a critical look at that company's cover letter:

1) No headline - just a company logo and a mission statement in reverse text on company letterhead. And nothing else.

You must write a "grab 'em by the throat" headline in all of your marketing campaigns. It's the ad for your letter. It works similar to a first impression. Its job is to compel people to read the next line. It has to scream, "Hey, buddy! This is important. It's for you. Read on."

2) A plural salutation. Never write, "Dear Friends... Dear Partners... or Dear Members." It screams of a mass mailing and not a personal letter. And you know where those type of letters end up?

3) No benefits. The copy was laced with features which spoke about the company and their products. How important they were. But not even a hint about what the prospect was going to get.

4) and 5) No offer or any sense of urgency. The letter stated the products they were selling. Take it or leave it. Not very exciting or does not motivate people to buy.

Even if she had written:

"Sale! Take 15% off your grand total if you order within the next 10 days" ... she would have created an offer with some urgency.

6) No call to action. Most people aren't thinkers. They have a herd mentality. And they need to be led. Really.

If you believe people will automatically call you and give you their credit card number just because they read your letter - you are sadly mistaken. You must lead them by the hand into each step of the ordering process. This erases any doubts of what to do next.

7) No guarantee. This is a major reason many companies are losing sales.

This direct mail company has a 30-day return policy for their standard products, but none for their custom print jobs. (Except in cases of a printing or production error.) Nevertheless, anything that reduces risk should be mentioned anyway to ease prospects' fears and anxieties.

8) No premium. Since a good portion of their database for this campaign is usually strapped for cash—a gift can mean the difference between making a sale or hearing silence.

9) No post script. The P.S. is an excellent place to restate the benefits, tease them with a surprise premium, or paint the picture of deeper benefits not previously mentioned.

In short, it was a boring cover letter lacking any punch. There wasn't anything that would excite a prospect to act. Can you imagine how much money they're losing?

But you don't have to follow their example. You don't have to make the same mistakes. Because you now know some of the killer secrets of a successful

direct mail letter.

Use these tips today to strengthen your letter and watch your response rates soar!

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Tommy Yan helps business owners and entrepreneurs make more money through direct response marketing. He publishes Tommy's Tease weekly e-zine to inspire people to succeed in business and personal growth. Get your free subscription today at www.TommyYan.com.

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Advertising and Fair Housing - Forget About Freedom of Speech

Real Estate Investment Club

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Your occupancy rates are down and you are competing with other apartment communities for residents. You have a novel idea - Hey! Maybe some creative advertising would help! You create a stunning brochure with pictures from your holiday party with everyone having a good time and a guy dressed like the Easter Bunny in the background. You put up some billboards with pictures of your smiling staff members posing around the swimming pool. The next thing you know, you have a complaint filed against you claiming that your advertising violates the Fair Housing Act. The complaint says that 7 out of the 10 people in the pictures on your billboards are Hispanic and that does not reasonably represent the majority and minority groups in your area. The complaint also says that the Easter Bunny in the brochure implies that you are discriminating against non-Christians.

Wait a minute. This is the U.S.A. What about freedom of speech? The First Amendment? You mean I cannot put anything I want to in my advertisements? That's right.

An apartment owner in Virginia was fined a substantial amount of money for using all white models in their brochure because the models were not "clearly definable as reasonably representing the majority and minority groups in the metropolitan area." Your billboard might be a problem because more of the residents in your community are members of racial groups other than what is shown in your billboard picture. However, you may take comfort in knowing that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) does not consider the use of the Easter Bunny to be discriminatory. So your brochure is probably okay.

The Fair Housing Act says that you may not publish advertisements which "indicate any preference, limitation, or discrimination or the intention to make a preference, limitation, or discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin."

Obviously, your ads may not say something blatant such as "no children" or "no Catholics." But what about the more subtle aspects of your ads? The general rule is to describe the property and not the people who live there and the ad will be acceptable. Phrases like "no wheel chairs allowed" or

"independent living" discriminate against people with disabilities. But, it is acceptable to say that your property is "handicapped accessible" or has "wheelchair ramps" because these are descriptions of the facilities.

An ad stating that your property is "great for Jewish families" is unacceptable because it indicates a preference for renting to Jewish families. Describing your property as "near the new Catholic Community Center" may also show a preference for a particular type of resident. However, using terms like "desirable neighborhood" or "great location" is not discriminatory.

Here Are Some Tips to Avoid Problems with Advertising

1. Review your written materials and advertising materials. Get rid of anything that may give rise to a discrimination complaint. Your advertisements and community newsletter should portray a community that is accessible to the protected classes.

2. Add the Fair Housing Logo to all of your advertising materials.

3. If room provides, put a statement in your advertising that contains the following Fair Housing message:

**WE DO BUSINESS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FAIR HOUSING ACT
IT IS ILLEGAL TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST ANY PERSON BECAUSE
OF RACE, COLOR, RELIGION, SEX, HANDICAP, FAMILIAL STATUS,
OR NATIONAL ORIGIN**

4. Describe the apartment and amenities. Do not describe who you think would be happy renting there.

5. The people in any pictures in your advertising should reflect the majority and minority members of your community. If your staff does not reflect the make-up of the community, do not use a picture of them in your advertisements. Likewise, using a photograph from one of your community events may be a bad idea if it does not represent the majority and minority members of your metropolitan area.

6. If you are not sure whether something in your advertisement is a Fair Housing violation, leave it out.

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5 Reasons Why Blogging is an Effective Marketing Tool

Art Luff

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Blogging is a concept that started in late 90s. It used to be a way to comment an existing webpage, an opportunity for visitors and readers to react or voice out one's opinion on the said page. What started as a single-sentence commentary has evolved into pages of personal take on just about anything and everything under the sun. As it continues to move forward, online advertising has tapped into the blog's potential. Here are 5 reasons why you should use blogging as an Internet marketing tool.

1. Blogging is simple. The simplest way to get your piece on the net is through blogging. No skills are necessary... an average adult can read and type, or at least click a mouse. It's like having a virtual piece of paper and you just write your ideas, experiences, new products, and hope that the truth behind your articles comes out and entice your reader to also try your product. If you have a PC and an Internet connection (who doesn't?) then you can blog and advertise.

2. Blogging is authentic. In this day and age where advertising saturate our lives, we question the credibility of promoters' claims. However, in blogs, real people share their real-life experiences, unscathed by paid advertising. Reading blogs about first-hand product use is like talking to people about their first-hand experience. You definitely want to buy a tried and tested product.

3. Blogging is free. Because blogging is yet to be proven as a mainstream online advertising media, most sites see it as something to augment current marketing tools and thus offer it for free. Any opportunity for free webtime is definitely a bonus especially to businesses that are starting up. Needless to say, paid blog pages can generate more income for your seriously growing business.

4. Blogging builds credibility. As you get more and more into writing your experiences on a particular product or industry, your readers come to realize that they can depend on your posts for their own information needs. As such, you become an expert on it; as a consequence, more readers visit your site and more bloggers link to your blogs. As companies and professional organizations notice the growth of your readership base, they may soon get in touch with you for advertising on your blog page, or make you an affiliate, which pays for every referral generated from your blog site.

5. Blogging builds your market. Unless you are a Hollywood star, chances are, only your Mom reads your posts. Mom has a lot of friends, so she lets her friends know how interesting your blog site is. But you need not depend on Mom to increase your readership base. Look into the following ways to build your market through blogging:

-By using your e-mail. Today, blogging is overcoming the e-mail's popularity in quickly and effectively reaching and expanding a market. In this age of speed and quick access, logging in and downloading e-mail is simply taking longer than clicking into a blog site. Let them explore your site by using a short e-mail message as teaser to your blog site. If your e-mail is on an entirely different subject, use your e-mail signature to give a link to the site.

-By using subscription. An easy way to get your readers e-mail is to give them an opportunity to subscribe to your blogsite. Keep some exclusive information for your subscribers to entice readers to subscribe and give their e-mail address. Just be responsible in using their e-mail address, as the last thing you want is a comment on your blog that you are a spammer.

-By understanding your readers. Conduct a simple survey for your readers to understand their profile and advertising preferences. Ask consumers to give you feedback on a post, an ad link, or a trial that you shared. In this way, it is like interviewing your readers without the commitment and intrusion of a face-to-face interview.

-By joining a blog network -A network of blogs maybe a collection of blog sites that share the same industry, interest, readership base, payment mode, etc. Consumers find credibility and convenience in clicking one link to several real bloggers about a single subject. Clearly, more bloggers are better than one.

-By using RSS. RSS is the fastest growing technology on the Internet today. As such, having RSS feeds to your blog is definitely another means of generating awareness for your readership base. Having a variety of feeds can add interest to your blog site.

Give your business a boost by effectively using blogging as an Internet marketing tool.

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