

A Lead-Generation Tip-Sheet

LIKE OTHER FORMS OF MARKETING, LEAD GENERATION REQUIRES A CAMPAIGN APPROACH. HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO SET IT UP.

BY ROBERT LEROSE

OF ALL THE DIFFERENT forms of direct-response advertising, the most misunderstood may be lead generation. Mail order promotions are obviously well-known for generating revenue through acquisition, renewal or backend sales. Simple.

But for some unknown reason, lead generation has been made unnecessarily complicated and therefore ineffective. It's a shame, since qualified leads are the lifeblood of marketers.

The good news is that the logistics of a lead generation promotion are pretty simple—if you follow some time-tested principles and if you execute them right. Before you launch your next effort, consider these recommendations.

The purpose of lead generation is to **get qualified prospects to identify themselves**, not to close the sale. Period. That's it. If a prospect says they're interested in your product or service and they want to learn more, the first effort has done its job.

Lead generation involves several touch points. Unlike mail order that makes and closes the sale at one time, lead generation is a multi-step campaign. The number of contacts in your series will vary depending on what you're selling, the price, the number of people involved in the decision-making process, and so on.

Work backwards, if you prefer. In conceptualizing a campaign, some professionals like to start at the end of

the campaign (their ultimate objective) and go in reverse to the start (the first step). Others choose a straightforward approach. Whatever method you decide on, the important thing is to plan every step of the campaign in advance. Having a well-thought out strategy in place before you hit the mail, along with the collateral material ready, allows you to respond promptly and confidently at every stage of the process.

Less is more. Give the prospect just enough information at each stage of the campaign to take him to the next stage until the process culminates in a sale. Revealing too much too soon increases the chances that the prospect will react negatively or find objections.

Personalization is nice but not necessary. Your lead generation piece doesn't have to be fancy. In fact, simple or even ugly has been shown to work better than expensive mailings filled with inserts. A non-personalized letter and reply device is all it takes to get the ball rolling.

Use a bait piece. Many experts agree that it's a mistake to send a lead generating promotion without offering something free to excite interest. You can use almost anything for a bait piece, but the best items offer genuine value that the prospect finds relevant and useful, and which ties into your product or service. Whitepapers, brochures, booklets, case studies, checklists and special reports are

commonly used because of their high perceived value.

Sell the bait piece, not your company. The first effort in your series should sell the benefits and solutions found in the bait piece, not the product or service you're ultimately trying to sell. For example: If you're a landscaper and you'd like to sign up more households, your bait piece could be "7 Tips For Growing a Greener Lawn"—not "How XYZ Landscaping Cares For Your Lawn." The former informs, the latter sells.

Make the bait piece unique. Create something specifically for the mailing and which is available nowhere else. If conditions preclude this, then it's perfectly acceptable to repurpose existing content from your company into a suitable booklet or report.

Put a catchy title on the bait piece. The title can interest the prospect, solve a problem, evoke fear, offer a benefit or ask a provocative question. "How to" titles and titles with numbers ("7 Ways to...") never go out of style.

Arouse curiosity, not contentment. Your lead generation promotion should get them excited enough to respond, and nothing more. It's better to hold something back in this kind of promotion rather than satisfy their curiosity or reveal everything at once. State clearly that the bait piece comes without cost or obligation.

Use low-cost PR techniques to generate more leads. To get more mileage out of your offer, notify media outlets that serve your target audience and tell them that your booklet or whitepaper is available—again, at no charge. You're not pitching your company; you're pitching genuinely valuable, relevant information.

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