

The Ultimate Offer Checklist

158 Ways To Boost Response To Your Direct Marketing Programs!

Most Direct Marketing experts agree that the three most crucial aspects of a direct mail package in terms of generating a response are: 1) your list accuracy (40-50%); 2) your offer (40%); 3) your creative approach (10-15%).

Next to choosing an accurate list of targets, nothing will have a greater impact on your response rates than your offer. In fact, most direct mail packages are not successful without a strong offer.

Improving your offer usually results in improving your response rates. In fact, according to Bob Stone, in his book *Successful Direct Marketing Methods*:

“... if an ad, TV or radio commercial or direct mail piece doesn't have an offer, then it's not direct marketing. The propositions you make to customers -- more often referred to as offers -- can mean the difference between success or failure. Depending on the offer, differences in response of 25, 50 and 100 percent, and more are commonplace.”

Not only is the offer one key to success or failure, but the manner in which you present your offer can have a dramatic effect on response, too.

What is an offer? It starts with the terms and conditions under which you present your product or service. This could range from simple pricing to payment terms to any incentives you're prepared to give to customers to encourage them to act NOW.

Often, as in the case of lead generation, the offer can be a promise of more information, free literature or a complimentary appointment or analysis.

Keep in mind that your offer should relate to your marketing objective -- promote trial, increase usage, generate a lead, etc. However, the most successful offer for your program *may not be related to your actual product*. Case in point: Canadian Automobile Clubs routinely test offers for membership acquisition. One of their most successful offers was a miniature “Boom Box” AM/FM radio. Not necessarily related to driving a car that already has a radio, but nevertheless, it had a high perceived value among prospects and was very successful.

You should also be willing to test offers to determine their pulling power. As a rule of thumb, the increase in response for a particular offer -- a free premium or extra issue, for example -- should more than pay for the added cost of including it. In other words, it should pay its own way -- and then some. So you'll need to be able to calculate your average cost per order with and without the special offer, to determine whether it's a profitable choice.

If you're going to the trouble and expense of using a special offer or premium, you will also want to feature it prominently in your marketing materials. On a direct mail package, for example, this would include showing the special offer (photo or illustration) on the response device or order form, writing about it in the letter, perhaps in the postscript, and including a short mention as a flash on the outer envelope and perhaps the brochure. On direct response print ads, you would want to feature it on the order coupon. Sometimes it's worth testing a direct response print ad built entirely around your special offer, from the headline on down.

You may find that your most responsive offer is not necessarily your most expensive. As with the CAA example, the key issue is perceived value or popularity with your target audience versus the cost of the offer. So it's important that you test your offers to determine the most effective combination.

Here, then, is what I believe to be the most comprehensive list of direct marketing offers you're likely to find anywhere, grouped by category, to help you generate your own, unique and compelling offer ideas. Remember, you needn't restrict yourself to just one of these offers. You can build an even more powerful proposition by "layering" -- using several of these offers bundled together for a super-charged selling proposition that people can't resist.

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THE MOST COMMON DIRECT MARKETING OFFERS

1. Competitive pricing
2. Free trial (30-day, 60-day, won't cash your cheque, etc.)
3. Free information
4. Bonus for payment with order (extra issue, free gift, etc.)
5. Installment payment terms (make it easier to pay)
6. Credit card payment option
7. Extend free or reduced interest credit option
8. Cash on delivery

9. Pay 0% interest -- or less interest
10. Free gift for ordering
11. Free gift whether you keep the product or not
12. Bounce-back specials offers to people who have just ordered
13. Sweepstakes entry
14. No deposit
15. Nominal deposit
16. Temporary price offer
17. Sale
18. Two for one, and variations of this
19. End of stock/close-out/going out of business sale
20. Holiday season or event-oriented offer

OFFERS THAT REDUCE COMMITMENT

21. 30-Day FREE examination period
22. Money-back guarantee
23. Bill me later (reduces risk, commitment)
24. Buy now -- pay later -- in a few months, eg. Pay for your Christmas gifts in January
25. Guaranteed buy-back at a certain date (collectibles, computers, etc.)

PREMIUMS & FREE GIFTS

26. Free sample
27. Free gift for inquiry (a lead generation mainstay)
28. Free gift just for examining your product or service
29. Free gift for trial order (which respondents can keep even if they decline the product)
30. Free gift for ordering now, or before a deadline
31. "Freemiums" -- enclose a small free gift upfront, in your mailing package, at no obligation (i.e. mailing labels, a pencil, etc.)
32. Free credit (0% financing or no interest until next year)
33. Sample for a small price (sometime more effective than completely free)
34. Multiple free gifts (worth testing multiple smaller gifts versus one large one)
35. Your choice of free gifts
36. Guest Membership: rename your free trial and add perceived value
37. Market Research Offer: free gift for helping us with your comments and opinions
38. Discount or gift for quantity
39. Discount or free gift for extending your service or subscription
40. Discount or gift for buying in a certain time period
41. Free Express Delivery (via Federal Express, for example)
42. Free gift escalates with size of order
43. Two-step free gift offer (i.e. first gift for trying, second gift for buying)
44. Continuing incentive gifts (i.e. Columbia House giving FREE CD coupons to current members)
45. Mystery gift

46. Good/better/best choice of premiums -- each one available by ordering before a certain date -- the sooner you order, the better your premium
47. Secret bonus gift
48. Free gift for a friend offer
49. Cash upfront free gift (incentive for advance payment)
50. Free catalog
51. Free guidebook
52. Free fact kit
53. Free video
54. Free article of clothing, tote bag or wearable item
55. Free consultation
56. Free demonstration
57. Free needs analysis or audit
58. Free estimate
59. Free meal
60. Free membership in a special group with your purchase (i.e. Workshopper's Guild)
61. Free newsletter subscription
62. Free talent test
63. Free gift shipment (you order the products, they ship free to your gift list)
64. Free contest or sweepstakes entry
65. Gift with purchase (i.e. cosmetics marketers)
66. Second free gift for paying upfront
67. Free service or extended service contract
68. 10,000th Customer Celebration free gift
69. Free personalization with order (i.e. monogram)

DISCOUNTS

70. Discount for paying with cash
71. Short-term introductory offer
72. Charter membership offer
73. Two-for-one introductory offer
74. Rebates
75. Deluxe alternative
76. Add-on offers (special of the month with your order)
77. Competitive coupon (honor your competitor's discounts)
78. Conditional sale (if you agree and want it, then ...)
79. Positive option -- just let us know
80. Lifetime membership option
81. Load-ups (i.e. 11 CDs for 1 penny -- Columbia house)
82. Deferred payment offers -- take 1-6 months to pay for items, with no finance charge
83. Introductory order discount
84. Professional or Executive privilege discount
85. Special Seniors Discount or senior's offers
86. Discount to the trade (wholesale)

- 87. Early bird order discount
- 88. Volume order discounts
- 89. Tiered discounts, based on levels of orders
- 90. Special item discounts (i.e. selected items in a catalog)
- 91. Delayed billing offer (we won't cash your cheque for 30 days)
- 92. Reduced down payment

SPECIAL SALES

- 93. White sale (similar to department store)
- 94. Seasonal sales
- 95. Retail-oriented sales (clearance sale, going-out-of-business sale, fire sale)
- 96. Beat the price increase sale
- 97. Silent auction sale (for limited quantity items, a sealed bid process)
- 98. Manager's or President's sale or other themed sale
- 99. Private sale (for invited customers only)
- 100. Birthday or anniversary offer or sale
- 101. Last-minute savings or special offers
- 102. Specials of the month
- 103. Going out of business/Liquidation sale

PRODUCT SAMPLING

- 104. Free samples
- 105. Freeware offer (try it, pay only if you like it, use it)
- 106. Slight charge (i.e. Reader's Digest 1 cent offer or Book of the Month Club's Any 4 books for \$1 offer; it will often outpull a "free" offer)
- 107. Comp copy offer (used by magazines; tied to ordering but with option to cancel)
- 108. Multiple sample offer (i.e. single free sample for an entire sales force)
- 109. Sample lesson

SCARCITY OFFERS

- 110. Limited time, offer ends
- 111. Limited enrollment period
- 112. Limited seating or space
- 113. Pre-construction, pre-publication pricing
- 114. Charter membership
- 115. Limited edition

GUARANTEES

- 116.Extended guarantee (up to 6 months or a year later)
- 117.Double your money back guarantee
- 118.Guaranteed buy back (e.g. collector's plates, computer equipment, etc.)
- 119.Guaranteed acceptance (life insurance for those age 65+)
- 120.Lifetime guarantee

BUNDLED OFFERS

- 121.Multi-product offers
- 122.Piggyback offer (second rides along in package, not necessarily tied to ordering first)
- 123.Good, better, best
- 124.Deluxe edition or version
- 125.Add-on offer (accessorizing the primary sale)
- 126.Design your own offer (let customer build the offer with guidelines)
- 127.Bounce back offer (enclosed with shipment)
- 128.Increase and extend (i.e. increasing insurance coverage on a new policy)
- 129.Get-A-Friend and save even more offers

CONTESTS AND SWEEPSTAKES

- 130.Random draws
- 131.Lucky number sweepstakes
- 132.Everybody wins
- 133.Involvement contests (essay, number matching, scratch'n'win)
- 134.Talent contests

CLUBS AND CONTINUITY PROGRAMS

- 135.Positive option (notified in advance of new selections)
- 136.Negative option -- 'til forbid -- we'll keep sending you the product/service until you say no (selection of month sent unless you say "no")
- 137.Standing orders (automatic shipment "till forbid")
- 138.Continuity load-up offer (first edition of a 12-volume set at an incredible price)
- 139.Front end load-up ("get any 11 CDs for \$1.00)
- 140.No strings attached load-up (i.e. Quality Paperback Books -- no commitment to buy more, ever)
- 141.Lifetime membership (one-time fee to join and enjoy discounts, benefits)
- 142.Annual membership fee

UNIQUE OFFERS

- 143.Inner Circle (discount or access to special event or person, in return for order or donation)

144. Guilt (charities send free gift of mailing labels or greeting cards, for instance, expecting something in return)
145. Blank check (fill in your account number and amount you want to contribute)
146. Executive preview
147. Yes/No/Maybe (forcing a response can lead to more overall positive responses)
148. Exclusive rights offer (for your area, industry, etc.)
149. Dramatic offer (if it doesn't work, tear it up!)
150. Trade-in offers (cars, computers, clothes, etc.)
151. Third party referral offers (especially with incentive)
152. Special offers for heavy users, best customers
153. Member-get-a-member/friend-get-a-friend
154. Survey or hand-raising offer (reward for supplying information)
155. Stripped-down version offer (fewer features for less cost)
156. Rush shipping free
157. Competitive coupon (honor your competitor's discounts)
158. Token gift or fee (\$1 for filling out our survey, etc.)