

How To Make A Lift Letter Work For You

The 'lift letter' has its origins in the US publishing industry's direct mail packages. Indeed, it's often known as a 'publisher's letter', as it commonly takes the form of a... letter from the publisher. Its function? To provide additional, supporting information that will be enough to convince hitherto-undecided readers of a direct mail pack to become buyers. Imagine an A4 letter folded to A5, on the outside of which are written the words "Don't read this unless you've decided NOT to subscribe..." Cheesy, perhaps - but it works! There's plenty of hard data to prove it.

In short, the lift letter is an extra piece added to a direct mail package that 'lifts' response. Hence its name - and our choice of the name for our newsletter.

So how can you quickly and cheaply create your own lift letter or device, and increase the response you get from your existing lists? Let's say you're looking to re-mail precious house lists you've already used 4-6 weeks ago. Or you might have just the one chance to mail a hard-to-get outside list, so you want to maximise your sales from it.

Here are six suggestions, each of which you can put to work for you in less than two hours, and at minimal expense:

Idea #1. Take 20 minutes to look through your current subscriber list. Assemble from this a list of 30-40 of your most 'blue-chip' subscribers. Those *guaranteed* to arouse 'fear of loss' feelings in many of your prospective subscribers. Then lay these company names out, in 2-column format on a simply-designed leaflet, topping and tailing your list of names with the following text, or something like it: "These companies read PUBLICATION NAME each month/week/day... Shouldn't you?" We've successfully used an identical device, lasered 2-up A5 on off-the-shelf, coloured A4 photocopy paper, then guillotined at our local print shop, to breathe new life into over-mailed house lists. The result: a revival in response rates that came close to matching those from our original mailings.

Why did such a 'cheap and cheerful' approach work so well? Evidently some prospects need that extra piece of information to convince them to take the required action. In this case a list of their competitors who already received the publication was enough to do the trick.

(A side benefit: a plain-but-functional lift device like this can also be a great way of cheaply testing new elements of your marketing 'story'.)

Idea #2. Support your existing sales pitch (letter or leaflet) by adding a 'second opinion' to your mail pack that comes from someone who is not sales-oriented. Whatever your product, you'll find someone to take on this role. If you're selling software, for example, you've got the software engineer. If you're selling a newsletter, directory or magazine, use the editor.

Let's take the latter example, as we can illustrate it with a very recent example of our own work. We've just put together a multi-part direct mail pack for an established

UK B2C newsletter. Sales letter, leaflet, separate order form, pre-paid reply envelope etc. All of the copy for this is, quite naturally, written in as convincing a sales manner as we can muster, with all the appropriate calls to action, guarantees, etc.

However, there's one piece in the mail pack that is deliberately low-key, and designed to appeal to those readers who will discount the sales pitch as being just that, copy designed to part them from their cash. Therefore, our 1-page lift letter is 'written' by the publication's editors, and adopts a very matter-of-fact tone of voice, with no overt sales pitch, no call to action. It's even laid out as a personal Memo From The Editors, on specially mocked-up memo-style letterhead to further distinguish it from the sales letter 'written' by the publisher. It simply tells the reader how great the publication is, from the editors' perspective, and supports this with specific examples from recent issues that are carefully chosen to appeal to the target audience.

Idea #3. If you've got lots of really good testimonials, product reviews etc, you can list these in a separate leaflet that'll have much the same effect as the editor's letter cited above. A separate flyer covered in testimonials can work even better than including testimonials on your main leaflet. Ideally, of course, you might do both. A good reason to start collecting more testimonials as soon as you can...

Idea #4. Here's another example from our recent work. It's sort of a cross between #2 and #3 above. Earlier this year we did a promotional pack for a membership organisation - one that some of our readers probably belong to. The pack comprised a 1-page personalised sales letter from the organisation's director and a 4pp A4 leaflet. To this 'standard approach' we then added a lift letter 'written' by the managing director of a prominent company that is a long-standing corporate member of the organisation, and printed on the company's actual letterheaded paper. The managing director spells out to the reader why he's such an enthusiastic supporter of the organisation, and what he thinks are the advantages of membership for the reader. So the letter is, in a sense, one long testimonial. The idea is that a significant percentage of waverers, people who are not quite convinced enough by the marketing spiel to join the organisation, will be sold by the testimonial letter from a real, live, long-standing member.

Idea #5. This works very well with publications that are frequently published, such as weekly or fortnightly newsletters. Find out from the editor which are the most valuable forthcoming features in a particular issue two weeks hence. Then develop these into a bulleted list headed "What you'll miss if you don't subscribe today". Just be sure that you choose a spread of topics likely to appeal to the most important/largest segments of your audience. Such a specific promise of future (editorial) benefit can work very well.

Idea #6. This lift device is not so much a letter as what's commonly known in the direct mail industry as a 'bucksip', owing to the fact that it traditionally takes the form of a slip of paper with the same dimensions as an American dollar bill. You take the offer that you've made elsewhere in your leaflet and/or letter, and develop it into a couple of paragraphs together with the signature, name and job title of the most appropriate heavy-weight individual in your organisation. Usually the

publisher or managing director. The added attention focussed on your offer and guarantee will provide increased assurance to wavering prospects - and convince a percentage of them to say yes to your offer.

Whichever of these six approaches appeals most to you, bear in mind that lift devices have a tried and tested history of gaining direct marketers an additional 'lift' in response rates and revenues of 10% or more. So why not try them out for yourself. You may achieve higher sales results out of all proportion to the invested time and effort.

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