Anatomy of a Direct Mail Package

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"How much do you charge to write a letter?" the voice on the phone asked. I quoted a price. *"That's a pretty good price, George. Tell me, how long does it take you to write a letter like that?"*

"Seventeen years," I replied. (This was some years ago. It takes 30 years now.)

Unfortunately, "writing a letter" is how many small business owners and dm newcomers think of direct mail. (Many also insist on calling a sales letter a "cover" letter — as though it were an added appendage to something more important. It isn't. If anything, it's the other way around. The sales letter is the primary document. Everything else — brochure, sales sheet or slick, order form, etc. — is in support of it.)

In any case, if you've been around more than a month or so, you've no doubt learned that there's more to direct mail than writing a letter. There's the envelope you're going to put it in, for example. How large? #10? 9x12? What's the difference, other than cost? What form of postage should you use...a bulk rate stamp?...printed indicia?...metered Third Class? First Class?

Clearly, there are dozens of decisions to be made about any direct mail package, each having an impact, large or small, on the eventual results.

The following checklist is designed to help you think your way through your next direct mail campaign, anticipate needs, and make the necessary decisions for timely production and mailing.

The commentary that follows is keyed to the list and provides detailed "how-to" suggestions for the various elements in a typical direct mail package. Not every point applies to every kind of letter, and, for the most part, exceptions are noted where appropriate.

C H A P T E R 1: Checklist

I. OUTER ENVELOPE

1. Format
    a). #10 business envelope
    b). 9x12 business envelope
    c). Oversized #12 or #13 envelope
    d). 6x9 "booklet" envelope
    e). Monarch "personal" envelope
    f). Square "invitation" envelope
    g). Poly and other novelty envelopes
    h). Closed face vs. window
    i). Literature code

2. Postage
    a). "Live" stamp (First Class or pre-cancelled Third Class)
    b). Meter
    c). Printed indicia

3. Mail Classification
    a). First class
    b). Third class bulk
    c). Special (certified, express, FedEx, etc.)

4. Corner card
    a). Company name and address vs. none
    b). Writer's name (handwritten or "typed" above company name)
    c). Product name vs. company name
    d). Logo conflict

5. Addressing
    a). Direct computer-addressed
    b). Cheshire label
    c). Hand-addressed
    d). Personalization vs. none

6. Teaser
    a). Teaser vs. none
    b). Offer teaser
    c). Benefit teaser
    d). Curiosity or "hook" teaser
    e). Ancillary notations

7. Envelope "look and feel"
    a). Straight business (white wove)
    b). Official or monetary value (brown or gray kraft)
    c). Big Event (four-color, display type, illustrations, etc.)
    d). Invitation/upscale
    e). Others

II. LETTER

1. Look and Feel
    a). Length
    b). Correspondence style vs. illustrated
    c). Letter/brochure
    d). Stock (white wove vs. ivory vellum, etc.)
    e). Personalization
    f). Headline vs. none
    g). Company letterhead vs. product vs. personal; top of letter
       vs. end of letter
    h). Single sheets vs. 11x17 folded
    i). Typeface(s)
    j). Handwritten notations
    k). P.S.
    l). Literature code

III. BROCHURE

1. Test with and without

2. Look and Feel
    a). Size and folds
    b). Four-color vs. two-color
    c). Stock (matte/gloss/semi-or dull-gloss)
    d). Illustrations (drawings vs. photos)
    e). Second order form
    f). Testimonials
    g). Offer
    h). Guarantee
    i). Call to action
    j). Company I.D. and contact information
    k). Literature code

IV. REPLY DEVICE

1. Look and Feel
    a). Certificate/check design
    b). Four-color vs. two-color
    c). Illustrations vs. none
    d). Offer boilerplate copy ("Yes!...")

1. Look and Feel (cont'd)
- e). Qualification questions (lead generation)
- f). Signature/phone#
- g). Detachable stub
- h). Action device
- i). Gift amount checkoff (fund raising)
- j). BRC vs. BRE

2. Billing
- a). Payment enclosed (hard offer)
- b). Credit cards
- c). Toll Free #/fax
- d). P.O.#
- e). Deadline date
- f). Name correction
- g). Key and literature codes

V. LIFT LETTER

1. Test with and without

2. Look and feel
- a). Size
- b). Stock
- c). Letter vs. memo vs. other
- d). Offer
- e). Signature

VI. PREMIUM INSERT

1. Test with and without

2. Look and feel
- a). Buckslip vs. folded
- b). Attached to reply device vs. loose

VII. ALTERNATIVES

1. Sweepstakes

2. Proprietary "Telegram" package

3. Proprietary "Express" package

4. Proprietary ink jet/personalized web press package

5. Self-mailer

6. Others

Chapter 2: The Outer Envelope

Getting the envelope opened is probably the most difficult job in direct marketing. For one thing, you have about 3 seconds in which to do it. Three seconds — while your prospect is ritually scanning the day's mail and dropping it into the round file at the post office or next to his/her desk — in which to get the reader's attention sufficient to put your package in the "A" pile: read first. Maybe there's a "B" pile: read later, maybe not. Maybe there's only the AAAaaaarrgh! pile as your pricey package sails wastefully into the trash.

So how do you make it to the "A" pile? Let's take a look at envelopes, the first category in our Direct Mail Checklist.

The very first thing you must do is send your package to the right prospect. I'll say again: junk mail is an offer sent to the wrong person. But that's list work, which we discuss in Chapter 4. We'll assume for now that your lists are on-target.

1. & 7. Format and Look & Feel

I like to think of direct mail as "theater in print." Each package a little drama, complete with costumes (package design, paper stock, and illustrations), dialogue (copy), and staging (layout and the natural flow from one component to the next, or from fold to fold of a brochure).

The drama can big and brassy (a Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes promising TEN MILLION DOLLARS! or the Time-Life History of the Universe in 20 volumes), or it can be quietly elegant (a square invitation in ivory vellum with a light gray "RSVP" in the corner). It can be *** VERY OFFICIAL *** (a 9x12 brown kraft envelope), or a bit of a mystery (a three-dimensional Jiffy envelope or package the recipient has to sign for). To business executives, I've had good success with the standard First Class 9x12 envelope with the border of green triangles.

As if to underscore these points, an ad currently running for Dupont Tyvek® envelopes carries the headline, "The right envelope can help you say, 'Dear Sir' even before he reads your letter."

The body text reads, "Actions do speak louder than words. And usually sooner. So when you want a mailing to convey the proper respect, start right away. By sending it in a Tyvek®. A unique blend of silkiness and ruggedness, it reflects the importance of the contents and the receiver."

Size Matters

Whatever drama you decide to play out, size and shape will play a role. Big, 9x12 envelopes (or a 10x13 I once used to mail "limited edition" prints) carry some added impor-

tance just by virtue of their size. Hard to toss them out without at least a peek. Of course, they cost more...naturally.

Booklet envelopes (6x9) may seem common to those of us in the business, but in fact, they're fairly rare in the average person's mailbox. Therefore, they tend to stand out — get attention — in the day's delivery. (I like to think of that white mail truck as it comes down the street as an ice cream truck. I keep listening for the bells.)

The good old #10 business envelope, of course, means business. Best used for personalized messages to top management and folks like that. Number 10s don't stand out, particularly, but the business executive expects to be addressed with either a #10, or a 9x12 business type envelope. Closed-face and personalized is the way to go. We'll get to addressing in a bit.

Some marketers are having success with larger versions of the standard business envelope: a #11, #12, or #14, which does stand out in the mail stack, projects the business envelope look and feel, and affords a bit more real estate on which to create a message. An oversized brown kraft can be especially effective, assuming the super-important projection is appropriate for the contents. (Brown kraft carries a strong association with checks and other documents of special importance.)

Another way to get attention is to go smaller than a #10. A #7 or Monarch envelope measures 3 7/8" x 7 1/2" and has a strong personal look and feel. A simulated script address might be most effective here. I mentioned an invitation above. A custom square envelope or a #5 Baronial says "special event" under most circumstances. Reinforce that with an "RSVP" teaser.

A transparent poly envelope can be most effective, mostly for consumer applications. It affords a strong "peek-a-boo" curiosity factor that makes people want to get inside. Just don't tip off the contents too much, or they won't have to open it before they chuck it. Some envelope providers also have cello-envelopes, which are 9"x12" with a large 8"x10" clear plastic window in which you can show the front of your brochure.

There are a variety of web press mailers that are produced with the envelope, letter, and reply device printed in line, then cut and folded into a direct mail package (see "The Alternatives" below). Some suppliers utilize ink-jet personalization and upscale paper stocks to create very interesting packages, while the less costly NCR type packages are best left to institutional mailers like the IRS and Motor Vehicle Bureau — unless, of course, that's the very impression you want to make.

A common testing practice for large consumer mailers is to introduce a new product with a 9x12 envelope, then test smaller sizes to see if they can reduce costs without eroding the response rate.

As you can see, envelope design is a form of impression management or "theater in print," as I said above. Even before you consider copy teasers, your envelope can go a long way toward setting up the prospect, emotionally and psychologically, for the message inside. "Verisimilitude" is the operative word. Think your envelopes through in terms of your offer, product, and market, and more of them will get opened.

2.-3. Postage & Classification

With regard to postage, a "live" (pre-cancelled) stamp can help make Third Class Mail (now called Standard Mail A™) look like First Class, unless you plan to have illustrations and teasers all over the envelope. In that case, I usually opt for the printed indicia and save the added cost of affixing stamps that won't have much impact.

For First Class, a stamp is advisable so long as the rest of the envelope is clean. Also, if you're using First Class Mail, it's wise to imprint "First Class Mail" on the envelope so your prospect doesn't miss it. A Standard A™ meter can also give an impression of First Class Mail, since few folks pay much attention to the metered amount.

4. The Corner Card

The corner card is the return address area in the upper left corner of the addressed side of an envelope. When planning your teaser, remember that the corner card can be a teaser, too or can work with your teaser to produce a larger effect. A plain white envelope with "The White House" in the upper left corner, for example, doesn't need any further teaser except, perhaps, "RSVP".

One question to ask about the corner card is, should it reflect the company (Acme Products)? Or the product you're selling (McWidgets)? If you're Bertha's Kitty Boutique, your individual fame may supercede that of your new electronic litter box. But if you're Shazam Publishing with a dozen or more magazines and newsletters, your new *Internet Marketing* newsletter title in the corner card may mean more to a list of web site owners than your company name.

A common technique used to enhance the personal impression of a package is to show the sender's name "typed" in black ink above the company name and address in the corner card. This too works best on a clean, First Class Mail, stamped envelope.

If the corporate logo is an elaborate piece of work, it's best to use some simpler version on the envelope so it won't conflict with and draw attention away from the teaser or other message. The same holds true for the letterhead vis-à-vis any headline or Johnson box that may be used at the top of the letter. (See below for a description of the Johnson box.)

I sometimes move the company logo or letterhead to the end of the letter, where it won't distract from the headline message. Presumably, you're not selling your logo.

5. Addressing

A colleague of mine with a successful direct marketing agency in New York refuses to take a client if they insist on using labels on their mail. She figures anything she might

do is doomed to failure with that "advertising mail!" pennant screaming across the front of the envelope.

By far the best choice is laser or ink-jet addressing, either directly onto an order form showing through a window, or onto a closed faced envelope. Personalized letters are also best for most purposes because beyond this sale or inquiry, you want to build a relationship. Addressing a person by name is a darn sight more personal than "Dear Middle Manager — or current occupant."

Do Teasers Work? — and Other Frequently Asked Envelope Questions

Now to the question above. "Do teasers work?" The right ones do.

That's not an evasion. If you examine the direct mail you receive each day, you'll find many envelopes with teasers that are designed only for the trash bin. "20% off!" *Off what?* "Open now!" *Why?*

Like me, you've no doubt been told by numerous friends and associates, "I never read junk mail — I throw it all away unopened." Maybe. Or maybe they're more like an associate of mine who told me she never read "junk" mail and one morning brought in a 6 x 9 envelope from American Girl Publishing. It was opened, and the order form was gone. "How come?" I queried my non-direct-mail-reading friend. She showed me the envelope: the teaser on one side said, "Help *your* daughter grow up to be as strong and self-confident as she *deserves* to be." And on the other side: "Finally. A newsletter written *just* for parents of girls 10 to 16." Turns out, my friend is a mother of a 14-year-old girl. Case closed. "Junk" mail is an offer sent to the wrong person. *Direct* mail is an offer sent to the right one. And notice the use of italics as a means of expression.

I probably discard more than half my mail based on the corner card alone. A lot depends on the accuracy of the list work. If you've effectively targeted your prospect (for cold mail), you're unlikely to turn him or her off with your teaser...assuming it speaks immediately to his need or problem and/or your solution.

One of the more successful direct mail writers of my generation is Bill Jayme, who has specialized in subscription packages for many of the nation's leading magazine publishers.

"What works for us," he has said, "And always works for us, is the outer envelope...that instantly waylays the prospect, captures his attention, engages him, intrigues him, grabs his curiosity. The outer envelope that wastes not a moment in commencing to make the sale. The outer envelope that orients the prospect immediately to the product, and very often to the offer, even before he gets inside."

But while you're waylaying, capturing, engaging, etc., remember that people respond to an appeal based on who *they* are, not according to who *you* are. Also, Bill was speaking mainly of magazine packages: A free trial issue of a $25 product, not business-to-business lead generation.

As to the issue of teaser or no teaser, consider that if a recipient of your package reads your teaser — then proceeds to open the envelope — he or she has already accepted a portion of your proposition. You have him/her saying "yes" to some degree even before you've made your pitch! That's a very valuable edge to take into the selling environment.

6. Three Types of Teasers

As I see them, envelope teasers can be divided into three categories: offer teasers, benefit teasers, and curiosity teasers.

A separate category is the "ancillary notation," which might be a "second notice" stamp or a simulated instruction to the "Postmaster," an "Urgent" stamp, or one of the many express mail look-alikes with their various officialese notations like "Audited Delivery," "Dated Material Enclosed," "Return Within 30 Days of Receipt," and others.

Offer Teasers

An offer teaser is just that: an offer. "Take the Next Issue of *Widget World*, FREE with the Certificate enclosed!" is a typical offer teaser. The offer can also be inside the envelope, rather than on it: "Breakthrough Upgrade Offer Enclosed" worked well for a software upgrade package. "Good through July 31st" added a touch of urgency that also helped. (But of course, that was mailed to committed users of the base product.)

A business-to-business offer teaser that worked especially well for me was on a package I've described elsewhere for a software development team, "Inside: Seven Proven Tips for keeping software development projects on time and on budget. PLUS exclusive "Guide to Software Product Development, FREE!" Note how it combines an offer with a benefit.

Some other offer teasers I've noticed (but didn't write): "Business Builder Enclosed. Test it now and get ready to receive 6 Sensational FREE GIFTS!" This one adds a touch of the curiosity teaser around the otherwise un-described "business builder." And a computer service bureau offers, "Find Out About a Complimentary File Analysis!"

Dynamically, the offer teaser is best used when you're sure of your market. You have to know that the recipient is a prospect for the offer based on your list (like the upgrade offer mentioned above.) Otherwise, the offer won't mean much; for instance, the "complimentary file analysis" in the example above was wasted on me.

Benefit Teasers

The benefit teaser delivers a promise or benefit to the reader, sufficient to get him or her to open the envelope. A successful benefit teaser for *OS/2* magazine: "Release the power of OS/2 for all the work you do — and get it right the first time with *OS/2* magazine!"

For a PC troubleshooting guide: "Maximize your PC — and your PC skills — with the first PC Guide the grows along with you!" For an AT&T small business service: "Now every AT&T long distance call can lower your cost of business...in ways you never thought of." (The last phrase was a pickup of a national campaign theme.)

One from the swipe file: "Inside: Double your PC storage and triple its speed...without spending thousands on hardware upgrades."

The benefit teaser is best used when you're less sure of your market and you need to start selling right away. Again, your benefit has to be on target, or forget it. You must know what's important to these people and nail it, the first time.

I like to try a combination of these two teaser types like this one for a Novell Networking binder product: "The Five Keys to LAN Success: [list of five benefits] Plus: Yours Free! 12 Powerful Programs To Help You Manage Your Novell Netware Network... See inside..." And then elsewhere on the envelope, "Dated Offer, Open Now!" That covered all the bases on a #12 envelope.

The Curiosity Teaser

Perhaps one of the most celebrated curiosity teasers was penned by Bill Jayme for *Psychology Today*: "Do you close the bathroom door when no one else is home?"

As you can see, the curiosity teaser is an oblique reference designed to appeal to the type of person who is likely to be interested in the product. In my view, this is the riskiest of the three types, since it's difficult to tap into someone else's imagination for the exact hot button that will turn him or her on. In the *Psychology Today* example above, only those with a psychological bent would find that teaser compelling enough to act — a good way to improve the quality of the respondents as well as improve both payup and renewal rates.

One I wrote for *3D Design* magazine: "The Splines! The Nurbs! The Blobs! Now you can bring them all together with *3D Design* magazine." That's less of a curiosity if you're a 3D designer since you'll know what those critters are, but it's a fun way to get a techie's attention.

A perennial curiosity teaser that still works when used appropriately: "R.S.V.P." It begs the response.

As you can see, curiosity teasers can be fun, but watch it: Unless you're very, very sure of yourself, the offer and benefit teasers are a safer bet.

So, should you use a teaser on your packages? I don't know. But you should test them.

Chapter 3: The Letter

1. Look and Feel

A letter should look like a typed letter, not a quasi-brochure. I see many so-called letters in my mail each week that do not meet that requirement. They use various display typefaces, often quirky stuff that calls too much attention to itself and gets in the way of the message.

Tiresome as it may be for some of our more imaginative designers, Courier is the typeface of choice. Why? As we pointed out in Chapter 2, tests consistently show it is the most readable and that it affords the highest levels of content retention. Times Roman, Bodoni, Garamond, and other serifed typefaces are OK too, of course, but they're less "type-writer-ish" than Courier. The point is the serif, not the typeface itself.

(a) Length. A simple suggestion often given is that a letter should be as long as it takes to get the message across. How do you know what that is? Write it, and see. Chances are, if you can't say it in four pages, you can't say it. Find someone who can.

Some say no one reads letters of more than one page. How silly! Millions of dollars of goods and services are being sold every day through direct mail — much of it with four-page letters.

True, no one will read a boring, meaningless, poorly written —or worse, mis-targeted — letter beyond the first paragraph. But when you're addressing someone's true needs, he or she will read what you have to say about it, if you make it vital and interesting. As a colleague once put it, "People don't read short letters or long letters. They read what interests them."

A woman showed me a package from *The Harvard Business Review*. It was a #10 package with a 4-page letter and several inserts. "Who's going to take the time to read all this? she exclaimed.

"Harvard Business School graduates will," I told her. In fact, I knew that package had been HBR's highly successful control package for about two years. I even knew who wrote it!

That said, and all other things being equal, a general rule of thumb is to keep business-to-business letters to two pages (to avoid the appearance of a time-consuming document), consumer letters to four pages (to demonstrate that there's a heck of a lot to be said about this wonderful widget). Just remember that no one's going to have a stroke if an interesting letter runs beyond those boundaries. The prospect's level of qualification is in him, not you, and no letter is going to change that. Magazine renewals and fund-raising letters have their own dynamics but are usually brief — one to two pages.

(b&c) Correspondence vs. Illustrated; Letter/Brochure. Sometimes, usually in consumer environments, you may wish to reduce package costs or have other reasons to combine the letter with graphic elements into an illustrated letter or letter/brochure.

(d) **Stock.** Stock should be compatible with the envelope. Standard stock is 20 lb. white wove, but if you've reached for an ivory or vellum look on the envelope, don't blow it with the letter. Have your supplier give you letter-stock options as well.

(e) **Personalization.** Personalization is the heart of the relationship you want to build with your customer/prospect. Customers especially should always be addressed by name. Whatever added costs you incur will be repaid over time by a higher lifetime customer value.

(f) **Headline vs. none.** A headline at the top of your letter carries similar dynamics to the teaser on the envelope. It synthesizes the core message and gives the reader a reason to spend his or her time with the letter. For executive mailings, however, you want to at least test a headline before you roll out with it.

A popular headline technique is the so-called "Johnson box" created by copywriter Frank Johnson when he was at American Heritage. He placed an offer statement inside a rectangle or "box" made of asterisks and found significant increases in response. It was probably due more to the offer than to the box, but the technique marches on, nevertheless, and today most anything at the top of a letter is often referred to as a Johnson box.

(g) **Company letterhead vs. Product vs. Personal.** If your company logo is an elaborate affair, you might consider placing it at the end of the letter instead of at the top, so you won't distract attention from your headline. You're not selling your logo, after all. As with the corner card, you might focus attention more compellingly if you use the product name rather than the company name in your letterhead. For business executive mailings, a personal letterhead (i.e., name, title) might be more acceptable.

(h) **Single Sheets vs. 11" x 17".** The most economical solution for a four-page letter is an 11"x17" sheet folded to make four 8 1/2" x11" (front and back) panels. It's also the most manageable for the reader and helps avoid confusion over which page follows which. Some marketers have found success in business-to-business mailings with two to three individual sheets printed "executive" style on one side only.

(i) **Typefaces.** Courier. As discussed in #1 above, Courier is the most readable typeface for letters, affording the highest levels of retention. That's physics, not opinion.

(j) **Handwritten notations.** Used in moderation, a handwritten notation or two can help draw attention to a key point in a letter. It's a technique usually confined to consumer mail, but there are always exceptions.

(k) **P.S.** Studies show that normal eye movement goes from the (1) headline and addressee to (2) the salutation to (3) the signature block to (4) the P.S. to (5) the first paragraph of the letter. Make that P.S. count with a key benefit or other important statement. A blue ink signature aids credibility.

(l) **Literature code.** To help the lettershop get the right components into the right envelopes, a literature code somewhere on the visible outside of the letter (and on all other pieces) can ensure accuracy.

See "Anatomy of a Direct Mail Letter" in Chapter 5 for help in pulling some of these factors together.

Chapter 4: The Brochure

1. Test With and Without

The first thing to understand about the brochure is that you may not need one. That's the upside. The downside is that about the only way to be sure is to test your package with it and without it, so you'll likely have to produce one in any case.

In my view, one of the main reasons brochures depress response is that they're not done right. The main function of the brochure (most of the time — there are exceptions) is to show the product in use. Many brochures I receive in the mail are little more than a repeat of the points made in the letter SET IN LARGE TYPE, or an overly detailed, long copy diatribe on the product that ends up distracting from the basic sales message.

Brochures that fail to add meaningful information to the message become a burden on the package and on the reader's time, not a help. The brochure should be a support piece to the letter. It "proves" many of the claims made in the letter by demonstrating those points with pictures, graphs, testimonials, etc.

In each case, the brochure shows the reader how the product plays out in his or her life.

2. Look and Feel

If the letter is the "sell" piece in the package, the brochure is the "show" piece. It's the salesman's sample case. The demonstration of the all-purpose juicer or the Ginsu knife…the computer screens that show how a software package delivers data…the real-as-a-roar color photo of the cheetah in a nature library; the lush look of a lemon soufflé in a cookbook; the stark beauty of the Pyramids in a historical continuity series.

(a) Size and Folds. Sizes range from a simple 8 1.2 x 11 page to a full-sized 15 x 25 "bedsheet" brochure. Some purists insist that an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet is a "flier," and you may encounter some confusion in terminology about that with printers, mailers, etc. Fold it in half to fit a 6 x 9 package and it's more clearly a four-panel brochure. Likewise if you fold it in thirds to fit an #10 business envelope. Only now it has six panels. Another favorite of mine is the 11 x 15 brochure, which folds in half twice to fit a #10 package and yields eight panels.

As mentioned in the section on letters above, the letter-brochure or so-called illustrated letter combines, on an 11x17 sheet, a letter on pages 1 and 4 with illustrations, usually two-color, in the center spread, pages 2 and 3. In this case, your piece is primarily a letter and should be on letter stock. You'd have to go to a fairly heavy stock, like 60# Cover, to avoid show-through if you used four-color art in the center.

You can get all the real estate you need for most projects with an 11x17 sheet folded in half to 8 1/2" x11" then folded again, either in thirds for a #10 envelope or in half for a 6x9.

The "bedsheet" brochure is usually reserved for those big, 9x12 packages such as the ones Time-Life Books puts out and for similar book-continuity programs. The extra space is needed for the dramatic photography that sells the books, mammoth headlines, and bold illustrations of the books themselves.

Whichever size you choose, be sensitive to the natural divisions the folds provide and use them to "unfold" your message a bit at a time. This allows you to control your presentation and direct the reader's attention to each point in the order you wish. You can use each panel separately, or combine two or more to create larger panels for larger illustrations.

Also be careful of elaborate brochure designs that require complicated folding and of brochures that are stapled or saddle stitched. The former can lead to confusion on the part of the reader and the latter are often set aside for reading "later," which seldom comes. Remember, the brochure is intended to support the letter, not replace it. We want our reader to move through the package to the order form, not get hung up on any one part of it.

(b) Four-color vs. Two-color. If you're selling food, artwork, four-color books, or almost anything to kids, you'll likely want to use four-color art. In general, consumer brochures do best in four colors, while business-to-business brochures can be effective in two colors, especially for information products and for most BTB services. Information doesn't have a color. Three colors will cost about the same as four, so you may as well go for it.

(c) Stock. Beware of high-gloss stock. It can reflect too much light in an unpredictable way and make the copy and illustrations hard to read. You'll want some degree of coating if you're using photos, so look for a semi-gloss or dull coat in an 80# text. Beyond that, let your designer advise you.

Business-to-business brochures can be effective in uncoated or matte finishes, especially in smaller sizes using two colors.

(d) Illustrations. Photographs and drawings are both illustrations. Photos provide greater credibility, but sometimes illustrations are the only way to get the image you want. Choose one or the other, however, not a combination. Exceptions would include an illustrated diagram that's related to a particular photo image and, of course, charts and graphs.

Every photo should be accompanied by a caption explaining what's in the photo. The pictures may be self-evident to you, but I assure you, they're not to the reader.

Often, you can enhance the visual impact of a piece with images purchased from stock photo houses. With the large quantity and wide range of stock images available on the Internet today (see www.photodisk.com, among others), you should be able to find photos that will work in almost any environment.

Remember you'll have to do your own product-in-use shots, and you could end up with some disparity in quality between your own photos and professional images. Your designer should be alert to this and should have sources for images that will enhance your material.

(e) Second Order Form. It's a good idea to provide a second order form in a brochure in case the first one gets misplaced, or your reader wishes to pass the package on to a friend or colleague.

Include copy to the effect of "may be photocopied for convenience" so the reader doesn't have to cut up the brochure to use the form. Don't rely on the brochure for the only order form, however, assuming it'll save money. You'll lose much more in orders than you save. Trust me.

(f) Testimonials. While I frequently may use a testimonial or two in a letter, the brochure is the place to present a selection of testimonial statements. Give them a heading like, "Here's what your colleagues are saying about ABC widgets…" and include full names, titles, companies, or addresses whenever possible to reinforce credibility. You'll need peoples' permission to use them, so collect them as they come to you rather than trying to track people down six months or a year later when you're under the deadline pressures of a promotion.

(g, h, i & j). Offer, Guarantee, Call to Action, Company I.D. The brochure should include all the essentials your reader needs to make a purchase decision in the event he or she loses the letter. That means repeat the offer in the brochure, feature the guarantee prominently, include a call to action, and be sure the company address and other ordering/contact information is easy to find.

(k) Literature Code. Help keep the printer/mailer from going nuts and making a mistake by including a literature code in a prominent outside corner of the document.

Chapter 5: The Reply Device

1. Look and Feel

I refer to this document as a "reply device," because it isn't always an "order form." Sometimes it's a donor or gift form, as in fund raising. Sometimes it's an information request, as in lead generation.

Look-and-feel issues for a fund-raising reply form are much the same as they are for the rest of the package. Don't look too fancy....or too rich. (The exception might be a political fund campaign that carries congressional or other high-ranking governmental association.) We'll get back to fund-raising packages in a bit.

In lead generation, the reply form will include several qualifying questions and should offer space for alternative names and even addresses, in the event the package was forwarded to a more appropriate recipient.

Otherwise, order forms need to project a lot of chutzpah. They need to summarize and synthesize the offer and benefits, and sell them at the same time. Most of all, they need to GET THE ORDER.

This is the document in your package that brings home the bacon. It's a form of contract that the customer makes with you, albeit non-binding. It represents a commitment on the part of the prospect/customer to accept your free trial or other offer on the terms you've suggested, so it should look and feel authoritative, if not exactly legal. (Too much of a "legal" look might cause doubt and hesitation.)

Most important, the order card should be as clear and unambiguous as you can make it. Any doubt about price or terms or guarantee and your prospect may balk. Allow sufficient room for any information you request. In look and feel, the order form should be consistent with the overall look and feel of the package. If it's a fun look, you can carry that to the order card, but lightly. The order card should always instill confidence in the prospect. Here are just a few options you may wish to consider.

a) Certificate/check design. You've received them, lots of them. The telcos have been living off them. On what? Order forms that not only look like checks, but are checks...sort of. They are checks because you can cash them, but that automatically switches your long-distance service to that company.

In any case, many companies use check-like documents very successfully. Not so much because people think they are checks, but because the check-like verisimilitude projects value.

During a stint at Ziff-Davis Publishing, most of the publications employed a dollars-off check-like certificate (with a patented, raised red portion showing the dollar amount). Nothing we "creatives" tried seemed able to beat them.

Likewise with certificates. I created a series of "professional courtesy vouchers" some years ago for a stable of medical publications marketed to nurses that significantly increased response, and they were used successfully for many years thereafter. My theory was that educated nurses might be turned off by simulated "checks" but "professional courtesy vouchers" compliments their sense of professionalism.

Tests of bind-in and blow-in cards in magazines often result in the certificate-type card winning in head-to-head tests with other designs — perhaps because the value design is a strong counterpoint to the slicker, four-color editorial illustrations and advertisements in the book.

There's a tendency among some to reject techniques like certificates as "hype" or "junk mail" tactics. But as I've said elsewhere in these pages, we all have a professional responsibility to do what works best, not what we like or don't like. Checks and certificates work often enough that you should at least test them.

Another variation on this theme of value and importance in order forms is the person-alized temporary membership card. The American Automobile Association (AAA) has used this technique forever, and many other associations and membership organizations — in-cluding some that can "borrow" the membership metaphor, like a record or video club — use a membership card as an order form.

The danger here is in making the card too real or valuable-looking so that the recipi-ent is reluctant to send it back. A card that must be returned needs to be designed into the paper or made into a low-cost cardboard or very thin plastic stick-on. It should be clearly marked "temporary" or some such. Heavier plastic could be too valuable in look and feel to send back. A plastic membership card used in conjunction with an order form can be very effective, however.

b) Four-color vs. two-color. Magazine publishers — who do more direct mail testing than any other category I can think of — have found that four-color on an order card, often in the form of a cover photo, can increase response. It's been said that if your budget per-mits four-color in only one place in a direct mail package, use it on the order form. If that's the only color in the package, OK. But if you have a color brochure and other color compo-nents, make sure the order card doesn't blend in and become "lost" in the overall package design. In that case, it might be better to keep the order card to two-color, as with the blow-in/bind-in example above.

For business-to-business lead generation (and fund raising), I'd keep the reply device to two colors. Business-to-business lead generation is usually an information transfer, and information has no color, so why pay for it? Also, the two-color look is more intellectual, generally, than four-color, which better complements the lead-generation environment. You're going to need open white space for your qualifying questions, in any case.

c). Illustrations vs. none. Most of what we've said about color applies to illustrations as well. Remember that the order card is a "contract" of sorts, so you want to keep it important-looking. Illustrations might reduce that look and feel. Except for a magazine cover on publishing order forms, I'd stay away from illustrations.

d). Offer boilerplate copy. The "boilerplate" copy — everything that comes after the "YES" checkbox — is written first person, as though being spoken by the recipient, now turned customer.

Don't put words in your prospect's mouth that he or she would never say: "Yes! I'd like to become a master of the universe and, with your wonderful software program, crush into powder everyone who ever crossed me…"

The copy needs to spell out the offer in its entirety. If you're offering a free premium, mention that first. "Yes, send my FREE report, 'The Masters of the Universe Guide to Picking Up Chicks,' and send my copy of your Masters of the Universe software package at $55 plus $3.75 shipping and handling. I may try the program for 30 days without obligation. If not satisfied, I will return the software for a full refund. The Report is mine to keep."

Note that if you ask for payment up front, you may refer to the offer as "Risk Free" — since it isn't technically "Free" if they have to pay to get it. That's an FTC rule. Also, under FTC regs, if you use "Free," and there's a catch, like it's free with a subscription, you are obliged to make that clear: "YOURS FREE with no-risk subscription."

You'll want to be sure to spell out all the payment options:
[ ] Payment enclosed, [ ] Please bill me [ ] Please bill my credit card, and, in some cases, [ ] Bill company (P.O.#____).

Visually, make those check boxes pop, and in the credit card line, make it long enough to enter a 16-digit number without crunching.

If you have a deadline — and you should always have a deadline — be sure it's featured prominently on the order form, maybe in a corner slash and in the boilerplate copy as well.

Spell out all the contact options as well: company mailing address, fax number, e-mail address if appropriate, and Web site URL, especially if there's an alternate reply form online.

e). Qualification questions. In lead-generation packages, you'll likely want to include several questions for the prospect to answer, both to obtain certain types of information and to help "qualify" the prospect in terms of the lengths he or she will go to in order to respond to your offer.

I have described in Chapter 10 the "Quantity/Quality Ratio" — the fact that you can't have it both ways: higher response rate usually means lower quality of respondent, and vice versa. So decide how difficult you want to make the response process. The harder you make it, the higher the quality of the prospect will be.

A client who owns a PC network training school put his course's $6900 pricetag on his web site. That will surely weed out the "tire kickers," but it also gives some good prospects the information they need on price without having to contact the school. Some of those prospects may get lost to inertia, to other schools, etc.

It's usually better to have the opportunity to speak to even a moderately good prospect, if you have the ability to sell those folks. In this particular case, however, the school's salespeople were being buried by low-quality prospects, so the owner decided to separate the wheat from the chaff by putting the price up front.

Sometimes the media itself will help qualify the prospect. A so-called "bingo card" lead, for example, may not be as well qualified as one that comes from a web site dedicated to your topic area, or your own direct mail, assuming your lists are on target. When you know the media is working for you, you can afford to ease up on the other qualification tricks and techniques.

Questions may address the type of business the company is in (which you really should know going in), prospect's title, budget, type of competing products he/she may be using, how soon his or her next purchase or review may be planned, and other related information, usually carefully worded to be "soft" (i.e. not an in-your-face type of inquisition).

f). Signature/phone #. Asking for a signature tends to make people uneasy. They get the feeling they may be committing themselves to something — even if you've said they're not. In some environments, it can make or break a lead-generation scheme, so use it judiciously.

With regard to phone numbers, most people expect to be asked for that, so there may be no problem unless you say something like, "Requests without phone numbers cannot be processed." That's tantamount to saying "we're going to call you." Again, consider the impact on your quality/quantity ratio.

g). Detachable stub. When selling subscriptions and many other categories, it's sometimes helpful to have a detachable stub on the order form. It also helps with formatting, since you can use the stub to bridge the gap from a #10 outer envelope with the address showing through a window to a #6 BRE for the return portion.

Most of all, however, it gives the customer documented "proof" of his or her purchase. I usually include spaces for dollar amount, date, and check/charge #. A brief reprise of the guarantee doesn't hurt here, either. By its nature, the stub is an "action device." That is, the customer has to do something — detach the stub — as part of the purchase process.

h). Action Device. I've always associated tokens and peel-off labels on order forms ("YES!"…"Yes - No - Maybe"…"Free!" etc.) with the pen a salesperson hands you when you've agreed to buy the insurance or the encyclopedia for the kids. It's closure to the deal. An action that signifies agreement with the proposal. A way to say, "yes." Do they work? Of course they work, or you wouldn't see any. Do they always work? Of course not. That's why direct mail is a testing medium.

What's always interested me, in response to those who say tokens aren't for business-to-business marketing (too junky, you know), is that magazines like *Fortune* and *Inc.* and *Business Week* — publications that target top management — have used these techniques successfully forever. Action devices do seem to run in packs, especially in magazine subscription marketing. That may be because magazine promotion folks watch each other's packages carefully and if a particular technique shows up twice, the others take that as a winning technique and jump on board.

All that said, you will want to employ these and other direct mail "bells and whistles" carefully in business mail. Test, test, test.

i). **Gift amount checkoff (fund raising).** Most successful fund-raising reply forms give the donor several gift amount options, usually with the highest amount in the first position, and often with the target gift amount circled or marked in some way. The target amount comes from the database as a step-up from the donor's last gift amount. The form itself is simply designed and personalized.

j). **BRC vs. BRE.** It may be tempting from a cost basis to want to use a Business Reply Card rather than a Business Reply Envelope — and the choice may be a good one. If you're not anticipating payment (cash, check, or money order), and if the information on the card is not confidential in any way (like a credit card #), a BRC may do the trick. Lead-generation reply cards just asking for information can often be BRCs. Even there, though, there could be some diminution of image. Judge your market, the image you want to project, and especially the relationship you hope to build when deciding which corners to cut, not only on order forms, but on every component of your package. Cheap begets cheap; quality begets quality.

Chapter 6: The Lift Letter

Whenever I speak to groups new to direct marketing and mention the lift letter in passing, I often get blank stares and the inevitable question, "What's a lift letter?"

The lift letter is a second "letter" or note in a direct mail package that performs a number of functions. It's called the "lift" letter because it often lifts response. In magazine promotion, it's often called the "Publisher's Letter" because it's usually signed by the publisher. One version you may be familiar with is the note that says, "Read this only if you've decided NOT to take us up on our offer." Of course, most people who have gotten that far into the package will read it in any case. But there are other ways to use a lift letter.

1. Test with and without

The first thing to know about the lift letter is that, like the brochure, you should test your package with it and without it. It may work more often than not, but it's wiser to test.

2. Look and feel

The next thing to know about the lift letter is that it isn't really a letter. It's more like a note. Or a memo.

a). **Size.** The lift letter or lift note is usually smaller than the standard 81/2" x 11" letter. It can be a 7" x 10" Monarch-sized letter, folded in half or in thirds, or any other size that will fit into the package and can be safely inserted.

b). **Stock.** The paper stock for the lift note should be a different color from the sales letter, and from other pieces in the package, so it stands out. It may also be printed on a better— or lesser— quality stock, depending on its nature.

For a package mailed to teachers, I once created a lift note that looked and felt like something scribbled by a young student on a scrap of yellow pad paper. Another time, it was lasered on a piece of pricey, upscale stationery presumably "From the desk of." the company president.

c.) **Letter vs. memo vs. other.** As indicated above, the lift letter can take many guises. Its primary purpose, however, is to reinforce the offer and guarantee, over the signature of someone other than — and usually senior to — the person who signed the sales letter. One way other another, the message is, "Yes, we really mean what we say." The reader can get a free issue or a 30-day trial demo or whatever, cancel and owe nothing, or get a full refund.

If for some reason that's not deemed appropriate, the lift letter can be an extension of the sales letter. It can, for example, present several testimonials with an outside teaser to the effect of, "Here's what your colleagues are saying about xyz widgets!"

It can offer other information that might have been awkward to fit into the logic and tempo of the sales letter.

The lift letter is essentially an involvement device. It's another opportunity to sell the offer and guarantee, and perhaps to present an additional point or two in the process. It holds the reader into your message a little longer, which improves your odds of a sale or response.

Chapter 7: Premium Insert and Alternative

1. Test with and without

This is a variable worth an A/B test.

2. Look and feel

Premium inserts should be at least as prominent in color and stock as the rest of the package, if not a bit more so. It's usually in color. Like the lift letter, it's another involvement device. Its purpose is to dramatize a hot premium -- where the premium is deemed strong enough to drive a response decision.

a). Buckslip vs. folded. A "buckslip" is a flat sheet, so-called because in a #10 envelope, it is roughly the size and shape of a dollar bill. In my view, the buckslip format is a little less compelling than a folded piece, because everything is right there as the recipient removes it from the envelope. It's a "glance-at" piece. Better, I believe, is taking an 8" x 7" sheet, fold it in half horizontally to 8" x 3 1/2" and put a teaser on the outside with the full story inside.

b). Attached to reply device vs. loose. You can also place premium copy on a panel that folds down from the order form so the whole sales story is on a single piece of paper.

The Alternatives

The alternative to designing your own direct mail package "from scratch," as the recipe writers like to say, is to utilize one of the many "pre-fab" direct mail packages available from web printers and publishers.

A web press contains a continuous roll of paper that is two- or four-color printed, computer addressed, and personalized in one or more locations, then cut and folded into a direct mail package, ready to mail. Ink-jet personalization is its strong suite; it can often be strategically placed in several locations within the package, such as the salutation in the letter, the order form, and perhaps a lift letter, invitation piece, or small brochure.

1. Sweepstakes

You may have already blown it.

Recently, the national press was vibrating with stories about the allegedly misleading use of ink-jet announcements in sweepstakes packages promising millions to people who "have already won," but for one reason or another, fail to read the smaller print that con-

tains the disheartening "if" phrase. (IF you return the enclosed numbers and IF your number is drawn for the first prize, etc.)

That's one problem with sweepstakes, if you choose to go that route. Another is the complexity of FTC and state sweepstakes laws, which you must know and follow if you're mailing nationally. Still another is the cost, especially if you're going to put up a few mil. Under FTC rules, all prizes must be awarded.

An alternative to doing your own sweepstakes is to buy into one produced by a sweepstakes provider. One company that has pretty much pioneered the turnkey co-op sweepstakes and developed a variety of custom promotions is Ventura Associates. They charge a fee to participate in a big-time sweepstakes that you can present as your own. They do all the heavy lifting; you just add your own product information and mail it. Ventura is in New York at 212-302-8277.

(Web Tip): Venture also provides turn-key sweepstakes you can add to your web site.

Another major player in co-op sweepstakes is Don Jagoda Associates, Inc,. at 516-454-1800.

Finally, the late great circulation consultant Dick Benson regularly cautioned clients, and anyone else who would listen, that sweepstakes often attract opportunity seekers. They're less interested in your product than in the prize money or car or whatever, at the expense of more qualified customers who might buy more frequently and/or spend more for your product or service. Further, customers who come onto your file as the result of a sweepstakes offer, frequently require similar inducements to stay there.

2. Proprietary Telegram Package

 Yes, the real kind from Western Union. Well, not "telegram," exactly. Western Union has a series of mailers available to marketers bearing the unmistakable logo and look of the Western Union telegram. They include the Mailgram, Priority Letter, and Custom Letter. The company's research shows opening rates of up to 93%.

One thousand half-page Mailgrams will run about $5.00 each with nominal added charges for enclosures and business reply envelope. The one-page Custom Letter was recently quoted at $.63 but check with Western Union for the most current rates. Complete details are available at 1-800-MAILGRAM.

You can always try to fake it yourself with a "gram" mailing on yellow stock, but for the difference in cost, you're probably better off with the real fake.

3. Proprietary "Express" Package

Like the telegram verisimilitude, some companies are marketing various takes on the USPS' Express Mail/Priority Mail packages. Lots of serious eagles.

Two companies that specialize in these packages are Mega Direct (1-800-826-2869) and Response Mail Express (1-800-795-2773). Each has more than a dozen flavors of "high impact," personalized, 9" x 12" and #10 packages designed to project the importance and immediacy of "express" mail.

As I pointed out recently in response to a survey from one of these printers, I'd feel better about them if I ever received one from a mailer other than the company that makes them. And keep an eye out for the Feds. There's been some buzz in Congress about outlawing these look-alike packages.

4. Proprietary "Pre-Fab" Packages

The advent of computerized ink-jet imprinting and web press technologies has made possible a variety of direct mail formats that feature personalized closed face envelopes with innovative personalization throughout and upscale paper stocks and colors that often make for effective packages at reasonable cost, especially at quantities of 50,000 and more.

One such printer is The Kurt H. Volk Company, who pioneered their patented Letter-Lope®. Letter-Lopes come in a wide selection of sizes and formats and can accommodate laser or ink-jet personalization at several places in the package, starting with a closed face envelope.

Letter-Lopes feature such niceties as four-color process, patterned envelope interior to prevent show-through, die cutting, embossing, personalized plastic card affixing, compatible color and/or matching stock on letter and envelope, spot-gumming and numbering. The packages are used with success by magazines, credit card marketers, political fund raisers, retail promotions, insurance and more.

Volk provides mailers with a template for the format they have chosen. The mailer provides the company with copy and art according to the template, together with their list on computer tape and Volk prints and mails the package. Your fingers never leave your hand.

Kurt Volk is available on the Web at www.kurtvolk.com or in Connecticut at 203-878-6381.

5. Self-Mailer Formats

A self-mailer with a postcard reply device is not usually a problem for most designers and printers to create. But when you need to include a reply envelope, it can get tricky, and you may need to contact a specialty printer.

There are many of these throughout the country (see below). One such is B&W Press in Danvers, Massachusetts (508-774-2200), who boasts "more than 2500 customers" and production of more than 8 million order/form envelopes per day on eight web presses. With that kind of schedule, however, you'd need to give yourself — and them — plenty of time to get the job done.

The packet of samples I received from B&W were all printed on uncoated stock, so you may need to search further if you're planning to use a glossy, multi-page self-mailer.

NOTE: There are many other sources for the kinds of mailings described here. As mentioned elsewhere in this book and in the Appendix, *Target Marketing* Magazine (www.targetonline.com — 215-238-5300) periodically publishes a directory of specialty printers as well as many other resource directories, including telemarketing, list experts, alternative media, catalog production, software, and more.