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Direct Mail and Business Mail Center Top Ten Direct Mail Mistakes

Don't let these bear traps capture you.

by Barry Feig



[How to Promote Your Business on a Shoestring](#)

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I've been writing this column for some time now and we've been talking about all the good things direct mail can offer. In order to make a direct mail campaign work, it's important to avoid common pitfalls. Mistakes can be in your copy, your list, and even on what you put on your envelope. Here are ten common mistakes people make that sabotage [sales](#).

Mistake #1. The biggest mistake.

Send to the wrong mailing list. Postage is the most important part of a direct mail campaign. If you're an Internet mogul who doesn't use Pay-Per-Click, extra traffic costs you nothing, even though 80% of your traffic will leave in 30 seconds. But it's free. If you want to make [money](#) via direct mail you're wasting at least 35 cents when you send to a person not interested in your mailings.

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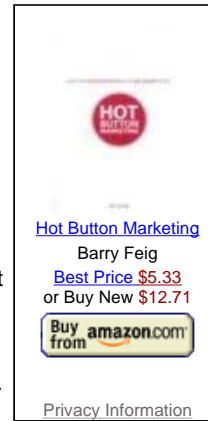
Know your clients' interests. A good rule to follow is that if a person has \$750 invested in your particular category, he or she is ripe for your sales pitch. There are many [mailing lists](#) who target your category.

Mistake #2. Not testing enough.

Analyze sales details constantly. Never do an "A" mailing without a "B" mailing. Check for response rates for each. I have a client, who, despite having very successful years in the fund-raising [business](#) is always testing new letter copy, new envelope copy and other variables like pricing and payment arrangements.

Mistake #3. Not personalizing your mailing.

Your sales letter should carry as much personalization as it can. A



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customer's name is the most important word to the prospect. Use it often; at the beginning and through the body of the letter.



Mistake #4. Spend all your time on the brochure instead of the letter.

Most people will read the sales letter first. If you can't sell your prospect in the first paragraph, your product or service won't sell at all. I have achieved a 30% response rate from the letter alone. First sell the benefits, then the features. How is it going to improve the person's life? Put the main benefit in the first sentence and let it stand alone

Mistake #5. Go crazy on adjectives.

Adjectives actually slow your copy down. State the facts and the benefits. Don Hauptman, author of the famous mail-order ad, "Speak Spanish Like a Diplomat!," says that when he writes a direct-mail package, more than 50% of the work involved is in the reading, research and preparation. Less than half his time is spent writing, rewriting, editing and revising.

Mistake # 6. Save the best for last.

A great many copywriters are so enthralled with the beauty of their work they save the most compelling reason for buying until the end of the letter. The same thing happens with TV commercials. The logo is only mentioned at the end. You are not Nike. You have to make your point at the beginning. Some time-testing openings for sales letters include:

- asking an intriguing question
- addressing most pressing problem or concern of the prospect
- arousing curiosity;
- leading off with a fascinating fact or incredible statistic

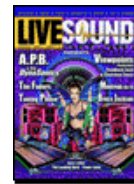
Start the offer up-front, especially if it involves money; saving it, getting something for an incredibly low price, or making a free offer.

Mistake #7: Starting with the product - not the prospect.

Avoid "manufacturer's copy" that stresses who you are, what you do, your business philosophy and history, and the objectives of your firm. They provide reassurance, not sales. You and your products are not important to the prospect. The reader opening your sales letter only wants to know, "What's in it for me? How will I come out ahead by buying your product instead of someone else's.

Mistake #8: Ignore the magic words.

They are "free" and "you" This mistake of not using the magic words can dramatically decrease the response to your mailing. General advertisers, operating under the mistaken notion that the mission of the copywriter is to be creative, avoid the magic words of direct mail, because they think those magic phrases are clichés.



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Say **free** brochure. Not brochure. Say **free** consultation. Not initial consultation. Say **free gift**. Not gift. Saying **a free gift for you** is even better

Mistake #9. Ignore the solution to the problem you're trying to solve.

Successful direct mail focuses on the prospect, not the product. The most useful background research you can do is to ask a typical prospect, "What's the biggest problem you have right now?" The sales letter should talk about that problem, then promise a solution.

Mistake #10. Forget about the envelope.

Remember your envelope is your first contact. Use strong teaser copy and/or an odd shaped envelope. They attract attention

Barry Feig is president of Barry Feig's Center for Product Success an outsourced [marketing](#) company where he researches and creates new product opportunities, positionings, marketing strategies and names. Visit his website at www.barryfeig.com or e-mail him at feig@barryfeig.com. His newest book is [Hot Button Marketing: Push the Emotional Buttons That Get People to Buy](#). Find out more at www.hotbuttonmarketing.net.



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