

ENTREPRENEURIAL RETIREMENT:

HOW TO MAKE

\$100,000+ A YEAR

SELLING SIMPLE

INFORMATION ONLINE

IN YOUR SPARE TIME

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Section 1

Avoid This Common Mistake When Creating Information Products

As we discussed in my last ETR article, the best way to prevent customers from illegally copying and sharing your content is to create information products that give the buyer more than his money's worth.

Creating great information products gives you several other advantages. For one thing, it minimizes refund requests.

It also creates loyal fans. These fans keep buying other information products from you and recommending your products to others.

However, many information product marketers make a serious mistake that results in less quality—and lower customer satisfaction. Let me explain...

What your customers want is solid how-to information that tells them how to do something, whether it's saving money on a new car or becoming a freelance copywriter.

The mistake many info marketers make is that they have written a "what to" product instead of the "how-to" information product the buyer wants.

To live up to the customer's expectation of getting great how-to information, your product really has to tell the customer how to do the thing you are writing about.

That means specific step-by-step instructions...recommended tools and resources...and strategies, tips, and techniques for doing the thing better and faster.

But too many info products I see tell the reader what to do—but not how to do it.

For instance, one small business advertising guide recommended advertising on billboards.

That's advice on what to do, which is fine as it goes, but not enough.

When a reader buys your specialized information product, he also wants you to tell him HOW to advertise on billboards.

What are the dimensions of a typical billboard? What's the most effective word length for billboard copy? The recommended size of the letters painted on the board to for maximum readability?

How can I find the billboards in my area where I can advertise? Who do I contact about renting them? What's a reasonable cost I can expect to pay? Can that be negotiated?

Why do so many information product writers produce "what to do" instead of "how to do it" e-books and reports?

It's because "what-to-do" is easy to write, because you present only the big picture (what to do), and not the niggling details (how to do it).

But it cheats the reader. In most instances, the reader already has some idea of what to do.

He is buying your specialized information product on the Internet—often at a premium price compared to books available in bookstores on similar topics.

Why is he willing to pay you more? Because he expects you to go into depth he doesn't get from "bookstore books."

I hire a lot of freelance writers to write e-books and reports for my small online publishing business, CTC Publishing.

One of my pet peeves—and a classic example of what-to instead of how-to—is when I read in a first draft a sentence that says, "For more information on X, just search the keyword X on Google."

I tell the writer: the reason the reader is paying for our e-book is because he expects *us* to have done the research and present the results.

Telling your reader “look it up on Google” is the sign of a lazy writer who has not done his homework—and a sin I will always ask my writers to correct.

One more point...

Even though information products buyers want “how-to” instead of “what to do,” you can often take the quality of your content to an even higher level.

You do this when, instead (or in addition to) telling the reader what to do, you actually DO IT FOR HIM.

For instance, instead of saying “here are some points to keep in mind when writing a collection letter to a customer who owes you money,” you actually include sample collection letters in your product.

Listen: everyone is lazy. Me. You. Your customers. And your writers, editors, and authors.

But the information product buyer has paid us to provide him with shortcuts. As the customer, he has the right to be lazy.

As the seller in this transaction of information publishing, we—the information product marketers—give up the right to be lazy.

Our customer expects us to do the work, so he doesn't have to.

If we don't, we are of little value to him. And he will let us know this by asking for his money back.

Action step: read the latest information product you wrote or published ... or even better, the one you are working on right now.

Ask yourself on every page: “Is this text telling the reader merely what to do, or am I actually showing him HOW to do it?”

If you are merely saying what to do instead of how to do it, rewrite to correct the oversight.

The result: top quality information products worth the premium price you charge.

Section 2

The Easiest Way to Write Great Bullets

Most ETR readers know that a successful copywriting technique is to use lots of “bullets” in your copy—short sales points presented in bulleted lists.

But have you ever sat down to write copy for one of your products, only to find it difficult to pull out of the product the salient sales points you need to write strong bullets?

If you’re a marketer, there’s an easy way to avoid this problem...and write kick-butt bullets that generate more orders and sales from every promotion you mail or e-mail.

And it starts way before you write a word of your copy. In fact, for maximum results, this step should be performed during creation of the actual product itself.

The method is to “build bullets” into your product. By that, I mean come up with a list of features you think would really convince your prospects to buy the product.

Or write a list of bullets you’d love to be able to use in your copy. And then, design all those features and bullets into the product as you are developing them.

Let’s say you are hiring a writer to create a how-to e-book you want to sell on the Internet on growing a vegetable garden in your back yard.

You have a section on growing bigger tomatoes. Make a list of the specific steps you take to make your tomatoes large and juicy. If the list is five items, give it to your writer so he can write a few paragraphs on each.

Now, when you write the sales copy for the e-book, you know you can write a bullet that says, “5 ways to grow tomatoes so big, you can make a dinner out of them.”

I had a client who was an industrial manufacturer who used this technique with great success. They manufactured “spectrophotometers,” which are instruments used to measure color.

Their competitors had all come out with a new generation of instruments, and my client was late to the game. But they used this to their advantage.

They carefully studied the other brands, made a list of flaws, and designed their new spectrophotometer to provide superior performance in each area where their competitors were weak.

In their product launch, they showed a picture of their new instrument. Call-outs highlighted every feature that made their device superior to their competition.

The launch was their most successful ever, because the “bullets” for their sales copy had been carefully built into the product. And they clearly distinguished the company’s products as superior in many ways to all others in that field.

As a copywriter you rarely have any control, but as a marketer, you often do. If you are an information marketer, it’s easy to design products with great sales bullets built in.

Just make the list of bullets your table of contents, and write or record an info product that covers all the points listed there. The more transparent the sales points in the product, the happier the buyer will be.

Avoid writing bullet points that sound great but aren't really covered in the product. Info product buyers often compare the product to the promotion. If they can't find content reflecting the bullets that caused them to buy, they will complain or ask for a refund.

My mentor, the great copywriter Milt Pierce, tells the story of when he was hired to write a direct mail package on a book on decorating by a famous author in that field.

He brought in his copy. The publisher and author read it. When they were finished, the publisher said to Milt, "This is incredibly strong promotional copy. The only problem is that it's not what is in the book."

Milt replied: "It should be." And according to him, the author and publisher agreed to rewrite the book so it reflected in the letter copy. When mailed, the package worked like gangbusters and the book sold like hotcakes.

The old-time mail order guru Melvin Powers did it a better way: when he wanted to publish a new book, he would write and run the ad first.

Of course, he wrote the strongest ad possible. If it pulled, he then quickly wrote and printed a book that delivered all the content promised in the ad copy. If the ad bombed, he never wrote the book and just refunded the money to those few readers who had ordered.

Section 3

The Secret of Making Hype in Marketing Work for You

I recently read an online promotion from one of the big Internet marketing gurus.

In it, this gentleman—whom I consider a personal friend—stated that
“Anything is possible.”

He also said he had a new Website that would help you “find your super powers.”

That’s hype to a high degree.

And frankly, I don’t believe it.

I could never write something like that for one of my own products and still sleep at night.

Yet I don’t have a problem with this guy, what he is selling, or how he is selling it.

Why not?

Because he believes in what he is saying and selling—even if I do not.

And that’s the key to making hype work in your copy today: believing in what you say.

There are a lot of complaints today about the incredible level of hype in copy, particularly online.

As an example, take a look at: www.thecopygod.com—a humorous spoof site that pokes gentle fun at the hype style of copywriting.

A lot of copywriters and marketers see hype-filled promotions and have one of two reactions.

Either they hate it and make a deliberate decision to avoid it in their own copy...probably a good decision for them.

Or they think, “These guys wouldn’t write all this hype if it wasn’t working”—and emulate it in their own promotions, usually with disastrous results.

You see a key to writing successful copy—copy that fills your mailbox or shopping cart with orders—is enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm for the ideas...enthusiasm for the product...enthusiasm for what you are writing about...enthusiasm for the wonderful ways in which the product will improve their lives.

The masters of hype can be genuinely sincere and enthusiastic in their hyperbolic copy, because they absolutely believe 100% in what they are saying and selling.

Therefore, if you too believe in something outrageous or seemingly impossible...and are sincerely convinced it can help others...you can write hype copy that comes across as energetic, enthusiastic, positive, and even sincere!

On the other hand, if you don't believe the superlatives and outrageous claims you are making in your copy, the hype will backfire on you.

Your copy will have all the sincerity of a three-dollar bill—and readers will be able to sense your disingenuousness and B.S. a mile away.

Result: your copy will fall flat...and your promotion will generate minimal orders and revenues.

“How can some of these hard-sell marketers believe the hype they write, particularly about money making, business opportunities, investments, self help, and alternative medicine?” I have been asked many times.

It's simple: each of us has different experiences and belief systems.

What sounds like baloney to you and me may be absolute gospel to our colleagues and competitors.

A year or so ago, two well-known direct mail copywriters, DH and PL, got into an argument in print about the ethics of writing for nutritional supplements.

DH called dietary supplements “snake oil.” PL countered that the pill he was promoting in his copy had worked wonders for those who had taken it.

The bottom line is: market and write about only those products, services, and ideas you think deliver an honest and fair value to the consumer.

Another copywriting friend, TN, often said he would work on any offer that wasn't "illegal, immoral, or fattening."

Good advice, but I also think you should avoid working on any product you don't believe in and aren't enthusiastic about.

After all, if you aren't enthusiastic about the product when you write your copy, the prospect is likely to be equally unenthusiastic when he reads it.

Section 4

Should You Offer Your E-Zine Subscribers a "No-Advertising" Edition?

On more than one occasion, one of my readers has suggested to me that I publish two versions of my e-newsletter.

The first would be the regular edition I offer now—a monthly online newsletter with pure content, supplemented by twice-weekly e-mails mixing content and product offers.

The second would be an "advertising-free" edition. You'd get the monthly content e-newsletter, but none of the e-mail marketing messages between monthly issues.

Well, I'm never going to offer an option to get the e-zine only—advertising-free and without the supplemental e-mail marketing messages.

And if you're an Internet marketer, neither should you.

Why not?

Think of it this way...

As an online information marketer—a "micro publisher"—you spend time and energy creating your content.

Your time, ideas, and information are valuable to others. Or at least they should be. If your content isn't valuable, why would you bother creating it...and why would your subscribers read it?

As with everyone else who works for a living, you—a content creator—need to earn money by charging for what you produce.

Electricians get paid to splice wires together. Plumbers bill you for fixing leaky pipes.

Why does the world seem to think content creators and owners of intellectual property should give away their creations for free?

As for me, I charge for my e-zine. Not money, mind you. But I do charge a fee.

And the "fee" I charge is that the subscribers agree to receive my e-mails. All my e-mails. Not necessarily to open or read them. But just to receive them.

Usually there are two e-mails a week—typically one sales message and one content message.

But even the sales messages offer ideas, solutions, and resources I believe my readers will benefit from.

No one is forced to buy the information products I am recommending. You can go years with never spending a dime with me, and still get my e-zine at no cost.

No one is forced to open or read the e-mails. If you are a subscriber to my e-zine, you can simply delete any or all of them.

No one is forced to receive the e-mails. I am not abusing anyone by sending them against their will. **The right to send my subscribers e-mail marketing messages is simply the price I charge for my publication.**

If you wish to stop paying the subscription fee, you can unsubscribe with a single mouse click in about 3 seconds. No need to make a phone call or waste a stamp on a letter.

When you unsubscribe, you will no longer receive the e-mails.

But you won't get my free e-zine, either. You take all or none. That's the deal—non-negotiable.

Amazingly, online subscribers argue with us Internet marketers about this issue from time to time—something they rarely do with a traditional publisher.

After all, if you called *Newsweek* and told them, "Send me the magazine, but take out the ads first," what do you think they would do?

Yes, I could offer an "advertising-free" edition of my e-newsletter, but what would be the point? Or as we copywriters say, "What's in it for me?"

Yes, as an Internet marketer, you can send too many e-mails...or have a disproportionately high ratio of sales to content.

But your subscribers will tell you what they consider too much or just right.

For instance, I recently signed up for the e-list of an entertainer I like.

After I got three e-mails the first day, I decided his arrangement was not for me, and I opted out with a single click.

But I did not send him an e-mail with obscenities in it.

I did not petition him to put me on a special e-list...or change his publishing model.

I simply unsubscribed.

How do you know when you are sending too many e-mail marketing messages to your e-list?

Just pay attention to the opt-out rate, which is the percentage of subscribers who opt-out after you distribute an e-mail message to your list.

Each time you distribute your e-newsletter or an e-mail message to your subscriber list, a few will opt out. That's okay.

But if too many are unsubscribing per e-mail—say, more than 2 out of every 1,000 subscribers on the list—you may be selling to your list too much, too hard, and too often.

Solution: cut back on frequency...make the content more educational, less hard-sell...add more content and do less selling...until the opt-out rate drops to about 0.2% or less.

Section 5

What the *National Enquirer* Can Teach You About Selling Information on the Internet

AWAI co-founder Don Mahoney recently e-mailed me an article about the *National Enquirer*.

In that article, Editor-in-Chief David Perel revealed the secret of the tabloid's outrageous success:

"The big news organizations tell people what they think they should be interested in, whereas we try to give them stories that they are interested in."

I think Perel has hit upon a key principle that applies to all writing, not just newspaper publishing.

And it is especially relevant to information marketing.

Namely, that your sales will be many times greater when you offer your customers information they want to read and learn...instead of information you *think* they should read.

The late Gary Halbert went even further, advising marketers to sell exclusively to what he called a "starving crowd."

A starving crowd not only wants what you are selling—but has an insatiable appetite for it.

Therefore, even if there are a lot of players in that market, they can all do well, because the market's demand is a bottomless pit.

In particular, there are three "starving crowd" markets that have an especially consistent and unending demand for information:

1) Hobbyists—hobbyists read about antique collecting or quilting not because they have to, but because they want to.

Those who are heavily "into" the hobby, whether that hobby is calligraphy or macramé, can't get enough of it.

In these niches, a lot of competition is a good sign, not a negative sign, for two reasons.

First, it proves the niche is viable. If others are making money selling information online to this market, you can too.

Second, you can make joint venture deals with these other marketers to sell your products to their lists and vice versa.

2) Business opportunity seekers—there is an insatiable appetite for information on how to make money in your spare time, start a home based business, change careers, or earn a living without a job.

I believe these business opportunity seekers can be divided into two groups.

The first group is doers. These doers are serious about changing their lives, and they actually pursue the course of action you recommend.

The second group is dreamers. The dreamers enjoy learning about small business, yet take no action beyond buying and reading how-to information products.

You can't usually distinguish between these segments when marketing. But you really don't have to, because both consume an unending stream of info products purchased online.

3) Money making and investing—it is a nearly universal desire to make more money and increase one's wealth.

If you sell information that helps people get greater returns from their investments with less risk...or accumulate a seven-figure net worth...or become financially independent...you will never run out of eager buyers.

Of course, there are other starving-crowd niches for information marketers, including: self-help, relationships, sex, health, beauty, fashion, fitness, and weight loss.

But the three above—hobbies, business opportunities, investing—are by far the largest and most active.

One of the biggest mistakes beginning information marketers make is choosing, as their primary niche, a market that is not a starving crowd.

Reason: without a starving crowd of buyers, you will always be fighting an uphill battle to peddle your info products.

And you will be forever frustrated that your prospects aren't buying your valuable information when you know it's stuff they absolutely should have.

But people don't readily do what they should do—or what you think is good for them.

They are much more easily convinced to buy what they already want...rather than what you think they need.

And when you select as your primary niche in information marketing a starving crowd...like hobbyists, business opportunity seekers, or wealth seekers...you can sell your prospects the stuff they want—over and over again.

Section 6

Give Your Self-Published Book the “Loose-leaf Test”

How do you ensure that the information products you sell give fair value to your customers?

One way is to follow Internet marketing guru Fred Gleeck’s “ten times” rule.

Fred says that the information products you sell should be worth at least 10 times the price you charge for them.

Alex Mandossian and I were discussing this in a recent ETR tele-seminar—and looking for a way to determine whether your product and pricing meet Gleeck’s criterion.

The solution we came up with is something I call the “loose-leaf test.”

Here’s how it works...

Traditional nonfiction paperback books (around 200 pages) typically sell for around \$10 to \$20 or so.

To determine whether your book is worth ten times that amount—Gleek’s “ten times” rule—imagine printing out the book manuscript on 8 ½ by 11-inch sheets of paper.

Now, three-hole-punch those pages...and put them in a three-ring binder...and maybe even add tabbed dividers to separate the sections or chapters.

Information products in three-ring binders are typically dense in content...and consequently command much higher prices than bookstore books.

It’s not unusual for these “loose-leaf services” to cost \$100 to \$200 or more per copy. (One loose-leaf service for executives on how to write and give speeches, *American Speaker*, sold for \$297.)

Does your \$20 paperback book contain enough valuable, in-depth content that you could reprint the thing in a three-ring binder—and sell it for \$200—to customers who would feel they got fair value for their investment...and not ask for a refund?

If it does, then you can rest assured that the content you deliver in your book is indeed worth at least ten times more than the \$20 you charged on it.

However, if you think customers who paid \$200 for a loose-leaf version of your book (remember: same content, just different packaging) would feel gypped and ask for their money back, then your book doesn't pass Gleck's "ten times" test.

Today I increasingly see nonfiction business books that are thin and light. They present just one or two new ideas, often in a thin book of 150 pages or less.

If a reader buys such a book in a bookstore, they probably won't complain: expectations for trade books are modest. If it's a good read, they'll be satisfied enough.

But your customers perceive information products published and sold online as containing more specific and highly specialized content than a "bookstore book."

So if you are an Internet information marketer, you have to deliver far more value to your customers for their money than a bookstore.

Gleck's "ten times" rule and the Bly/Mandossian "loose-leaf test" help you ensure that you do just that.

I have discovered that, if the customer thinks your information product was worth the \$20 you charged but no more than that, they may be dissatisfied and want a refund.

One customer, JB, recently asked for a refund on one of my e-books. He wrote: "Your e-book was certainly worth the \$19 you charged me, but no more than that. So please send my money back."

At first, I thought: how odd! JB says the product is worth what he paid for it. So his desire for a refund made no sense to me.

But in Internet information marketing, we make big promises in our copy to grab the reader's attention – and make a sale. (In a bookstore, by comparison, the only "selling" is usually done by the book and its cover.)

JB apparently felt that the book did not live up to the copy on my landing page, and was disappointed on that basis.

The solution, of course, is either to charge less (not very desirable), write weak copy (also not a good idea), or, preferably, to make the product stronger.

Add content until the product meets the Gleek/Bly/Mandossian test—and delivers content not just worth what you charged for it—but worth TEN TIMES what you charged for it.

When you sell an item worth \$200 for \$20, customer satisfaction will soar, and refunds will be minimal to nonexistent.

I can't remember who said it or where, but a famous marketer once stated: "It is our goal not to give the customer her money's worth, but to give her MORE than her money's worth!"

Or more specifically, at least ten times her money's worth—or even more.

Section 7

When is the Best Day—and Time—to Send Your Marketing E-Mails?

The problem with attempting to define “best practices” in online marketing is that different marketers often get wildly different results, making it difficult to establish definitive rules.

For instance, I recently did an informal survey asking top e-mail marketers this simple question: what day of the week, and time of day, should we send e-mail marketing messages to our list to get the best click-through and conversion rates?

“Different people will give you different answers to this question,” says online copywriter and site optimization specialist Nick Osborne. “But in truth, there is no ‘best’ day of the week for e-mailing. It’s something of an urban myth. Individual e-mailers need to find the answer by testing.”

According to the *MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Guide 2007*, the volume of daily e-mail traffic, from busiest day of the week to least busy, is as follows: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Monday, Sunday, and Saturday. Stefan Tornquist of Marketing Sherpa adds, “When we periodically check this, it’s usually a horse race for first between Tuesday and Wednesday, with Thursday falling just behind them.”

“The most popular and busiest day of the week for e-mail is Tuesday,” says Nick. “But some argue that this is a bad day, simply because your e-mail has so much competition for attention from other e-mailers.

“The least busy day is Saturday. So some would say it’s a great day to send your e-mail. But it’s the least busy day for a reason: millions of people are out

shopping, spending time with their kids, enjoying life, and not checking their e-mail.

“As for best time of day, I have never come across any data on that. But intuitively, I would start by sending B2B e-mails at the beginning of the work day, and B2C e-mails when people have gotten home from work.

“But that's just intuition. The only way to find out for a particular list is by testing open rates and conversion rates at different times of day. Also, keep in mind that when you e-mail your list at 9 a.m. in New York City, it's 6 a.m. in Los Angeles and 2 p.m. in London.”

“We have tested different days of the week and have found that Tuesday performs best for us,” says Josef Katz of Trump University. “Weekends did not perform well, though we thought they might.

“Thursdays are not bad either but Tuesday seems to work best for our business. We try to get our e-mail out early in the day but have not tested day parts in our efforts. Naturally, we always have room to improve and test.”

Ivan Levison, a copywriter in the software industry, comments: “I don't send marketing e-mails out on Monday. People are back from the weekend and getting back in gear. I'm not a fan of Friday either, because they are thinking about wrapping up for the weekend, and I believe are less prone to take action or take the decision to others.

His favorite days for sending marketing e-mails: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. As for time of day, the California-based Levison says, “Not first thing. By 10:30 a.m. PT, everyone on the West Coast is in and has gone through their e-mail already, and on the East Coast they're just back from lunch. I think this makes sense, though I have no test results to back this up.”

“We've found that the best schedule for us is to send stand alone efforts on Tuesday mornings, and then a quick 'in case you missed this' kind of follow up

note on Fridays at midday,” says Katie Yeakle, director of the American Writers and Artists, Inc.

“Our assumption is that Tuesdays are good, because Mondays are typically such busy e-mail days for most people. Fridays are good, because most of us like to clear out our in-boxes, and tie up loose ends, before the weekend starts.”

For Patrick Coffey at Early to Rise (ETR), Friday e-mails actually outperform Tuesday. Sales start to trend upward on Thursday and top with Friday, then drop off on Sunday.

“In the past, we thought the best day for mailing to our list was Tuesday mid-morning,” says Patrick. “However, after reviewing our ad sales over the past year, we discovered that Friday is actually our best day. This definitely shows you why you need to be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating.”

Here are ETR’s daily sales shown as a percentage of the total weekly revenues:

- Monday - 14.3%.
- Tuesday - 13.2%.
- Wednesday - 13.8%.
- Thursday - 16.6%.
- Friday - 23.1%.
- Saturday - 13.6%.
- Sunday - 5.4%.

“I do have some theories as to why this happens,” he says. “As we start to approach the weekend, people become less focused at work and need a break. So they’ll take the time to read a personal e-mail or browse the web.

“On the other hand Sunday is clearly our worst day. I believe this is caused by Sunday being a day for people to spend time with their family and run

errands. Another factor could be that fact that many of our Christian readers are attending mass when our message hits their inbox on Sunday mornings.”

“I typically send my e-mails out at 2 p.m. ET on Thursdays or Sundays,” says Internet marketer Paul Hartunian. “My rationale is that if I send out at 2 p.m. on Thursday, people on the East Coast get them at 2 p.m. and on the West Coast at 11 a.m., both well within the workday. So the people are not inundated with early morning e-mail or wanting to wrap up the day and get out of the office. On Sundays, the same applies, but people are more at leisure.”

Robert Skrob, director of membership services at the Information Marketing Association (IMA), is an exception to the “no Mondays” rule.

“Our marketing e-mails go out on Mondays,” he says. “If I get busy, I don't mind sending them out on a Tuesday. However, I don't bother sending anything on Thursdays and Fridays, my response is minimal on those days.”

These e-mails are distributed in the afternoon – after 2 p.m. ET and 11 a.m. PT. “I hate having my messages lumped in with the overnight spam deluge,” he says. “That way, everyone has an opportunity to get their e-mail box cleaned out and get into transactional mode. Our e-mails arrive at a time when the recipient is dealing with important issues of the day.”

One exception: when sending prospects to a landing page to hear an audio presentation over the Internet, Skrob has found that Sunday mornings get a three times higher opt-in rate. “I'm guessing my prospects have more leisure time to review their e-mail, and listening to my presentation is a nice diversion for their day,” he notes. “The ratio of listeners to buyers stays consistent, so more opt-ins on Sundays has meant more sales.”

Bob Martel of JMB Marketing Group says: “I am sure that in some industries minutes matter and timing is crucial. I manage several Constant

Contact e-mail campaigns for clients and, in general, we schedule e-mails for Tuesday or Wednesday delivery, after 10 a.m. ET in most cases.

“Time limited, direct response special offers to a house list work at all hours any day of the week. A lot depends on who you are trying to reach, consumers or people in the workplace, and the overall purpose of the communication. Is there a time sensitive call to action?”

Martel notes that the Internet is a 24/7 environment, even for the 9-5 employee. “I find that while it used to be true that marketing-driven e-mails needed to be very carefully timed, or so we thought, people are reading e-mails at all hours of the day and late into the night,” he says. “Sunday nights are very active, as telecommuters clean the slate for the upcoming work week.”

Michelle Feit of list broker ePost Direct says she focuses on the times within each day when the marketer is most likely to find the executive receptive, uncluttered, and at their desk. Her guidelines for B2B e-mail distribution:

- Don't be in the inbox first thing in the morning or after lunch when most of the e-mail clutter exists.
- Stay away from major vacation weeks when people will most likely be out of the office – Christmas week, July 4th week, etc.
- Friday's are fine except afternoon in the summer.
- Avoid Monday mornings. People are trying to finish up last week's tasks, and weekends create the most e-mail clutter.

“Best practices say to e-mail Tuesdays or Wednesdays, early in the morning, for marketing messages,” says Dwain Jeworski, Marketing Director, Strategic Profits. “But we send later in the day, and on any day, as our audience is worldwide.

“Saturdays have become a great day for us, as people have time on the weekend to read what we are sending, and also because the e-mail market follows

the best practice rule of weekday mornings except Friday – leaving the weekend quiet for e-mail.”

Conclusions: Best days for e-mail marketing are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, in that order. Time of day is not as critical as day of the week, especially with an audience in multiple time zones. But e-mailing around the lunch hour East Coast USA time seems safe.

When using e-mail marketing to drive traffic to landing pages with long audio or video messages, test e-mailing on the weekend. Test alternate times and days, weekends include, for your other e-mail marketing campaigns as well.

Section 8

Optimizing Your Weekly E-mail Schedule to Increase Online Revenues

A huge number of direct marketers who sell online have a regularly published e-newsletter they distribute to their e-list.

But the most profitable e-mails you can send are your solo e-mails–marketing messages promoting specific products.

Those of us who generate direct sales by sending e-mail marketing messages to our house file know that the more solo e-mails we send, the more money we make.

Then why don't we send e-mails all the time? Because too-frequent e-mailing can produce a spike in our opt-out rate–which in turn causes our most valuable asset, our e-list, to evaporate.

As a rule of thumb, the frequency of solo e-mail marketing blasts to your e-list depends, to a large extent, on how often you distribute the e-newsletter they subscribed to.

A marketer with a daily online newsletter can probably send a solo e-mail to his list at least daily.

But if a marketer with a quarterly e-zine starts bombarding his list with daily e-mail sales pitches, they'll jump ship fast.

The best way to find the optimal schedule of e-newsletters and solo e-mail blasts, of course, is to test.

"There is a point of sending too much, yes, but it varies based on the niche, the relationship, and the content of the dedicated mailings," says online marketing consultant Andrew Palmer. "If the offer is relevant to the list, and can be seen as helpful, and a good relationship exists already with the subscribers, then you can be more aggressive.

"But if the e-newsletter is monthly, the relationship is not as strong. So sending a solo sales e-mail every day is out. Even once a week might be a bit too aggressive. Twice a month is more reasonable."

To create more slots for solo e-mails each month, Andrew advises clients to publish their e-newsletter weekly rather than monthly.

E-newsletter frequency, of course, depends on two factors. First, can you do it? Do you have the time and resources to write two, four, or more issues per month instead of the single issue you do now?

Second, does your topic merit increased frequency? A daily e-newsletter on precious metals prices makes sense. But do you really want daily e-mails on leadership or time management?

"You can e-mail information in the form of a newsletter every day, as long as the content can support this frequency," says Dwayne Jewarski of Strategic

Profits. He notes that for a monthly online newsletter, not e-mailing to the list for a few days prior to distribution increases readership.

Jewarski lets opt-out rates tell him whether he is e-mailing too frequently. If the opt-out rate spikes above 30 unsubscribe requests per thousand, he knows he's e-mailing too much.

"There should always be a call to action, or a reward for receiving the e-mail," he adds. "The recipient should always see value in the message, and every message should have a purpose."

Michelle Feit of e-list broker ePost Direct says that you can e-mail your list daily if you can provide them with must-have information. If your purpose is to maintain contact or generate sales, then five to six times a month is plenty.

"The monthly newsletters I manage vary from 800 to 4,600 opt-in subscribers," says Bob Martel of JMB Marketing Group. "We usually send private-offer, limited-time solo e-mails for various products or services, with some seasonal, some inventory sales, and some cross-selling efforts."

Adds Martel: "You have to poke at it to find the point of annoyance and ineffectiveness, and then back off a few turns. If it's an opt-in e-list, and the solo piece has a high perceived value, as evidenced by the subject line and the history of past value-building solo e-mails, then I think there is a higher tolerance."

"Frequency of e-mail marketing messages is the million-dollar question," says Katie Yeakle of the American Writers and Artists, Inc. She notes that some subscribers would prefer that you never e-mail them sales messages, while others appreciate you more for keeping them informed about things that are of interest to them.

"The more offers we send out, the more profitable we are. We haven't crossed the line...and we keep testing to see where that line is."

Copywriter and site optimization expert Nick Usborne says, “I think that if your e-list is accustomed to receiving a newsletter once a month, it is hard to suddenly start e-mailing them a few times a week. You’d get a lot of unsubscribe requests.”

He suggests that if you want to maximize frequency of e-mail sales messages, clearly state up front, when the user first subscribes, how many e-mail messages he can expect each week or month.

Here are a few rules of thumb that can help you optimize e-newsletter and e-mail marketing distribution schedules for maximum revenues:

- If you have a monthly e-newsletter, you can send a solo e-mail marketing message once a week. If people complain and unsubscribe, cut back to every other week. If they seem receptive, you might consider testing twice weekly.
- If you have a weekly e-newsletter, you can safely send a second, sales-oriented e-mail, in addition to the newsletter, to your subscribers each week.
- If you have a daily e-newsletter, you can send subscribers at least two e-mails every day: the e-newsletter plus a second e-mail with a marketing message.

Another strategy that works: say you want to increase e-mail revenues, but your e-list complains when you increase the frequency of sales messages.

Solution: alternate your straight e-mail sales messages with “editorial” e-mails. These are e-mails that ostensibly contain content. But here the content in the e-mail relates to, and leads to the sale of, a specific product.

Example: you write an opinion piece on how many entrepreneurs waste time, and give them a few time management tips. At the close of the e-mail, you mention your new time management seminar on DVD, and place a link to the product page.

You can, in your subject line, position the editorial e-mail as a “supplement” to the subscriber’s regular e-zine subscription. The regular issues look and read like a content-driven e-newsletter, with articles. The editorial supplement can read more like a personal communication from the editor to his reader.

This works especially well if the regular e-zine issues focus on your regular content, such as news, tips, and advice, with the editorial supplement being more in the nature of personal opinion and advice from the guru to the subscriber.

Section 9

Improve Online Copywriting with “Experienced-based Empathy”

In one of his lectures, AWAI co-founder Michael Masterson told his audience—mostly new and aspiring direct response copywriters—“I highly recommend you have children.”

Copywriter John Forde also advised his readers to have children in a recent issue of his Copywriter’s Roundtable e-zine.

Michael and John want you to have children not just to experience the joys of parenting, but because it will make you a better copywriter.

How so?

The most crucial part of online copywriting is your ability to understand your readers—and reach them on a deep, emotional, personal level. And the more you are like the people you are writing to...the more experiences you have shared with them...the easier it is to be empathetic with them.

I call it “experienced-based empathy.” It means being able to relate to a person because you are in their group or have common experience or background.

Experienced-based empathy is a powerful technique. Not only does it enable you to get inside the minds of your prospects in a way other marketers can’t. But you can actually use it in your copy to forge an instant connection with your reader, e.g., “As a CPA, I know all too well how time-consuming it is for a busy accountant like you to keep up with constant changes in the tax code.”

Of course, you cannot become a member of every target market you write for: you can’t be all things to all people. A man, for example, can’t be a woman (for the most part). Therefore, one can argue that a female copywriter is a better choice to write ads for feminine hygiene products, bridal gowns, or cosmetics.

As a rule, the more well-rounded your knowledge, and the more experience you have in life, the wider the range of audiences to which you can write with strong empathy and understanding. But you can’t know everything about everything.

The solution? Broaden your knowledge and experiences, but do so selectively. The best areas in which to acquire new knowledge and experiences: markets you want to write for, as well as characteristics or habits that are widespread rather than unusual.

For example, the “norm” in America today is to have children, not to be childless. Therefore, if you never have children, you distance yourself from your readers who are average people. In addition, you are at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the responsibilities and emotions of parenting, because you haven’t been there.

Do I think you have to be a golfer to write good copy for golf clubs, golf balls, or golf books or videos? It’s not mandatory. But if I had to choose between two copywriters of otherwise equal experience and ability to write my golf ad, and

one played golf every weekend and the other had never played, I'd probably choose the golfer. If you are a golf-playing copywriter pitching a golf account, it can't hurt to let them know you're a duffer.

I do believe copywriters should pick and choose their projects based, in part, on their knowledge of and experience with the product and its market. For instance, at the beginning of my career, when I badly needed the work, a book publisher offered me a project writing direct mail packages for books on hunting and fishing. I turned down both topics—the hunting and the fishing—for slightly different reasons.

Hunting was easy. It sickens me. I love animals. I could no more write enthusiastic copy about killing a warm-blooded animal than I could write copy telling people to smoke cigarettes.

I do not have the same problem with fishing. I have gone fishing. My older son likes it, and fishes off the dock of our weekend lake house. My father loved fishing with a passion.

I'll do it. But I don't love it. And so I turned down the assignment to write copy for fishing books. I understand fishing well enough to write empathetically about its positive points. Fishermen are usually nice people. But I told the client that plenty of people—and copywriters—love to fish. I advised him to find a copywriter who is passionate about it. I only tolerate it.

In business-to-business, “becoming your prospect” can be even more difficult. I once wrote copy for a company whose products were sold to orthopedic surgeons. It was not realistic for me to become an orthopedic surgeon just to write better copy for this client (even if I wanted to, I couldn't get into med school).

On the other hand, I knew an account executive at an industrial advertising agency assigned to a welding account. To better understand his target market, he took courses at night and became a certified welder.

I am a chemical engineer, so during the first half-decade of my career, I worked largely with industrial clients, particularly in chemical processing and related industries. Not only did I understand the client's prospects better, but engineers working for my clients felt more comfortable talking with me, knowing I was one of them and not a typical "ad guy."

When home computers were introduced, there were more copywriting opportunities in high-tech than in industrial marketing. I enrolled in night school and trained as a Certified Novell Administrator. Again, by training to become an IT professional in a class full of IT professionals, I became better able to understand and empathize with IT professionals on a deeper level.

While I'm not recommending you totally change who you are, here are some suggestions that can enable you to market more confidently to a broader range of prospects:

Read widely in many different fields—not just marketing.

Seek out new experiences—snorkel, sail, rock climb, build a new deck. If you volunteer to feed the homeless at a shelter, do you think that would improve your copy to raise funds for your client's homeless shelter?

See popular movies—the ones grossing \$100 million a year or more.

Get married, have children, adopt a dog or cat (or both) from an animal shelter. This will allow you to experience emotions you might otherwise miss.

Whenever possible, buy and use your clients' products. Own shares of their stock.

Talk to people. You may discover that a relative, neighbor, or friend can give you insight into a group they belong to (Vietnam veterans, boat owners, Wiccan) that you might have to sell to some day.

Section 10

Write Conversational Copy for Best Internet Marketing Results

We copywriters are taught to write conversational copy. Many marketers erroneously think “conversational copy” means “write like you talk.” But what it really means is “write the way your *prospects* talk.”

A public radio station in my area, featuring eclectic rock and pop, sent me a fundraising letter. It began: “Dear Neighbor: I know you are a savvy media consumer.”

Now, I don’t know about you, but if you ask me why I listen to the radio, I would not say because I am a savvy media consumer; I’d say, “I like music.”

Here’s my rewrite for the fundraising letter lead:

“Dear Fellow Music Lover: Do you ever wish, when you turn on the radio, that they’d play OUR music?”

While my rewrite hasn’t been tested against the original, I believe it’s an improvement, for two reasons. First, it talks about something the reader cares about: hearing music I like when I turn on the radio. Second, it establishes an empathy-based bond through a common interest between the reader and the writer: that we share similar musical tastes—which is why I said “our” music instead of “your” music.

“In most cases, you should write in a conversational, intimate voice,” says copywriter Susanna K. Hutcheson. “You should talk as if you’re having coffee with the reader and use her language. Many copywriters, and just about all people who write their own copy, don’t understand the concept of writing in the language of the reader. It’s truly an art.”

Is there any situation where you should use language other than conversational copy? What about writing to sophisticated audiences? Don't specialists prefer jargon when discussing their industry or trade?

Some argue that jargon is appropriate because it's language used by specialists in your target audience. But I think they confuse jargon with technical terms.

Technical terms are words or phrases that communicate a concept or idea more precisely and concisely than ordinary terms. Example: "operating system" to describe the software that controls the basic operations of a computer.

Jargon, on the other hand, is language more complex than the ideas it serves to communicate.

Example: I worked for a company that made industrial equipment. In one of our products, a door opened at the bottom of a silo, allowing powder to fall into a dump truck underneath. Our chief engineer insisted that in our copy we replace "dumped" with "gravimetrically conveyed."

For a client, I wrote that the dental brace they manufactured helped keep loose teeth in place. The product manager rewrote "keep loose teeth in place" to "stabilize mobile dentition." To me, this is like calling the seashore an "ocean-land interface."

Mark Twain said "I never write metropolis when I get paid the same amount of money to write the word city." But is there an exception to the rule of writing the way people talk? A situation where you would deliberately use language more complex than the idea it serves to communicate?

Yes, and the one case in which you might consider replacing ordinary language with more sophisticated phraseology is when you want to set your product *above* the ordinary.

Take a look at a Mont Blanc catalog. They don't describe their products as pens; they sell "writing instruments." Why? Because Mont Blanc pens start at about \$100 ... and, while that's too much to pay for a pen, it's not too much to pay for a "writing instrument."

The goal of direct response copywriting is not to produce perfect prose or great writing. It is to persuade the consumer to buy your product. And the bottom line is: the copywriter should do whatever it takes to achieve that goal, whether or not writing purists approve.

For instance, grammarians dislike the phrase "free gift," complaining that "free" is inherent in the definition of gift: what gift isn't free? But in a recent lecture, my colleague Herschell Gordon Lewis defended "free gift" because it works, explaining that "each word reinforces the other."

I remember years ago hearing about a mailer who actually split test "free gift" vs. "gift." Not only did "free gift" win handily, but a number of recipients of the "gift" letter responded by inquiring to ask whether the gift was indeed free.

Which reminds me of what Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "It is not enough to write so you can be understood; you must write so clearly that you cannot be misunderstood."

Section 11

The Cut-Off Age for Starting an Internet Marketing Business

At what age are you too old to start an Internet marketing business—or other new career or business?

I have thought at various times in my life (I am now 51) that the cut-off age was 50...60...or even 70.

There were two reasons I believed you'd reach a point where starting over just wasn't practical anymore.

The first, and lesser, was sheer age and lifespan: the idea that when there are many more years behind you than ahead of you, your time to enjoy the fruits of whatever labors you pursue is too limited.

The second reason I believed there was a cut-off date for starting a new career, learning a new trade, or launching a new small business was lack of experience.

For instance, one of the many careers I considered in my youth was the law. But years ago, I decided pursuing that was impractical (not that I was really interested anyway; it was more of a theoretical consideration).

Reason: say hypothetically you were to graduate law school at age 45.

You compete against two groups.

The first is other 45-year-old lawyers who are the same age as you—but have 20 years of law experience vs. your zero years.

The other group you compete against is your classmates. Like you, they are new to the law.

But being in their 20s and single, instead of 45 and having a mortgage and 3 kids in college, they can afford to work for starting salaries too small to meet your needs.

However, actor Abe Vigoda has changed my mind about all this...and my opinion today is that it is NEVER too late to learn new things, start a new business, switch careers, or go into a different industry.

Abe Vigoda, if the name does not ring a bell, is a dour-faced actor famous for playing the character Fish on the TV show "Barney Miller."

On the Internet today, I read a short interview with Vigoda, who is still a working actor at age 87.

In it, I was reminded that Abe Vigoda's big break was his first movie, "The Godfather," in which he played Sal Tessio.

Well, "The Godfather" was released in 1972. So if you do the math, Abe Vigoda didn't begin his movie acting career until he was over 50.

More impressive is that, at age 87, Abe Vigoda—who, pardon me, has a slightly cadaverous appearance that makes him look ready for the Old Folks Home—is still a competitive handball player.

If Abe Vigoda can get his first movie role at over 50—beating out actors his age who had decades more credentials and experience—then I am convinced that you and I can start a new career or business at any age.

Yes, you may have some disadvantages over your younger colleagues, peers, and competitors—including (possibly) less energy, less flexibility, and less adaptability to new technologies and methods.

Then again, maybe not. It depends on your personality—and your circumstances. If you are a retired empty-nester, you may actually have more time, freedom, and flexibility, not less.

On the other hand, if you are still working for a paycheck because you have to and not because you want to, it may take a greater degree of courage and fortitude to make any major business, career, or life change.

As an older entrepreneur or career changer, you will likely have some advantages over your competitors—such as greater life experience and wisdom to draw upon when making decisions.

But I know from first-hand experience that 50 is not too old to make a major change, and from that, I am guessing that your age won't stop you, either.

For example, I started a small online information marketing business as I was closing in on my 50th birthday.

Today I earn a six-figure passive income selling information products on the Internet, “working” only an hour or two a day.

In my case, I kept my day job as a freelance copywriter and still put in long hours on that.

But entering a new field—Internet marketing—has energized and renewed me in a way I never thought possible.

If your gut tells you that you are ready for a change, you probably are.

I close with this piece of wisdom from Milton Hershey, founder of Hershey Chocolate:

“I have often been asked—What is the best age for producing? I know only one answer, the age you are now.”

Section 12

10 Tips for Increasing Landing Page Conversion Rates

There’s lots of buzz about blogging, viral marketing, social networking, and other new methods of generating eyeballs and traffic online. But all that traffic won’t make you any money unless you can convert those unique visitors to leads or customers.

Depending on whether you are selling a product directly from your landing page, asking visitors to download a free white paper, or promoting a Webinar or demonstration, conversion rates can range from as low as one percent or less to as much as 50% or more. Here are 10 keys to writing landing pages that maximize online conversion rates:

1—Build credibility early. People have always been skeptical of advertising, and with the proliferation of spam and shady operators, they are even more skeptical of what they read online. Therefore, your landing page copy must immediately overcome that skepticism.

One way to do that is to make sure one or more “credibility builders” is clearly displayed on the first screen the visitor sees. In the banner at the top of the page, use your logo and company name if you are well known; universities, associations, and other institutions can place their official seal in the upper left of the screen.

Within or immediately under the banner, put a strong testimonial or three above the headline on the first screen. Consider adding a pre-head or subhead which summarizes the company’s mission statement or credentials. At www.bnasoftware.com, the positioning statement is: “The nation’s definitive income tax management solution.”

2—Capture the e-mail addresses of non-buyers. There are a number of mechanisms available for capturing the e-mail address of visitors who click on your landing page but do not buy the product. One is to use a window with copy offering a free report or e-course in exchange for submitting e-mail address. This window can be served to the visitor as a pop-up (it appears when the visitor arrives at the landing page) or a pop-under (a window that appears when the visitor attempts to leave the landing page without making an inquiry or purchase). These are both blocked by pop-up blockers. A “floater” is a window that slides onto the screen from the side or top. Unlike the pop-up and pop-under, the floater is part of the Website HTML code, so it is not stopped by the pop-up blocker.

3—Use lots of testimonials. Testimonials build credibility and overcome skepticism, as do case studies and white papers posted on the Website. If you invite customers to a live event, ask if they would be willing to give you a brief

testimonial recorded on video. Have a professional videographer tape it, get a signed release from the customer, and post the testimonial on your Website as streaming video. Require the customer to click a button to hear the testimonial, rather than have the video play automatically when the visitor clicks on the page.

For written testimonials, customers may suggest that you write what you want them to say and just run it by them for approval. Politely ask that they give you their opinion of your product in their own words instead of having you do it. Reason: what they come up with will likely be more specific, believable, and detailed than your version, which might smack of puffery and promotion.

4—Use lots of bullets. Highlight key features and benefits in a list of short, easy-to-read bulleted items. I often use a format where the first part of the bullet is the feature, and after a dash comes the benefit; e.g., “**Quick-release adhesive system**—your graphics stay clean and don’t stick together.” Online buyers like to think they are getting a lot for their money, so when selling a product directly from your landing page, be sure all major features and important benefits are covered in a comprehensive bullet list appearing on your landing page.

When generating leads by giving away white papers, you don’t need a huge list of bulleted features and benefits. But using bullets to describe the contents of the paper and the benefits that information delivers can raise conversion rates for download requests.

5—Arouse curiosity in the headline. The headline should either arouse curiosity, make a powerful promise, or otherwise grab the reader’s attention so he has no choice but to keep reading. The headline for a landing page selling a training program on how to become a professional property locator makes a big promise: “Become a Property Locator Today—and Make \$100,000 a Year in the Greatest Real Estate Career That Only a Few Insiders Know About.”

6—Use a conversational copy style. Most corporate Web sites are unemotional and sterile: just “information.” But a landing page is a letter from one human being to another. Make it sound that way. Even if your product is highly technical and you are selling it to techies, remember that they are still human beings, and you cannot sell something by boring people to death.

7—Incorporate an emotional hook in the headline and lead paragraph. Logical selling can work, but tapping into the prospect’s emotions is much stronger—especially when you correctly assess how the prospect is feeling about your product or the problem it solves right now.

Another effective tactic for lead-generation landing pages is to stress your free offer in the headline and lead. Example: Kaydon’s landing page shows a picture of its catalog with the bold heading above it reading, “FREE Ceramic Bearings Product Selection Guide.”

8—Solve the reader’s problem. Once you hook the reader with emotional copy dramatizing her problem or a powerful free offer, show how your product—or your free information—can help solve their problem. For example: “Now there is a better, easier, and more effective solution to wobbly restaurant tables that can irritate customers and ruin their dining experience: Table Shox, the world’s smallest shock absorber.”

To maximize landing page conversion rates, you have to convince the visitor that the quickest route to solving his problem is taking the action indicated on the landing page, and not—as you might be tempted to let him do—surfing your site. That’s why I prefer landing pages to appear with no navigation, so the reader’s only choice is to respond or not respond; there’s no menu of click buttons and hyperlinks to other interesting pages to distract him.

9—Make it timely and current. The more your online copy ties in with current events and news, the higher your response rates. This is especially critical

when selling financial and investment information as well as regulatory compliance products in fields where laws and rules change frequently. Periodically update your landing page copy to reflect current business and economic conditions, challenges, and trends. This shows your visitor that your company is current with and on top of what's happening in your industry today.

10—Stress the money-back guarantee or lack of commitment on the part of the user. If you allow customers to order products directly from the landing page, make sure you have a money-back guarantee clearly stated on that page. All your competitors give strong money-back guarantees. So you can't get away without doing the same. If your product is good and your copy truthful, your refund rates can be as low as 1% or even less.

If you are generating leads, stress that your offer—which might be a white paper, online demonstration, or Webinar—is free. Say there is no obligation to buy and that no salesperson will visit.

Section 13

5 Steps to Building a Large and Responsive Opt-In E-List of Qualified B2B Prospects

Many B2B marketers want to cut marketing costs by shifting more of their marcom budgets from traditional direct mail and paper newsletters to e-mail marketing and e-newsletters. But if you want to ramp up your online marketing program, you should start building a large opt-in e-list of customers and prospects now.

Why? Because without a significant online "house file" (list of opt-in subscribers), you can only reach prospects in your niche by renting other

marketers' opt-in e-lists, which is hardly cost-effective: each time you want to send another message to your industry, you have to rent the list again—at a cost that can easily reach into the hundreds of dollars per thousand names.

Some marketers buy databases containing e-mail addresses of business prospects in their niche market. This can work if you are sending highly targeted e-mails on extremely relevant topics and offers to narrow vertical e-lists.

But when you send e-mail messages to non opt-in lists, you are mostly asking for trouble. CAN/SPAM does not prohibit e-mailing to people who have not opted in. But people on non- opt-in e-lists are much more likely to register SPAM complaints than those on legitimate opt-in e-lists—and far less likely to buy from you.

So the best online strategy for B2B marketers is to build your own opt-in e-list of subscribers. Doing so eliminates the cost of renting opt-in lists while preventing the SPAM complaints and lower response rates typical of non opt-in purchased or rented lists.

When you own an opt-in e-list covering a sizeable percentage of your target market, you can communicate with your prospects and customers as often as you desire or think is appropriate at minimal cost. Being able to send an e-mail to your target market with a few mouse clicks makes you less dependent on costly direct mail, print newsletters, and other paper promotions.

By using a double opt-in process that requires new subscribers to verify their identity before being added to your e-list, you help minimize spam complaints and bounce-backs. Owning a large opt-in e-list of target prospects also decreases marketing costs and improves lead flow and revenues.

So how do you build a large and profitable opt-in e-list of qualified B2B prospects in your field? Here are 5 ideas:

1—Dedicate a portion of your online marketing budget exclusively to list-building. Most B2B marketers drive traffic either to their Website home page or landing pages relating to specific offers (e.g., free webinar registration, free white paper download, purchase a product). And a lot of the traffic they drive to these pages is existing customers and prospects who are already on their e-list.

You should spend a minimum of 20% of your online marketing budget on building your house opt-in e-list. That means getting qualified prospects in your industry that have not yet opted into your online subscriber list to do so.

There are many online marketing options that work well for e-list building programs. These include pay-per-click advertising, postcard marketing, banner advertising, online ads in other marketer's e-newsletters, B2B co-registration deals, video marketing, viral marketing, editorial mentions in trade publications, online article marketing, affiliate marketing, and social media—to name just a few.

2—Calculate your maximum acceptable cost per new subscriber. When evaluating marketing methods for e-list building, you have to weigh the cost of acquiring the new name vs. the value that new name has for your business.

To determine value, divide total annual revenues generated by your online subscriber list by the number of names on that list. Example: If your 20,000 online subscribers account for \$600,000 in annual sales, your subscriber value is \$30 per name per year.

You decide how much you are willing to spend to acquire a subscriber worth \$30 per year. If uncertain, use this rule of thumb: list building campaigns should ideally pay back their cost within 3 to 6 months. Therefore, if your names are worth \$30 per year each, you can afford to spend up to \$15 per subscriber to acquire new names.

Say you drive traffic to a landing page where people can sign up to your e-list. The conversion rate is 50 %, so for every two unique visitors you drive to your registration page; you get one new opt-in subscriber.

Using Google Adwords, you can drive traffic at a cost of \$7 per click. Can you afford that? Yes, because that means you get one new subscriber for every two clicks you buy, which works out to \$14 per subscriber—within your \$15 per new name limit.

Would it make more sense to base the allowable acquisition cost per new name on the *lifetime customer value* (LCV) of online subscribers rather than just the average one-year revenue per name? Theoretically, yes. But you can only do that if you've been marketing online long enough to have reliable numbers on which to base LCV estimates. Until you do, stick with the revenue per year per name figure as the baseline.

3—Publish a free e-newsletter. The best way to build and regularly communicate with an opt-in list of B2B prospects is to publish and distribute a free e-newsletter on a specialized topic related to your product line and of interest to your target prospects.

Publishing a free e-zine gives you two important benefits for your online marketing efforts. First, it gives you a standing free offer—a free subscription to your e-letter—you can use in your e-list building efforts. Second, having the e-newsletter ensures that you communicate with your opt-in subscribers on a regular basis. This regular communication builds your relationship with your online prospects while increasing the frequency of branding messages and online marketing opportunities.

4—Build a “free-on-free name squeeze page.” With a staggering number of free e-newsletters on the Internet competing for attention, it's not enough to have a simple sign-up box on your home page for your free e-newsletter. You should

offer a bribe as an incentive for visitors to subscribe. The best bribe is a free special report the visitor can download as a PDF file in exchange for opting in to your e-list.

For instance, if you sell supply chain management software, and publish an e-zine called “The Strategic SCM Partner,” offer a short bonus report “7 Steps to Improving Supply Chain Management in Your Enterprise” as a premium for new subscribers.

Drive traffic not to your home page or standard subscription form, but to a special “free-on-free name squeeze page”—a landing page highlighting this offer. We call it a “name squeeze page” because it extracts or “squeezes” new names for your list from Web traffic. “Free-on-free” means you are offering free content (the report) as a bribe to get the visitor to accept your primary free offer (the e-newsletter subscription). For an example of a free-on-free squeeze page see:

<http://www.bly.com/reports>.

5—*Capture the e-mail addresses of site visitors who do not buy, subscribe, or register.* Put in place one or more mechanisms for capturing the e-mail addresses of site visitors who do not buy a product, download a demo, subscribe to your free online newsletter, or take other actions that opt them into your e-list.

Going back to our example for supply chain management, when the visitor attempts to leave the site without purchasing or registering, have a window pop-up to capture his e-mail address. The headline says, “Wait! Don’t leave without claiming your free special SCM report!”

Short copy explains they can get a free copy of your special report “7 Steps to Improving Supply Chain Management in Your Enterprise” by typing in their e-mail address in the blank space and clicking submit. If you are not proactively making an effort to capture e-mail addresses of site visitors who do not otherwise register, you are leaving money on the table.

For more ideas on building your e-list and capturing the e-mail addresses of site visitors, go to www.thelandingpageguru.com.

Section 14

7 Steps to Selling More Newsletter Subscriptions Online

With its irresistible cost efficiency, the Internet is a publisher's dream, and scores of newsletter publishers are pushing in two directions: electronic product and electronic promotion.

Here are some of the things you can do to successfully market your newsletter or other information products online. These tips can help you increase online revenues and reduce marketing costs:

1—Publish a free e-newsletter. The most popular business model for selling information products online is the Organic Model, also known as the Agora Model because it was pioneered by Agora Publishing.

In the Agora model, you focus your prospecting not on generating orders for paid products, but on driving sign-ups to a free e-newsletter. Why?

Prospects are growing increasingly sophisticated and skeptical, especially online prospects. Internet users do not readily buy from strangers.

By offering a free e-newsletter, you reduce the prospect's risk in acquiring some of your content, and so more prospects are likely to accept such a free offer than order a paid product.

Once prospects subscribe to your e-zine, they get your content on a regular basis. If they find the content valuable and like the editor's personality and style, they will gradually become more comfortable with you. They will no longer consider you a stranger. And they will be more open to buying products you sell or recommend.

2—Produce a free-on-free squeeze page. In the early days of the Internet, all you had to do was say “free e-zine” and people would subscribe in droves. After all, they were getting a valuable, content-filled newsletter — free!

Today it’s different. The Internet is flooded with e-zines — thousands of them. So just offering a free e-zine is not enough. To get people to opt into your e-list, you have to offer one or more free bonus gifts as an incentive to subscribe to your e-zine.

What happens is this: the prospect isn’t really sure she needs another e-zine. But that free report you’re offering sounds interesting. She subscribes to get the free report, figuring she can always unsubscribe later. But if the e-zine delivers valuable content on a consistent basis, she won’t.

A “free-on-free” offer means you are giving away a free report or other bonus content to people who sign up for your free e-zine. A “name squeeze page” is a Web page where you advertise this free-on-free offer and allow people to register for it.

You can see a sample of the free-on-free squeeze page for my e-zine, The Direct Response Letter, at www.bly.com. We give away four free reports, each priced at \$29, so we can say in the headline, “Free Gift Worth Over \$100!”

3—Drive traffic to your e-zine squeeze page. Building a large opt-in e-list of qualified prospects is the cornerstone of the Agora Model.

To build your list, you use various means at your disposal to drive traffic to your free-on-free squeeze page, where they can opt into your e-list. Methods of driving traffic to the squeeze page include viral marketing, social media, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, organic search, article marketing, e-newsletter advertising, e-mail marketing, co-registration, banner ads, and postcards.

4—Build a relationship with your e-zine subscribers. Now that you have a list of opt-in subscribers, you want to make them like you, trust you, and value the advice and guidance you offer.

The primary means of building this positive relationship is to continually deliver great content in your e-zine.

Some publishers make the mistake of publishing fluff or filler in their e-zines, because they think they should save the “good stuff” for the paid subscription newsletter. This is a mistake.

If the prospect doesn’t like your free e-newsletter, they are certainly not going to buy your paid products. Make your free content your best stuff, not your worst, and prospects will clamor for more—for which you can charge handsomely.

5—*Start selling early.* I have heard some marketers say that you should wait an appropriate time period before promoting a paid product via e-mail to your online subscribers. The notion is that if you start selling too early, before they have become “fans,” it will be a turn-off.

I would give you the opposite advice. Start selling early—even right away. A rough rule of thumb is that 90% of your free e-zine subscribers who eventually become paying customers do so within 90 days of opting into your e-list.

That means if an online subscriber doesn’t buy something within the first three months of subscribing to your e-zine, odds are he never will. Therefore, the sooner you can convert that freebie subscriber to a paying customer, the more valuable that name will be.

One technique that’s effective in this regard is the “OTO,” or “one-time-only” offer. After someone subscribes to your e-zine, immediately send him to a landing page for one of your paid products.

Make it an inexpensive one-shot product, such as a report or e-book, on a topic of interest to the greatest number of people on your list. Offer it at a special “buy now” discount to new subscribers. Internet marketer Peter DeCaro says on average 3% of new subscribers will take the OTO.

6—Strike the right balance of free content vs. selling—in both your e-zine and solo e-mail marketing messages.

Your e-newsletter should be approximately 80% editorial and no more than 20% plugs for your newsletters, books, and other information products.

For solo e-mails, a number of publishers have found that their subscribers accept a 50% ratio: half the messages are sales pitches, and half are content. But even the content e-mails can have a small ad with a link to a paid product from which the content was taken.

7—Frequency of e-mail marketing is an issue that publishers agonize over. To know how many e-mails are just right—and how many are too many—you have to measure opt-out rate.

Opt-out rate is the percentage of subscribers who unsubscribe after you distribute an e-mail marketing message or e-zine. Your opt-out rate should be small—ideally 0.1% maximum. If it's much greater than that, your e-list will shrink too quickly.

If your opt-out rate is 0.1% or less, your online subscribers do not think you e-mail too often. So can you step up your e-mail marketing campaign—and send sales messages more frequently?

Test for a week or two. If the opt-out rate remains low, you know the increased frequency is acceptable to your list.

On the other hand, if the opt-out rate spikes upward, your online subscribers are letting you know they don't want to hear from you that often. Cut back to the old frequency.

About the Author

BOB BLY is an independent copywriter and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in business-to-business, high tech, industrial, and direct marketing.

Bob has written copy for over 100 clients including: Network Solutions, ITT

Fluid Technology, Medical Economics, Intuit, Business & Legal Reports and Brooklyn Union Gas. Awards include a Gold Echo from the Direct Marketing Association, an IMMY from the Information Industry Association, two Southstar Awards, an American Corporate Identity Award of Excellence, and the Standard of Excellence award from the Web Marketing Association.

He is the author of more than 50 books including *The Complete Idiot's Guide To Direct Marketing* (Alpha Books) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt & Co.). His articles have appeared in numerous publications such as *DM News*, *Writer's Digest*, *Amtrak Express*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Inside Direct Mail*, and *Bits & Pieces for Salespeople*.

Bob has presented marketing, sales, and writing seminars for such groups as the U.S. Army, Independent Laboratory Distributors Association, American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the American Marketing Association. He also taught business-to-business copywriting and technical writing at New York University.

Bob writes sales letters, direct mail packages, ads, e-mail marketing campaigns, brochures, articles, press releases, white papers, Websites, newsletters, scripts, and other marketing materials clients need to sell their products and services to businesses. He also consults with clients on marketing strategy, mail order selling, and lead generation programs.

Prior to becoming an independent copywriter and consultant, Bob was advertising manager for Koch Engineering, a manufacturer of process equipment. He has also worked as a marketing communications writer for Westinghouse Defense. Bob Bly holds a B.S. in chemical engineering from the University of Rochester and has been trained as a Certified Novell Administrator (CNA). He is a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the Business Marketing Association.

Bob has appeared as a guest on dozens of TV and radio shows including

MoneyTalk 1350, The Advertising Show, Bernard Meltzer, Bill Bresnan, CNBC, Winning in Business, The Small Business Advocate and CBS Hard Copy. He has been featured in major media ranging from the LA Times and Nation's Business to the New York Post and the National Enquirer.

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