

Writing a Mail Shot and Sales Letter

Introduction

Throughout the time of your business, it is important that you use some degree of marketing to influence the continuous sale of your product or service. Due to low funds, small businesses can often be restricted by the level or amount of marketing possible, and consequently turn to methods that accumulate little cost. It is not to say that those methods that are considered less costly, are not effective: in fact, they can often be more successful than those that require extremely high costs.

A business should therefore focus on the media that is not only best suited, but will also give a return for the investment that they can afford.

The aim of this article is to introduce the sales letter that can be included as part of a mail_shot. A sales letter is a letter (not solely a leaflet, brochure, etc) that sells your product or service ultimately to provoke a sale by gaining the interest of the reader. As you will learn from reading further, a successful sales letter requires quality content, design and delivery.

Of course, sales letters can be written by professional services, but to be truly cost effective, it is beneficial to understand how to write them yourself. Anybody is capable of writing a sales letter, even if your past experiences have failed. The message is to try, try, and try again: learning from your mistakes is all part of getting it right.

Benefits of a Sales Letter

Firstly, a sales letter is cheap to produce and using a mail shot to deliver the information will further keep costs to a minimum. Using targeted mailing lists to reach your audience is the more effective way of sending a mail shot as it may encourage a higher response rate, say, around 5 - 10%.

Further, do you ever show interest in a TV advert only to be let down by the short time to acknowledge key information such as a telephone number, web site address or terms and conditions. In which case, a sales letter can be kept and referred to at any time to retrieve such information.

A sales letter can also accommodate for as much content as you believe necessary, where other media such as newspaper advertising may have limited space. The extra space to advertise in newspapers/magazines will significantly increase with content: an extended sales letter will only cost you the price of the extra printing and paper (if needed).

Types of Sales Letter

Sales letters can be used for a number of reasons which are highlighted below:

a) Product/Service Awareness

The first and main reason for issuing a sales letter is to make the consumer aware of your product or service by providing sufficient details to interest the reader.

b) Preparation for Future Contact

A sales letter can be used to prepare the consumer for future contact, for example, a personal visit or a phone call.

c) Enquiries

If at an earlier date, the consumer requested further information about a particular product or service, a sales letter can be sent to answer their queries. The answers can then be written to help sell the product or service.

d) General Product/Service Information

A sales letter can inform the consumer of new offers, products, services, sales, etc that you believe will be of interest to the recipient. The consumer may have specifically asked to be informed of such information and/or you may target consumer groups specifically.

Objectives of a Sales Letter

To help determine how you will write your sales letter, it is important to identify your objectives. These are highlighted below:

a) To Sell a Product or service

Are you trying to encourage the consumer to make a purchase by convincing them that they need the product/service? This approach will often require the use of persuasive language.

b) To Inform a Consumer

Do you aim to give the consumer all the necessary information concerning your business, product or service? When we aim to 'sell' a product/service (above), it is common to miss out the details of how things work, prices, etc. Such sales letters are therefore commonly accompanied with leaflets and other inserts to illustrate this information

c) To Get a Response

Apart from hoping the consumer will respond by making a purchase, it is common for a sales letter to be used to create other responses such as a response for further information, a free sample/trial, a personal visit, etc. Often, consumers do not like making a purchase without physically seeing or trying the

product/service. By allowing them the opportunity to do so, they may respond so that they can make a confident purchasing decision.

The Design and Format of the Sales Letter

Use Headed Paper

Using headed paper will definitely make the letter look more professional in the eyes of the consumer, immediately giving your business a positive image: first impressions are always important.

Address the Consumer Personally

Avoid using the phrase 'Dear Sir/Madam'. Instead, make the consumer feel valuable by using their name if you know it. Use the term 'you' instead of 'we' or 'us' throughout the content: target them as an individual - not as part of a group.

Language is Important

Language is perhaps the key element in writing a sales letter, so it is important that you use the right words in the right context. Whatever you do, do not use clever phrases or jargon: it makes people feel stupid. The point to remember at all times is that the letter should be easy to read by using simple and short words.

Use appealing words such as **free, quality, only**, where appropriate.

Use Paragraphs

Split your content into small paragraphs making the letter easier to read. Add headings throughout the letter so that the consumer can get an idea of the content from a simple glance.

Be cautious with Fonts

Stick to one font throughout the sales letter, using two at a maximum. Likewise, keep the same font size throughout the content, allowing a slight increase for headings and titles. Do not use a very small font size in an attempt to get more information in a shorter space.

Using a size 10 font and face type 'Courier' or 'Arial' is perhaps the most common used for sales letters.

Emphasize!

Emphasis is important to highlight or stress certain words or phrases. Many people use uppercase to emphasise, but this is a mistake as it can often make the sentence hard to read. Instead, use *italics*, **bold**, underlines, or exclamation marks!, but be cautious of using **colours** as they too can make the sentence more difficult to read.

Tips to Put You Ahead of the Rest

Don't Get Thrown Away

Imagine this - you get a pile of mail, most of which you consider as junk mail and you immediately drop them in the bin without a thought. What gives the consumer a reason not to do the same with your mail shot? The answer is **distinction**. Get your mail shot noticed - once they have opened the envelope, you are half way to gaining their full interest.

It all comes down to the design of your envelope. Give it a bright colour, a different shape (without going too far!), a picture, or something that will catch the eye of the consumer making them believe it is worth opening.

What do Other People Think?

It may sound good to you, but how will other people react to it? Give people in, say, your office or a random sample of consumers a chance to read the letter before you issue it out as a mail shot. Get their opinions and act on any negative comments.

Give them a Closing Thought or Statement

Arguably, the end of the letter is an area that can attract a lot of attention and because it is the last thing you read, the words are often remembered. Therefore, use this space wisely, using PS if necessary to remind them of a piece of information that you regard important or useful to the consumer. For example:

'PS Remember, all offers end on June 31st so order now to avoid disappointment.'

Give it That Extra Professional Touch

A personal signature from a key member of staff, if not you, gives the letter that finishing touch instead of the usual printed name and position. You can sign each one individually, if you have the time, or alternatively, scan your signature onto the letter - just as effective.

Avoid Giving False Hope

Do not promise anything if you cannot give it. As well as false advertising, you are setting yourself up for a bad image when consumers are let down one by one from your inability to live up to your promise. It is ok to suggest that you **may** be able to make a difference if it is possible, but do not suggest a certainty if it cannot be given.

For example, 'we can triple your sales in two weeks' or 'our product can be used for 10 years, etc.

Summary

Using a sales letter as part of a mail shot is a cost effective approach for creating sales. The sales letter can therefore be seen as a marketing tool to promote your product and service, and by targeting your audience accurately, they can return a significant response. Sales letters can be written to either sell, inform or encourage a response from consumers.

The success of a sales letter is largely determined by how well it is written and presented, and so it is important to integrate quality content and design to encourage a successful response. As said above, the delivery is also important to determine a high success rate. Gathering past, present and future customer contact details is a must, as these details will offer you the best return from a sales letter as the recipients are, at least, interested in your produce.

Writing a Sales Letter

Get Their Attention!

Give the consumer a reason to read the sales letter by getting their attention within the first sentence - maybe a slogan, a catchy phrase or an appealing offer. This may be written as a question, a quote or an interesting fact (with relevance).

The Sales Letter is a Lot like a Press Release

When we read something that we believe will not be of our interest, we glance through the content to see if anything grips our attention. Often, you may read the first paragraph before skipping, say, every other sentence of the content because you have not read anything that interests you so far.

As a result, it is important that you build the first paragraph with as much key information as possible allowing you put the less important information towards the end of the letter: just as you would write a press release. This way, the consumer is more likely to read the full letter after being intrigued by the first paragraph.

Give Detailed Information about the Product/Service

If using the sales letter to inform, you may go into finer detail when describing your product or service by using leaflets and other inserts. Otherwise, you should just give the major details to prevent your sales letter from becoming long-winded, consequently drawing away the interest of the consumer to begin reading at all. This can be done by using bullet points to summarize the more important details, which are an excellent way for drawing attention.

If it is a product, give details of the functions, features, design (including colour and size ranges where appropriate), etc. For a service, detail what it is and how it works. The idea is to allow the consumer to picture the product or service.

Include the price if you feel necessary: some people may feel the price will not sell their product/service and therefore make it known, say at a later time or further down the letter.

Highlight the Major Benefits

Why should the consumer buy your product or service? What is it that makes your product or service better than the rest? How will it make their life more convenient? If you fail to provide a good reason, it is likely that consumers will not show further interest particularly if they already own a similar product or use a similar service.

Think about where the consumer may have doubts or queries and try to answer them without being untruthful: being truthful is very important throughout the sales letter.

Prove It

Can you prove any claims that you have made? Offer the consumer a free trial or demonstration before they buy, perhaps even a money back guarantee for a certain period, say, 30 days.

If your product or service has been recommended by another business, put it in quote marks stating their exact phrase. Any positive consumer comments could also be added using the same format. Do not go over the top, list, say, two or three just to make the point.

Get the Consumer to Respond - Today!

Encourage the consumer to respond and make it easy for them to do so. If consumers are indecisive after reading the sales letter, they may need an incentive to give them that final push. Offer some sort of promotion for immediate response, say, a free gift or a 20% discount if they reply within the next seven days. Throughout the sales letter, keep encouraging a response by using phrases such as 'buy today and get a free gift' - the repetition should stick the message in their head: the power of psychology is very useful in sales letters.

If promotional gifts and discounts are not a profitable solution, encourage the consumer to make an early purchase by suggesting 'limited supply' or 'available for a limited time only', etc.

Consumers will not respond if they have to go through the trouble of looking up your number in the phone directory or start driving around the area looking for your shop. Therefore, you should provide all your contact details (telephone/fax number, address, and web site - if applicable) and if necessary, a basic map (small, say 2 x 2 inches). With the sales letter, you may even send a Self Addressed Envelope and form to encourage the consumer to order via post.

If you do not expect the consumer to make a purchase directly from reading the sales letter, it may be that you encourage them to respond for further information. This follow up information would then be used to sell the product, encouraging the consumer to make a purchase.

Direct the Consumer to the Inserts

If you send any additional inserts such as leaflets and promotions with the sales letter, you should constantly be attempting to refer the consumer to read them. This will be done by suggesting to the consumer that they read them for further detailed information. For example, 'Our informative, easy to read leaflet will give you an insight of how Product A can change **your** life' or 'we invite you to read our leaflet...'