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# ***Is Your Direct Mail Brochure Helping or Hurting?***

By Hugh Chewning

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With direct mail, it's often said, "The letter sells while the brochure explains." With this in mind, it's important not to let your explanation get in the way of making the sale.

I do a lot of "Beat the Control" work, and whenever I'm up against a package that includes a brochure, my first instinct is to test eliminating the brochure. More times than not, dropping the brochure will increase the mailing's response.

Why? Because when people are reading your brochure, they aren't responding. Too often, the brochure becomes a distraction and diverts the reader's attention from the letter's call to action.

Yet, there are times when it makes sense to test a brochure.

With some products and services, you can better communicate their benefits with a picture, illustration or graph than you can with just words.

For example, if you want to demonstrate the inner workings of a gadget, exhibit the beauty of a collector's item or show the photo quality of a travel magazine, a brochure can help you sell your offer.

You use a brochure to document the claims made in your letter.

With a brochure, you can show pictures of customers using your product, include more testimonials, provide a chart comparing your service with that of

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your competitors, include graphs to validate improved product performance, and deliver product information your prospects can keep or pass along as a reminder of your offer.

### **Selecting the Right Format**

You define your brochure's format by the job you need it to do. For many offers, a simple flyer is enough, while a tri-fold brochure may work better for others. High-ticket offers may even require a multiple-page booklet.

Whatever the format, the brochure is always part of the total direct mail package and its design must share the image of the mailing's other components. For example, a glossy, four-color, multiple-page booklet doesn't fit with most fundraising offers. A tri-fold brochure may be out of place with an offer for gold coins, but it can be the perfect fit for a security alarm company.

When designing your brochure, you also want to consider the following:

- Unlike the letter, design the brochure to be scanned, not read.
- Include a strong headline that tells the “what and why” of your offer. The headline identifies the reader's problem and suggests that there is a fix.
- Make your first paragraph count. Engage the reader and briefly describe how they will benefit from your product or service.
- Include a strong guarantee. Nothing will overcome the reader's hesitation more quickly than a strong “No-Risk, Money-Back Guarantee.”
- Issue a clear call to action and tell the reader how to respond—by mail, telephone or via your website. Include a response device at the bottom outside corner of the page, where it's easy to cut out. Show perforation lines around the response device to suggest what the reader needs to do. Also, include your toll-free number and the URL for the offer's landing page. The brochure is a stand-alone device and needs to provide all the information necessary for the reader to respond.
- A brochure is a great place for Questions & Answers—written as if the reader is asking and you are answering.
- Increase your credibility with testimonials.
- Use graphs and product reviews to compare your product with those of

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your competitors. People will scan, not read, your brochure and graphs and charts can often tell your story better—and quicker—than text.

### **Focus the Reader's Attention**

The brochure is a “show me” component; you want to use its graphics to focus the reader's attention so they quickly get the information that will motivate them to respond.

Use photos freely because before any word of text is even noted, the reader's eyes will be pulled to photographs and illustrations.

- Select a readable typeface (serif); use short paragraphs and sub-headlines.
- Include pictures of people using your product or service. Readers will look at pictures with people before they see pictures of products.
- On two-page spreads—the inside of a folded brochure, for example—put your strongest picture as far to the left as possible. In most cases, eye flow begins at the upper right of a two-page spread and continues in a sideways



- "U" like this . Placing a strong picture to the left pulls the reader's eyes back across the page and “exposes” more of your message.
- People read captions. Place captions as close to your pictures as possible—below or to the right of the illustration.
  - Your reader's eyes will typically follow the eyes of the people in your photos. You can take advantage of this by, for example, having the models in your photo look to the left when you want to call attention to copy that's to the left of the picture.
  - Place color pictures to the left and black-and-white pictures to the right. Warmer colors draw the reader's eye to the left and they will see more of your message.
  - Readers will see action illustrations before still pictures. Portraits gain attention before full pictures of people and, most often, a larger group of

people will gain attention before a smaller group does.

### **Does It Help or Hurt?**

Your brochure can be a great asset, but you do need to test its effect on your mailing. It's a mistake to assume that the brochure's four-color beauty, high-quality photos and fancy charts will increase response.

Test and retest your mailing's brochure. And remember, the brochure's purpose isn't to educate, entertain or impress. In a direct response mailing, the brochure has only one purpose: to increase the mailing's net income.