



18 Proven Ideas for a *Better* Response Device

By Hugh Chewning

INTRODUCTION

The response device is one of the most critical components of the mailing. After all, it's what completes the sale.

Yet too often, we allow the response device to become an afterthought when we create a new mailing package.

We work hard to make sure our envelope design grabs the reader's attention. And we work and rework our letter copy until we get the reader fired up and ready to part with his or her money. But unfortunately, the sale is often lost once the reader gets to the response device. It's too confusing, too complicated or lets the reader forget why he or she wanted to respond in the first place.

To help keep this from happening, here are *18 Proven Ideas for a Better Response Device*. You don't need to test any of these ideas. They're tried and proven, so be sure to include them when you design your next mailing.

18 Proven Ideas for a *Better* Response Device

1. Include one. Eliminating the response device is *not* the way to trim costs. Make it easy for the respondent to reply and let him or she know that a reply is expected.
2. Consider writing the response device *before* you write the letter. This will

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- force you to describe the offer, show the benefits and issue a call to action in a brief, concise and easy-to-understand fashion—which will help you write a better letter.
3. Give the response device a name. And consider your words. Acceptance Form is better than Application Form because “application” implies possible rejection. Savings Certificate is even better. One respected direct response consultant claims that just adding the term “Certificate” to the response device’s title will increase results (e.g. Acceptance Certificate vs. Acceptance Form).
 4. With today’s technology, there’s no excuse not to print the recipient's name and address—plus the source code—on the reply form. Don’t make the recipient write his or her name and address onto the form. This slows things down and gives the recipient time to reconsider their action. (And unless you have a specific reason for asking, don’t ask the recipient for a phone number or signature. Make it quick and easy to respond.)
 5. Show the name and mailing address of the organization—the person who is waiting for the recipient to reply. By including all the information the respondent needs to respond, he or she can reply even if the return envelope gets lost. Like every other component of the mailing package, the reply form should be able to withstand the test of becoming a stand-alone device.
 6. Repeat the benefits promised in the letter.
 7. Show a guarantee. The reply form is the prospect’s last opportunity for resistance and a guarantee will help overcome this reluctance.
 8. Speak in the first person. The reply is the recipient writing to—or talking to—the letter writer.
 9. Tell the reader exactly what to do. (“I’m enclosing my check for...” Note, the voice has changed from the letter-signer to the reader.)
 10. Tell the reader to whom to make their check payable. And it’s “Make your check payable to,” not “Make your checks payable to.” Then, tell the reader what to do with the check (Put your check into the postage-free envelope I’ve enclosed and mail it back today).
 11. For fundraising, list specific asking amounts on the reply form. And when possible, show what these asking amounts will accomplish. (e.g. “\$15 will help seven children receive lifesaving vaccines.”)

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12. Again, for fundraisers, test odd asking amounts. For example, “\$15.47 will help nine children. . .”
13. Make sure the reply form stands out. It needs to pass the “drop it on the floor test” and be easily identifiable from the other package components.
14. The reply is an action device. Use warm, action colors.
15. Make it easy to use. The type should be no smaller than 10 point – and larger if you’re writing to seniors.
16. When the reader must make choices, use check-off boxes. But don’t offer too many choices. This is when you want him or her to respond, not to think.
17. Make sure the reply device fits into the return envelope.
18. If you have a tear-off stub on the response device, use it to recap the benefits and guarantee.

I’m a great believer in testing. However, all 18 of these ideas have been tested and retested so, if you’re not using them now, I suggest you adopt them.

* * *

On a related topic...Giving people the option of responding by mail, telephone or Internet can often boost results. After all, you’re letting the prospect select the method that’s easiest for him or her to use.

However, I am reluctant to list these options on the response form. My thought is that once you get the recipient this close to responding, why send him or her in another direction.

If your experience shows otherwise, I would welcome hearing from you.

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