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# The Editor's *Other* Checklist

By Hugh Chewning

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## INTRODUCTION

Here's a brief checklist to use before every mailing. It's a good reference for new staff as well as a "reminder" for the experienced pro.

When reviewing a mailing package for the first time, the first rule should be to sit on your hands!

One of the biggest mistakes is to pick up your red pen before you've reviewed the complete mailing package. Checking for errors in grammar, spelling and sentence structure is essential. But when you proofread the letter before reviewing the entire package, you're likely to miss the big picture. It's like not seeing the forest because a tree gets in the way.

When editing, you need to look for more than the use of words. You want to make sure that the letter is talking to the right audience—that it convincingly shows how the offer fulfills the needs of the reader and then issues a clear call to action. And once you've read the package, ask yourself these questions:

## THE OUTER MAILING ENVELOPE (OME)

1. Before opening the envelope, the readers' eyes typically moves from their name on the envelope...to any teaser near their name...to the corner card (return address)...and then to the type of postage used. Do these components act in harmony? (If you have an "official" envelope, you probably don't want to use a postage stamp, for example.) The impression presented by the outer envelope should

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also reflect the inside components. It's important to remember that you're creating one package, not multiple components stuffed into an envelope.

2. Are you using the backside of the OME? When opening the envelope, people typically spend more time looking at the back than the front.
3. Are you testing a second version of the OME? Often this is the most cost-effective test you can suggest.

## **THE LETTER**

1. With its style, format and copy, does the letter present itself as one letter written by one person to one other person?
2. Typically people look for their name in the inside address and salutation. Are you personalizing both areas?
3. Have you assigned title codes? And do you have a default for names that don't have a title? ("Dear Friend," "Dear Member" and "Dear Neighbor" are more personal than "Dear Sam Jones.")
4. Whenever possible, I like to begin the letter with "You" and relate to the reader right away. And remember, one person is writing your letter to one other person so check the copy for "us" and "we" and whenever possible, replace with "me" and "I."
5. Is the letter starting with its best lead? Often it's buried in the third or fourth paragraph.
6. Is the letter friendly and inviting to read? Does it use short sentences and paragraphs with wide margins? Have you double-spaced between paragraphs? Are your paragraphs indented?
7. Other than the last page, do your pages end with a complete sentence? Break the page in mid-sentence so the reader must turn the page to complete the thought.
8. If you're using "handwritten" notes or underlines, are you using the same color and writing style as used for the salutation? Remember, the person signing the letter is the person writing the notes.

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9. Review your letter and then answer these 10 questions:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have you used a Serif typestyle for copy?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Does your P.S. restate the benefits and the call to action?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> After reading the first few paragraphs, do you know the purpose of the letter?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the text at least 12 point type for older audiences?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can you quickly identify the offer?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Are you taking full advantage of your ability to personalize the package?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does the letter close the sale?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Does the letter tell the reader what action to take?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the letter's signature legible? (Signatures that are difficult to read promote a negative response.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Have you included a P.S.? More than 90% of readers turn to the signature and P.S. before moving back to the top of the letter |

## **ENCLOSURE**

1. The most common order of readership is envelope, letter, enclosure and then the response device. If you're using an enclosure, do its contents justify delaying the reader from reaching the order form?
2. The enclosure, like all other components, should be self-sufficient. Does it include the offer and instructions on how to respond?

## **RESPONSE DEVICE**

1. Is the response device easy to find? (Drop the package on the floor and see if you can easily pick it out.)
2. Have you given the response device a name? "Reply Form" is often good enough but you want to be able to refer to the response device by its name in the letter copy. Some tests indicate that simply calling the response device a "Certificate" rather than a "Form" will increase results. Test it.

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3. Have you used a separate reply device? Typically, a separate response device will out-pull an attached form 3 to 1.
4. Are the recipients' name, address, source code and order information included on the reply form?
5. Have you put the letter signer's name and return address on the response form? This tells the reader who is waiting for a reply. And in case the return envelope is lost, the recipient will know where to mail the response.
6. Does your response device re-state the offer?
7. When possible, use a tear-off stub as a receipt.
8. Use color to set off any portion of the form that is to be detached.
9. Do you tell the reader to whom to make their check payable? Don't make them guess—or hesitate—about anything. (And it's "Make your check payable to..." not "Make your checks payable to...")
10. Have you shown the guarantee? (Every offer can have a guarantee so use it on your response form to decrease any resistance to responding.)
11. Do you display the benefits of responding?
12. Are you using warm action colors for the response device? This is an "action device" that calls for warm, action colors.
13. Write in the first person. (Remember, the recipient is now speaking to the letter writer.)
14. Does the reply form fit into the return envelope?
15. If the recipient can't determine out what the mailing is about—and the benefits of responding—after reading the response form, you need to rewrite it.

## **THE NEXT STEP**

Now, read your letter aloud—or have someone read it to you. Remember, the best direct mail is written in conversational English and this is where you'll

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spot clumsy phrasing, overuse of particular words and paragraphs that don't connect smoothly with the previous thought.

Once you're satisfied, it's time for proofreading. You and your proofreader may have different opinions but remember, your goal isn't to impress. It's to sell.

### **AND FINALLY**

1. Are you testing a new offer?
2. How about testing a new format? There's never a better time to test a format than when printing your control with the same vendor.
3. Have you considered testing a different outer envelope design? This is often one of the most cost-effective tests you can do.
4. Are you mailing the names your merge-purge identified as "duplicates" 10 days after the original drop date—and after making the needed agreements with the list owner? These duplicates are typically your most productive names.
5. Have you recommended that a follow-up and/or house file mailing be produced at the same time as the acquisition mailing? Simple plate changes can increase the production run and give the client a more economical and productive second mailing.

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