



18 Proven Ideas For a More Effective Order Form

By Hugh Chewning

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Whether you call it an order form, a response form or a response device, it's one of the most crucial components of any direct response mailing.

The response form is the tool the prospect uses to complete the sale. Yet when creating a new direct mail package, we don't always give the order form the time, attention and respect it deserves.

Too often, we write copy that excites readers and motivates them to accept our offer only to lose the sale (or contribution) with simple, easy-to-correct design flaws in the order form.

Here are 18 tested and proven ideas you can use to make your response form more profitable. You may want to use this list as a checklist when writing or approving your next mailing.

1. Always include a response form. I don't mean to sound too elementary, but eliminating the order form is not how to trim costs.
2. Write the response device before you write the letter. This will force you to summarize the offer, list the benefits and outline the call to action in concise, easy-to-understand language, which will help you write a better letter.
3. Title your response device. Acceptance Form is better than Application Form because "application" implies possible rejection. Savings Form is even better. And one respected direct mail consultant claims that just

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4. adding the term "Certificate" to the response device's title will increase results (e.g., Acceptance Certificate or Savings Certificate). Whatever title you select, use it in the letter copy when issuing your call to action. For example, "Fill in the Acceptance Certificate I've enclosed and mail it back to me today in the postage-free envelope."
5. Along with the source code, print the recipient's name and address on the response device. People want to know that their replies will be credited properly, and you don't want to make the respondent write his or her name and address on the form. This slows things down, gives the respondent time to reconsider whether they respond and practically ensures caging errors.
6. Unless you have a specific need, don't ask for the recipient's phone number or signature on an acquisition mailing. Again, it slows the response process and raises questions of how you will use the information. Generally, if you don't have a specific plan to use the information, don't ask for it.
7. Show the name and mailing address of your organization on the order form. With this information, the respondent can reply even when the return envelope is lost. The response form, like every other component in the mailing, should be treated as a stand-alone device from which the recipient can complete the order.
8. Repeat the benefits promised in the letter. Remind the prospective customer why he or she is responding.
9. Show a guarantee. Nothing helps respondents overcome their reluctance more than a guarantee. (See <http://www.cdmdirect.com/how-a-guarantee-builds-direct-mail-profits/>.)
10. Change your sentence tense when writing the reply device. The respondent is now talking to the letter writer.
11. Repeat the call to action—in the respondent's words. For example, "I'm enclosing my check for..."
12. Tell the reader to whom to make their check payable. There's nothing worse than getting ready to write a check and not knowing to whom to make it payable. And please note, it's "Make your check payable to..." not "Make your checks payable to..." You're only asking for one check.
13. For fundraising, list specific asking amounts on the reply form. And when possible, show what these asking amounts will accomplish. (e.g., "\$15 will

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- help seven children receive lifesaving vaccines.")
14. At or near the bottom of the form, print simple instructions telling the respondent what to do with the check ("Put your check into the postage-free envelope I've enclosed and mail it back today.").
 15. 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. This is an action device, so use warm colors.
 16. Test the form's design. Make sure there's ample space for the reader to complete the form and use a type size of at least 10 points—and larger when mailing to seniors.
 17. Don't offer too many choices. This is when you want the prospect to respond, not to think. When you do offer options, make it easy for the prospect to make a selection by using check-off boxes. Three choices of anything are enough.
 18. Make sure the reply device fits into the return envelope—ideally without folding but always with no more than one fold.
 19. If the response device includes a tear-off stub, use the stub to restate the benefits and guarantee.

I'm a great believer in testing, however, these suggestions have been tested and retested by a wide variety of clients, and if you're not using them now, I urge you incorporate them into your next mailing.

Something you may want to test, however, is giving your customer more options on how to respond—by mail, by telephone or via the Internet—as long as you have procedures in place to track the non-mail replies. Typically, the easier you make it for the prospect to respond, the higher the response rate will be.