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Don't Drop the Ball

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FROM **THE ADVERTISING SOLUTION**

I hope you use all the great lessons from our Legendary promoters to create campaigns that succeed beyond your wildest dreams. And then, I hope you don't drop the ball.

Let me tell you what I mean by explaining something that really frustrates me. It's when I work hard for a client, finding them tons of prospects who actually respond to their promotions and make inquiries by calling or clicking a link to a website ... and then my client is not set up to handle the response and close the sale.

You have to wonder, what's the purpose of your ad campaigns? Is it to see how many people you can get to contact you?

No! It's to get those people to give you their money or their information for further sales attempts. If you don't close the sale, the whole campaign is useless, regardless of how many responses you might get. So being ready to close the sale should be one of your top priorities.

But sometimes in the rush to get out a promotion, and handling all the details like getting mailing lists ordered, the advertiser loses sight of the glaring question, What is going to happen when people start responding to the ad? Once the orders start coming in, it's a little late to start thinking about this. All of this should have been thought through at the same time that the rest of the campaign was being planned.

It's All About Customer Service

In your sales copy you usually provide a phone number and/or a website URL that prospects will use to respond to your offer. Someone has to be there to answer that phone, or there has to be a working website with the ability to take orders.

You may recall the brouhaha sometime back when the Affordable Care Act came into effect. That is a perfect example of what happens when the offerer (in this case the United States Government) is not prepared to handle the incoming orders.

Other examples of websites crashing from too big a response are rampant in the industry. So, if you're expecting to get a big response to a website, make sure it's up and operational, and that it's been thoroughly tested to prevent breakdowns.

Another potential problem with websites is that they may not be updated with the new offer in your sales copy. If you don't send prospects to a dedicated landing page that's been especially set up for this particular offer, then you may have to do some major reprogramming of your main site in preparation for your campaign. That can take time, and bugs always turn up at the last minute. Get all of that handled before you send out your emails or direct mail sales pieces.

If you're asking prospects to call to order or to get more information, you have another set of requirements to meet. And this is really the focus of this article. The question is, do you have a staff of customer service representatives who are fully informed about your product and the offer?

If you don't, you might as well just push your customers away, because if they have to deal with a telephone operator who is uninformed and confused, just think of what that will do to their level of confidence in your company and your product. It could mean lost sales, and that can be devastating to the outcome of your expensive promotional campaign.

So here are some ideas for avoiding these problems.

Train operators in advance

When I worked for The Ken Roberts Company, several times a year we would send off mailings that went to more than a million prospects. We knew we would get an onslaught of calls with orders, and to prepare for it we would bring in a team of temporary employees and get them fully trained prior to sending out the mailing.

The morning that the mailing "hit," every phone would have an operator at the ready to answer questions and take orders. Each operator had a pre-printed pad with spaces for all the information that had to be collected to make it as easy as possible to take orders. And supervisors would be available in case any questions came up that were beyond the capabilities of the new operators to handle.

Now, that was a huge operation, and you probably are not going to have to prepare for a response that big (although I hope that you do get that large some day!), but you should prepare to meet the level of response you expect. Even if you just have your regular office staff handling the calls, make sure everyone in the office knows that a mailing is going out, what the offer is, and how orders are to be handled. It would be best if you could have pre-printed order forms, ready to go, to make it easy for order takers to do their job.

When the whole staff knows what they're doing, they won't sound confused and negative on the phone. They'll sound confident and knowledgeable, and that will reflect well on you.

Sometimes you might not use your own staff to answer the phone, but may hire the services of a professional call center. These call centers can do a good job, but only if you have provided all the necessary information so that operators are fully informed. Make sure to get the call center staff everything they need to do a good job for you.

Set Up Different Phone Numbers

If you are testing several different offers, or you want to make sure that operators recognize people responding to an offer as compared to people who are just calling the company for other business, it helps to have different phone numbers set up for each purpose. With different lines coming into each phone, the operator can see which line lights up, and immediately know how to handle the call.

Again, this avoids confusion, or having to ask the prospect if he happened to receive an ad in the mail or saw something online. The operator answers the phone correctly and knows what the caller wants, which immediately assures the prospect that he's called the right place, is talking to a knowledgeable person, and will be taken care of.

Avoid Being Overwhelmed by Spacing Out Mailings

One thing you want to make sure to avoid is having prospects hear the busy signal or be put on hold. People may call back one more time, but you're quite likely to lose sales if your lines are so busy that prospects can't get through or are left sitting listening to "on-hold" music. If you don't have the staff to handle a huge response, consider spreading out the response by mailing or emailing in batches.

One of my clients prides itself in excellent customer service. And in fact, prospects do need quite a bit of instruction and guidance to properly use their product, which is a complex software program. They know how many calls they can field per day to their satisfaction.

Knowing how many responses they can expect to a mailing of a certain size, they plan the scheduling of their mailings so that they have a steady stream of calls that they can easily handle. This method works great for them, and I recommend it to you if your business has similar needs.

You work hard to identify prospects and "reel them in." Once you have them in your sites, don't scare them away with poor planning. Get ready to welcome your "guests," and they may turn into loyal customers with sizable lifetime value.

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