



# Ready, Set, Action!

Play up your call to action to boost response

What makes direct response advertising different from general advertising? One word sums it up: response.

No matter what type of direct marketing media you use to target your customers and prospects, your primary objective is to generate response—immediate or delayed, in the mail or online.

And it's your call to action working hand-in-hand with your offer that generates this measurable response. That's why your call to action should never be overlooked, under-valued or taken for granted. It plays a very important role in every mailing you send out.

## What, When, Why and How

So, how do you make your call to action more compelling and effective as a response generator? Start with the basics: Focus on what, when, why and how. Know what you want your reader to do before you start writing and designing. If you're the approving manager or creative director, make sure your writer and designer understand your specific response goals from the very start.

**What.** Do you want your reader to call, mail, fax or visit your Web site—now? Or do you want her to stop by your retail store in three days, or drop by your trade show booth in three weeks?

**When.** When you want your reader to act must be effectively reinforced by your copy, design and mailing format. For example, when your call to action



This self-mailer from Southwest Airlines uses a subhead and bulleted copy to explain how easy it is to book a reservation online and qualify for a special 15 percent discount.

is for delayed action—such as visiting a retail store or exhibit at a trade show—make sure the mailing format includes a retention piece such as a coupon, gift card or calendar sticker to serve as a reminder. This retention device also should include your call to action, in case it's the only piece that gets retained.

**Why.** You also need to be specific about why your reader should respond. The call to action on a recent postcard from the Direct Marketing Association (DMA)—“Register Early and SAVE \$”—is too general to be compelling. How early do I have to register, and how much will I save? It's not explained on the postcard. It leaves the reader

asking, “What's in it for me?” And he or she doesn't want to have to work to learn the answer.

The mail piece assumes the reader will take the time to go to the DMA Web site to learn the specifics—“Register by June 30 and Save Up to \$200.” It's much more effective to include specifics in the postcard call to action where the reader's eye will be drawn to the date and dollar amount. This change alone dramatically could increase response, Web traffic and, ultimately, registrations for the DMA fall conference.

**How.** Obvious as it may seem to you, you need to tell your readers

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exactly how to respond. For example, if you want them to call, tell them to call and provide the phone number. And make sure the phone number is easy to find, easy to read and easy to refer to later. Show it in more than one place and make sure to place it close to the call to action, if it's not already part of it. Put it in at least one "hot spot." Hot spots are where the eye goes

first. Remember, response diminishes when your reader has to search for the information needed to respond.

For example, the call to action copy in the Southwest Airlines self-mailer, "3 Easy Steps to Take 15% Off" (shown on page 17), does an excellent job of explaining what could be a complex response concept. It uses a subhead and bulleted copy to explain how easy it is to book a reservation online and qualify

for a special 15 percent discount.

## **Bonus Tips**

Here are four additional tips to make your call to action even more effective.

**1. Start your call to action with an active verb** such as rush, renew, register, call, visit, preview, check, reserve, mail, send, hurry, act, save, win, invest. Make it clear you want the reader to do something—the more persuasive and benefit-oriented, the better.

**2. Make your call to action stand out** so it's easy to see and easy to refer to later. Use bold-face type, underlining, contrasting colored ink or a visual violator. Your goal should be to create a call to action that's one of the first pieces of copy to get read.

**3. Rephrase and repeat the call to action.** Because you don't know where your reader's eye will go first, include your call to action in more than one place. You never know which page(s) get read, or where your reader will start or stop reading. Not everyone starts reading at the top, then reads to the bottom of the page, or begins on the first page and reads straight through to the postscript. Studies show 30 percent of the population read magazines and catalogs back to front and 30 percent read the P.S. first.

Similarly, put a call to action on both sides of a postcard.

**4. Put a call to action on your outer envelope or the outside panel of a self-mailer**, when appropriate. It helps set reader expectations for what's inside. For example, if your teaser copy doubles as a call to action stating, "First 50 to Register Save \$200," there's a good chance recipients opening and reading your mail piece already are thinking about being among those first 50 responders.

Don't be shy, retiring or demure. An appropriately strong, specific, compelling call to action is the one that generates the most response. ■

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