

OPEN SECRETS

A REFRESHER COURSE

At a time

when the corporate world seems increasingly obsessed with digital solutions, legendary direct marketer Ernan Roman has some compelling news for brands: Recipients actually want your traditional mail.

Roman says that prospects and customers have been so overwhelmed with e-mails in recent years that the deluge has turned off many of them. It has also made them more receptive to mail.

"This started four years ago, and it has reached a crescendo over the last three years," says Roman, a 35-year marketing veteran who heads Ernan Roman Direct Marketing in Douglas Manor, N.Y.

Of course, despite the good news that customers are asking for your mail, you still have to persuade them to open your envelope. To help you do this, *Deliver* turned to Roman and fellow direct marketing legend Herschell

realize that, in an era of unprecedented consumer power, untruthful messages only undermine customers' confidence in their brands.

These tactics haven't completely died out yet. "In 2008, the brand is more important to direct marketers than it ever was before," says Neil Feinstein of True North Inc. "In 1978, we didn't care about the brand. We cared about the sale. The check in the mail created a sale. In 2008, that check in the mail creates a (mad) customer."

Feinstein adds that "as a consumer and a creative person, when I get a subscription notification that [looks like] a bill, I'm hugely furious."

Marketing veteran Herschell Gordon Lewis says that in direct, as in branding ads, heavy competition can fuel chicanery. In an industry where

Direct marketing wizards **Ernan Roman** and **Herschell Gordon Lewis** explain the science — and art — of getting recipients to open your envelopes. **BY ELAINE APPLETON GRANT**

Gordon Lewis, who started his career making gory films like "Blood Feast" and "2000 Maniacs" before turning to ad copywriting. Not surprisingly, both men know how to get attention.

Here are a few tips they have for those trying to capture mail recipients' eyes:

Understand what mail is good for. Make sure recipients are expecting something they can use. Customers of Roman's clients tend to prefer direct mail for important communications "that are relevant to the preexisting relationship," says Roman. He adds that "the customer is going to get cranky if you start chopping down trees for a message that doesn't have substantial value."

Fulfill personal requests. Use preference information from opt-in campaigns to your advantage on the outside of the envelope. For instance, Roman's company recently completed a campaign that encouraged viewers to name their favorite TV programs during the opt-in registration process. Using the consumer-provided information, Roman segmented the company's list and sent personalized promotions to the fans of various shows.

Keep the envelope clean. Generally, when sending high-level business information, keep your envelope simple — an address, a restrained logo and a personalized return address are all you need. Don't muck up the envelope with extra text, big logos or artwork.

Help recipients make quick decisions.

If the product is relevant, but a commodity, says Roman, informational graphics and copy can help recipients prioritize the mailing's importance: "We're saving them time by letting them know about the product or offer on the outside of the envelope."

Use the right words. Many overused words insult recipients' intelligence. Lewis eschews the words "free" and "personal," which, at best, have little meaning — and at worst, incite consumers' cynicism and even anger.

Avoid the "bulk-mail" effect. Lewis recommends doing whatever you can to ensure that your envelope doesn't look like one of millions, whether it's an unconventional font or an eye-catching color.

In this age of consumer-driven marketing, there's no one-size-fits-all strategy that always will or won't work. You have to know your consumer well before you splash the envelope with promotional copy — or not. **D**

clients sometimes pit direct marketing agencies against one another on the same project, competitors may begin to think only in terms of response. "Long-term relationships are in eclipse," says Lewis.

But marketers who forget to consider both sales and relationships aren't doing their clients any favors, say experts. They are also giving fuel to those considering legislation to allow recipients to opt out of direct mail.

With talk about "Do Not Mail" legislation increasing, marketers can ill afford to anger mail recipients — especially when all most recipients are asking for is the truth.

You can download the DMA's ethical guidelines at dmaresponsibility.org/guidelines/.