

This is the BEST Article, Written JUST FOR YOU, Read it TODAY!

Persuasion in Subscription Marketing Creative Versus Misguided Over-Exuberance

By Todd Lerner

I love what direct marketing champion David Ogilvy said: “The consumer isn’t a moron; she is your wife.” Yet I can hardly pick up a subscription marketing piece that doesn’t default to including hacked out bromides along the lines of: “SUBSCRIBE TODAY!”

I ask myself if “SUBSCRIBE TODAY!” would persuade real-people consumers like my sister.

Let’s say I discovered a great magazine for my sister and I made it my mission to get her to subscribe. Perhaps I’d present the case to her something like this:

“You know, there’s a magazine you might really like. I took

one of their subscription cards – it says you can check it out for free. So here you go, you can send it in and have a look.”

Now, if at any point in the above pitch I screamed at my sister: “SUBSCRIBE TODAY!” – well, she’d probably laugh right in my face. What would your sister do?

Some real-world examples.

I’ve shown 3 sets of examples, all taken from actual subscription marketing direct mail packages. Heavy-handed and over-hyped specimens are on the left side, and purposely under-hyped versions (from our own past control packages) are on the right side.

3 Sets of Real-World Examples (taken from actual subscription marketing packages)

Heavy-handed and over-hyped

1

**MAIL THE
ENCLOSED REPLY
CARD NOW!**

*I can imagine my best friend thinking
“Are they really ordering me around?”*

2

I’m pleased to
announce a special
deal just for you.

My Dad: “Now that’s just total B.S.”

3

**...SUBSCRIBE
TODAY!**

My sister, laughing: “NO!”

Purposefully under-hyped

**Simply return your
enclosed
acceptance card.**

*I can imagine my best friend thinking
“I don’t know, maybe I’ll accept this.”*

We’ve done our best
to make price a
non-issue for you.

*My Dad: “That sounds fair enough
I guess.”*

...but we do need
your go-ahead.

*My sister: “All right, okay, I’m busy
but here you go.”*

Below the excerpts are quotes expressing how people I know might respond, but decide for yourself how your own best friend, or Dad, or sister would likely reply.

Respecting the intelligence of the consumer.

The consumer isn’t your halfwit finger puppet. He’s your friend or family member. Granted, you and I may think people sometimes make dumb decisions in life, but most aren’t complete and total imbeciles – especially in today’s info-saturated world.

And even if for some reason you really do think the consumer is a moron, as a marketer you wouldn’t want them to know that’s what you think. You want them on your side so they might decide to buy your product. Even a weak mentality, after all, can wield a strong volition.

People are subtle and persuading them is subtle business. It’s almost embarrassing

(Continued on page 14)

This is the BEST Article, Written Just For You, Read it Today!

...continued from page 7

to see someone “SUBSCRIBE TODAY!”-ing another human. And it’s not just a harmless waste of ink – I believe it works against the credibility of your pitch. It shows no respect.

Mere laziness? Misguided over-exuberance?

So why would anyone allow something like “SUBSCRIBE TODAY!” on their important subscription marketing piece? Possible reasons:

- *Laziness*

Busy subscription marketing executives, and the creatives they employ, often copy things that have been done before. It’s fast, it’s easy, and it’s approval-safe.

- *Heavy-handedness*

Some marketers might view “SUBSCRIBE TODAY!” as an aggressive form of “asking for the sale.” And I’m all about stepping up and non-shyly asking for the order. But c’mon: Asking for the sale is not the same as shrieking and demanding and vainly attempting to bludgeon the prospect into the sale.

- *Misguided over-exuberance*

I love magazines. I happily immerse myself into the world of the publications on which I work. I’m constantly amazed by editorial’s ability to generate so much relevant content issue after issue. Still, this doesn’t stop me from assuming that potential subscribers may not be equally as excited about the product, and that it would be wise to keep a realistic perspective throughout the communication. Prospects have to be approached from their point of view, not ours. People are skeptical about advertising messages (aren’t you?) and it’s worthwhile to consider winning their trust by not being overly sensational.

How can you avoid over-hype in your marketing efforts?

First thing I’d do is look through a proposed marketing piece for any “SUBSCRIBE TODAY!”-like red flags.

Then I’d ask my creative team to give those stale stock-phrase generalities more thought. Maybe they can ratchet back the auto-hype machine and come up with something more subtle and specific, and so perhaps less trite and more convincing.

I’m not saying it’s always a simple thing to achieve. But that’s what advertising creative people are for. It’s their task and challenge to come up with effective forms of artful persuasion. **SM**

Todd Lerner Advertising specializes in direct marketing creative for clients that include Time Inc., Disney, The Financial Times, Radisson, Condé Nast, Rodale, Columbia House, Hearst, Smithsonian, and others. Feel free to email Todd with questions or comments about this article: todd@toddlerneradvertising.com