ONLINE
MARKETING
THAT
WORKS

*HOW TO PROFITABLY SELL
YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE
ON THE INTERNET*

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Section 1

10 Steps to Online Marketing Success

"I want to market my business on the Web, but how do I get traffic to my site?" one client asked recently. "And if I want to sell my product or service using e-mail marketing, who do I send the e-mails to?"

Here is one online marketing methodology that has been proven effective for many different types of businesses.

The primary concept is that online marketing works best when you e-mail people who already know you.

Therefore, successful online marketers build their "house file" or "e-list" (lists of prospects and their e-mail addresses) using the process outlined below, and then sell to those people via e-mail marketing:

1. Build a Web site that positions you as an expert or guru in your field (see steps 2 and 3 below). This is the "base of operations" for your online marketing campaign.

2. This Web site should include a home page, an "About the Company" page, your bio, and a page with brief descriptions of your products and services (each product or service description can link to a longer document on the individual item).

3. You should also have an "Articles Page" where you post articles you have written on your area of specialty, and where visitors can read and download these articles for free.

4. Write a short special report or white paper on your area of expertise, and make this available to people who visit your site. They can download it for free

as a PDF, but in exchange, they have to register and give you their e-mail address (and any other information you want to capture).

5.   Consider also offering a monthly online newsletter, or "e-zine." People who visit your site can subscribe free if they register and give you their e-mail address. You may want to give the visitor the option of checking a box that reads: "I give you and other companies you select permission to send me e-mail about products, services, news, and offers that may be of interest to me."

6.   The more "content" (useful information) on your site, the better. More people will be attracted to your site, and they will spend more time on it. They will also tell others about your site. You can even add a feature that allows your visitors to e-mail your articles to their friends – a good idea since it spreads the word about you and your site.

7.   The model is to drive traffic to your site where you get them to sign up for either your free report or free e-zine. Once they register, you have their e-mail address and can now market to them via e-mail as often as you like at no extra cost.

8.   The bulk of your online leads, sales, and profits will come from repeat e-mail marketing to this "house" e-list of prospects. Therefore your goal is to build a large e-list of qualified prospects as quickly and inexpensively as you can.

9.   There are a number of online marketing options, which can drive traffic to your site. These include: free publicity; e-mail marketing; banner advertising; co-registrations; affiliate marketing; search engine optimization; direct mail; and e-zine advertising.

The Agora Model
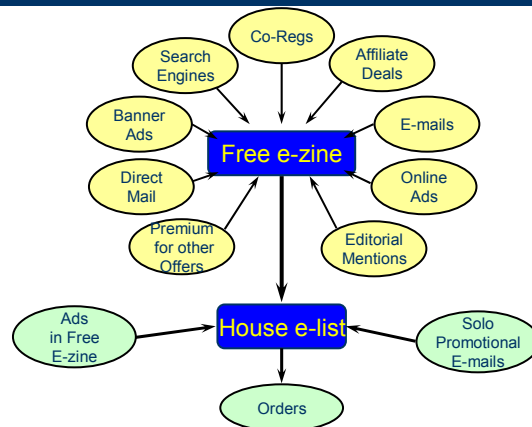
10. The key to success is to try a lot of different tactics in small and inexpensive tests, throw out the ones that don't work, and do more of the ones that are effective.

Another question that comes up is frequency: How often can you send promotional e-mail offers to your house e-list?

Every time you send an e-mail to your house file, a small percentage of the list will "unsubscribe," meaning they ask to be taken off your list. The number of people who unsubscribe is called the "opt-out rate."

Start increasing the frequency of promotional e-mail to your house file. As soon as the opt-out rate spikes upward, stop. You have now reached your maximum frequency.

Many marketers have discovered that the frequency of e-mail promotion to the house file can be much higher than previously thought. Some are successfully e-mailing different offers to their house e-list as often as two times a day or even more.

This is good news for marketers, since the more frequently you can e-mail offers to your list, the more money you can make.

Best of all, the profit on these sales to your house file is extremely high, since the e-mail promotion costs almost nothing. There are no postage or printing costs, and because you already own the names, you avoid the $100 to $400 per thousand charge incurred when renting outside e-lists.

Section 2

Breaking into Your Prospect's E-mail "Inner Circle"

With direct mail response rates continuing to decline, telemarketing impeded by the Do Not Call list, and CAN-SPAM controlling e-mail marketing, direct marketers are constantly exploring channels to find the magic formula that will work for them.

In e-mail marketing, the explosion of spam and the widespread use of e-mail filtering software have depressed click-through rates to new lows. So how can you make e-mail marketing work?

According to an article in The Marketing Report (10/27/03, p. 5), a survey by Nielsen/NetRatings found that most people regularly open and read a maximum of 16 permission-based e-mails. The only way to break into the inner circle is to displace someone, the survey said.

And an article in DM News (10/16/03) reports, "Marketers will have to enter that emerging inner circle of trusted companies from whom people are willing to keep reading e-mails."

Okay, but how do you break into this inner circle of e-mail senders whose messages your prospects will open and read?

It's not easy, but there are at least six options that seem to work with some level of success:

1. Free e-zine. Write and publish a truly valuable e-zine and offer it free to folks who give you their e-mail address. If you publish regularly (at least once a month) and provide content of genuine worth, readers will come to value your publication and establish a relationship with you. You will have entered their "inner e-mail circle," because they will view anything with your name in the "From" line as being from a trusted adviser and worth their time to at least open and read. A great example of such an e-zine is Agora's Daily Reckoning (www.dailyreckoning.com).

2. News and updates. Similar to an e-zine, some publishers send short news bulletins to their subscribers on a regular basis. ComputerWorld sends a daily online update with short items from the magazine. You can purchase a short online ad in these updates, thereby buying your way into the reader's inner e-mail circle. CMP, a trade publisher, e-mails a monthly update, Business Technology Advisor (BTA), to the subscribers of all its publications. For $200 per thousand, you can sponsor BTA, having the entire issue devoted to your firm and products. Since CMP subscribers know and look forward to BTA, your message gets a higher readership and response than it would if you send it under your own banner.

3. Service and upgrade notices. Software users will open and read e-mails from the software publisher that contain news about upgrades, technical information, or service policies. If your customers regularly need to receive service and product news from you, get in the habit of delivering it via e-mail. Then they

will be "trained" to read your e-mails, so when you send a promotion, it too will get opened and read.

4. Transaction e-mails. A survey from www.quris.com shows that customers do value and read two specific types of e-mails: (a) transaction confirmations and (b) account status updates. So you can get your promotional message read by embedding it into routine e-mails that contain transactional or account status information. A good example is www.amazon.com, whose customers open and read the e-mails amazon.com sends because they might contain news about their order.

5. Alert services. Consumer newsletters, especially investment advisories, have pioneered this approach. When you pay for your monthly subscription, the publisher offers you a bonus: additional content, sent periodically via e-mail, to keep you updated on the topic between regular issues. The catch: You have to give the publisher your e-mail address to receive this free online bonus. The publisher quickly builds an e-list of subscribers who eagerly anticipate and read the e-mails, because they are viewed as valuable information they pay for as part of their subscription. The most successful publishers keep the information content of the e-mails high, but also liberally promote products and services to these e-mail alert recipients.

6. Club or membership. Your prospects will read e-mails from clubs, associations, online communities of interest, subscription Web sites, and other organizations of which they are members. Therefore, if you can create a club or have your e-mail distributed by one of these membership organizations, you can enter the prospect's e-mail inner circle.

As a rule of thumb, whenever you can send e-mail to your prospect using one of the above methods, your chances of getting opened and read increase exponentially vs. sending a typical promotional e-mail.

Section 3

Write, Design, and Publish Your Own Free E-zine

My monthly e-zine, The Direct Response Letter (go to www.bly.com to subscribe or view back issues), is not the most successful or widely read e-zine on the planet. Far from it.

But marketing results and comments from subscribers tell me my simple formula for creating the e-zine – which, including copy and layout, takes me just an hour or two per issue to complete from start to finish – works.

In this article, I want to share the formula with you, so you can produce an effective e-zine of your own, sitting at your computer, without hiring a writer or designer, in just a single morning or afternoon.

If you want to market your product or service over the Internet, I strongly urge you to distribute your own e-zine free to your customers and prospects. There are several reasons for doing so.

First, the e-zine allows you to keep in touch with your best customers – indeed, with all your customers – at virtually no cost. Because it's electronic, there's no printing or postage expense.

Second, by offering potential customers a free subscription to your e-zine, you can capture their e-mail address and add them to your online database. You can then market to these prospects, also at no cost.

Whether you are generating leads or direct sales, there are two ways to sell your products and services to your e-zine subscribers. One is to place small online ads in the regular issues of your e-zine. These ads are usually a hundred words or so in length, and include a link to a page on your site where the subscriber can read about and order the product.

Or, you can send stand-alone e-mail messages to your subscribers, again promoting a specific product and with a link to your site.

When you are dealing with a free e-zine (as opposed to an online newsletter which the reader pays for), people spend just a little time reading it before they delete it with a click of the mouse.

I am convinced that most subscribers do not print out the e-zine, take it home, and curl up with it on the couch later to read. Therefore, I use a quick-reading format designed to allow the subscriber to read my e-zine online right when he opens it.

In this formula, my e-zine always has between 5 and 7 short articles. They are usually just a few paragraphs each.

Every article can be read in less than a minute, so it never takes more than 7 minutes to read the whole issue, though I doubt most people do. You can see the most recent issue at www.bly.com to get a feel for the length and content of these articles.

I advise against having just a headline and a one-line description of the article, with a link to the full text of the article. All this clicking forces your subscribers to do a lot of work to read your articles, and that's not what they want.

I do not use HTML; my e-zine is text only. This way it is easy and inexpensive to produce.

I don't "make a production" out of it; it's just straight type. Many readers have told me they like it this way, and that they don't like HTML e-zines, which look (a) more promotional and less informational and (b) seem to have more to read.

When preparing your text e-zine for distribution, type your copy, in a single column, in Times Roman or another easy-to-read typeface.

The column width should be 60 characters, so you can set your margins at 20 and 80. However, to make sure the lines come out evenly, you must put a hard carriage return by hitting "return" at the end of each line.

There are a variety of services and software programs for distributing your e-zine as well as your e-mail marketing messages to your online database. I use and recommend Bulking Pro (www.bulkingpro.com).

My frequency is monthly, though occasionally I do a second issue if there is major news that month.

I am a freelance copywriter. Let me show you specifically how having an e-zine helps bring in business for me.

I recently gave a speech on software direct marketing. It was recorded, so I had audio cassette copies made. In my e-zine, I offered the cassette free to any subscribers involved in software marketing – potential clients for my copywriting services.

Within 24 hours after I distributed the e-zine, we received over 200 inquiries from marketing managers at software companies requesting the tape, many of whom needed copy written for direct mail and e-mail to promote their software.

By comparison, most copywriters tell me that when they send postal direct mail to a list of prospects, they average a 2% response. At that rate, they would have to send out 10,000 pieces of mail to generate the 200 leads I got in an hour for free.

That's what an e-zine can do for you. Once you build your subscriber list, you have an incredibly powerful marketing tool and the most valuable asset your business can own: a database of buyers with e-mail addresses and permission to mail to them at any time.

Section 4

8 Affordable Ways to Drive Traffic to Your Web Site

How do you drive traffic to your Web site without burning through your available cash in a couple of weeks? Here are 8 cost-effective ways to get hits to your site:

1. Google. The world's largest search engine, Google facilitates 250 million Web searches per day for its users. As an advertiser, you can buy preference in Google's search engine, based on key word, on a cost-per-click basis.

It could cost you as little as a dime a click or more than a dollar a click, depending on the popularity of the key word you want to buy. If the cost of the key word is 30 cents per click, and 100 people click on your site that day as a result of a Google search on the key word you bought, Google charges you $30. Google lets you put a limit on how much you spend per day, so the cost can fit any budget.

2. Overture. Another search engine that lets you buy preferential rating on key words. Overture reaches over 80% of active Internet users by displaying your business in search results on leading sites like Yahoo!, MSN, and Alta Vista.

How do you determine what you can afford to pay? Say your product costs $100 and out of every 100 clicks on your site, you get one sale, for a total of $100. You can afford to pay $1 per hit if breaking even on the initial sale is your goal.

3. Affiliate marketing. Find Web sites that cater to the same market you do. Arrange for them to feature your products on their site and in their e-mails. Online ads, e-mail blurbs, and Web pages talking about your product link to your site where the user can purchase the product under discussion. The affiliate

receives a percentage of the sale ranging from 15% to 50%. To recruit affiliates or make money being an affiliate for other marketers, visit http://www.affiliatesdirectory.com.

Amazon.com runs one of the largest affiliate programs, enabling you to feature books on your site that are related to your topic and of interest to your audience; when the user clicks on the book page, he is automatically linked to www.amazon.com where he can buy the book online. It's a service for your visitors, and you earn a small commission on each sale.

4. Co-registration. In co-registration marketing, the user who visits a Web site is served a pop-up window containing a number of special offers; most frequently these are subscriptions to free e-zines. By arranging to have your e-zine or another offer featured in these co-registration pop-ups, you can capture many new names for your online database at a relatively low cost compared with traditional e-mail marketing.

There are a number of companies that can find such co-registration deals for you. One of these is VentureDirect Online, www.venturedirect.com. Another is E-Tactics, www.e-tactics.com.

5. Banner ads. Banner ads have seen a resurgence thanks to the increasing sophistication and popularity of Macromedia Flash; in an attempt to recapture the attention of the overloaded Internet user, animation and effects in banners have become more sophisticated and dynamic. Banner ads can work but should be tested conservatively and cautiously, and don't get your hopes of a breakthrough up too high. Banner ads usually supplement other traffic generation methods, and are only occasionally a primary source of unique visits. Exceptions? Of course.

6. E-mail marketing. Sending solo promotional e-mails to a rented list of opt-in names is an expensive way to acquire new names. Say you rent a list of 1,000 e-mail names for $200, get a 2% click-through, and 10% of those sign-up for

your e-zine. Your acquisition cost to acquire those two new subscribers is a whopping $100 per name. Business-to-consumer marketers have a better chance of success with careful testing of e-mail marketing, since consumer lists are more reasonably priced than business-to-business names.

7. Online ads. While sending a solo e-mail to a company's e-list can run $100 to $400 per thousand, a less expensive option is to run a small online ad in their e-zine. Cost can be as little as $20 to $40 per thousand. The e-zine publisher specifies the format and length of your ad, which are typically 100 words of text with one URL link. The higher up (earlier) your ad appears in the e-zine, the higher the response.

8. Viral marketing. At its simplest, viral marketing entails adding a line to your outgoing e-mail marketing messages that says, "Please feel free to forward this e-mail to your friends so they can enjoy this special offer." To work, the e-mail you want the recipient to forward must contain a special offer, either a free offer (typically free content) or a discount on merchandise. According to Bryan Heathman of 24/7 Media, 81 percent of viral e-mail recipients will pass the e-mail on to at least one other person.

Section 5

How to Build Your E-zine Subscriber List Rapidly and Inexpensively Using "Safelists"

Online marketing expert Debbie Weil recently asked me, "How do you know whether an e-zine is successful?"

"An e-zine is successful if it achieves its stated marketing objective," I replied. "Conversely, if you have no written marketing goal for your e-zine, you have no way to determine whether it is worthwhile."

The original goal of *my* e-zine, "Bob Bly's Direct Response Letter," was simply to update clients, prospects, book buyers, seminar attendees, and colleagues about things I was doing that they wanted to know about, such as publication of a new book or availability of a recent speech on audiocassette.

As a result, I kept it deliberately small: between sign-ups on the home page of www.bly.com and e-mail addresses added from my database, circulation was about 2,000. And that was fine with me.

But my plans changed, and I suddenly wanted to get a lot more subscribers in a hurry. One reason was that a larger e-list would mean more sales of my books when announced in the e-zine. In fact, my publishers were concerned that with such a small circulation, sales of my books to my e-zine readers would be insignificant.

Also, a larger list would allow me to do cross-promotions with other e-zines, enabling me to reach a wider market for my books and tapes, as well as drive more people to my speaking engagements and Web site.

I called Peter DeCaro, my freelance Web master, and gave him the task of adding new e-zine subscribers. To my amazement, within 6 weeks he had built my e-zine distribution list from 2,000 to more than 60,000 subscribers.

"How did you do it so quickly and inexpensively?" I asked Peter (the entire fee was around $1,000). "Safelists," he replied.

As Peter explained it to me, the Internet users on what is known as a "Safelist" have agreed to provide their e-mail address in exchange for the ability to regularly promote to the list's membership. It is known as a Safelist, I suppose,

because it is "safe" to send promotional material to these people – they have opted in and agreed to receive it.

Peter has joined numerous Safelists for the purposes of promoting his clients' offers, including me and my free e-zine. You and I can join, too. There's no exclusivity. Some Safelists are free to promote to; others require a fee. But the fee is a tiny fraction of what you'd pay to mail to traditional rented opt-in e-lists, which can run $200 to $400 per thousand.

What works in promotions targeted to Safelists? "Free offers tend to pull well in Safelists," says DeCaro. "So by offering a free report or some other freebie in your promotion, you establish credibility with the Safelist subscribers and encourage them to investigate the source of the ad – you – further."

Some Safelists permit only text ads; others allow either text or HTML. Peter says HTML ads pull better on Safelists.

I asked Peter where one finds Safelists. He recommends several online directories that contain Safelist listings, including www.mailpro-network.com, www.megasubmitters.com, www.targetsafelists.com, and www.101-website-traffic.com.

Here's how our promotion worked: Instead of sending Safelist subscribers directly to www.bly.com to simply sign up for the free e-zine right away, we first directed them to a special landing page offering a free bonus report as an extra incentive for subscribing to the e-zine. The copy on this landing page began:

"For a limited time, you can get a **FREE** copy of my report offering recession-proof business strategies by clicking here. Apply these techniques to your own marketing and selling efforts during a recession or a down time, and you will survive – even prosper – while others struggle to get by...."

A link at the bottom allowed the reader to click onto my home page to sign up for the e-zine. An autoresponder automatically fulfilled the subscriber's request for the free report.

Peter suggests using a cgi-based autoresponder as opposed to a pay service. A cgi script is prewritten code that performs the autoresponder function of automatically responding to e-mail requests. A good Web site that reviews different cgi autoresponder scripts is www.autoresponder-review.com. Many cgi scripts can be found on www.scriptsearch.com.

At this point you may be thinking that Safelists sound like an Internet scam and that the quality of the names can't be any good. This I don't know yet – it's too early for me to tell. I do know that the unsubscribe rate for Safelist-acquired names is many times higher than people who subscribe to my e-zine either because they (a) know me or (b) signed up for it on www.bly.com.

What I *do* know is that if you're interested in quantity and not necessarily quality, Safelists can be an effective way to build your e-zine subscriber base in a hurry at very low cost.

Section 6

How to Help Search Engines Find Your Site

Because so many Web sites crowd the Internet, you need to make an extra effort to get yours noticed.

One way to attract attention is to make your site search-engine-friendly – that is, to increase the odds that search engines will find your site.

There are two key steps that can help you do this. First, submit your site to directories such as Yahoo! and The Open Directory.

Second, make your Web site findable by search engines that send out "spiders" and "crawlers" to scour the Web. Some of the information those spiders and crawlers seek can be found in "META tags" – words or phrases embedded within the HTML code used to create Web sites.

Before you create your own tags, it's a good idea to take a look at those of others, especially competitors and colleagues. You can easily open a window and view the META tags of any Web site you visit.

From your browser's tool bar, simply choose the "View" menu. Then click on "Source," and a window will open with HTML text that you can study.

The most important META tags are found near the top of the page in between codes like this: <head> and </head>. If you are creating your own Web site, depending on which software you use, all you have to do to add META tags is type the words you've chosen in the appropriate places.

The key META tags for marketing purposes are Title, Description, and Keywords. These tags control what surfers see when your site is listed in the search engines, which means they will help people decide whether to visit your site.

"Title" is what your visitors see at the top of their browser windows when they are visiting your site, as well as what they will see in their bookmark lists.

So make sure each page has a title that makes sense to visitors, not just to you. Be descriptive; failure to put strategic keywords in the page title is often why Web pages are poorly ranked.

When your Web site comes up in search-engine findings, the META tag identified as the "description" is often the opening statement people will use to decide whether to access the link. The description should concisely answer the question "What do you do?" For example: "XYZ Design provides client-focused,

creative and effective graphic design, art direction, and project management for marketing communications."

"Keywords" are the terms your prospects and visitors will type into the search field when they are looking for talent. So carefully consider the words and phrases they might use to describe your services.

Put these keywords in your META tags. You also should include your keywords in the first 25 words of your home page.

Here are some additional tips for selecting keywords:

- Use plurals for your keywords, but avoid excessive repetition.

- Misspell keywords if misspellings are common. For example, DIRECTV, a digital satellite television service, is frequently referred to as Direct TV. If your name is misspelled regularly, include that spelling in your keywords as well.

- Don't always use obvious keywords. Include phrases that may get fewer searches but higher results.

- Don't let your combined keywords exceed 1,000 characters. The fewer keywords, the greater impact they will have.

Maintaining a high ranking in search engines is a time-consuming process. And even with due diligence, these efforts may not get you into the top 30 listings, particularly if you're competing in a niche with well-established and better-financed competitors.

The best strategy is to register with the major search engines and free directories, and supply your information every time you find a site that offers a free listing. Have a seven-word description ready to copy and paste as well as 10 keywords. Devote a certain amount of time each month to maintaining your listings in databases and directories.

I had always thought a good strategy for making your Web site easy-to-find was choosing a domain name that is clearly descriptive of what you do; e.g., http://www.divorceonline.com if you are a divorce lawyer.

But Heather Lloyd-Martin, a copywriter specializing in search engine optimization, disagrees. "This doesn't really work," she says. "Plus, it encourages people to come up with those terrible domains like www.make-money-online-with-internet-marketing.com, which are spammy and are usually downgraded in the engines."

She also downplays the importance of tags. According to Martin, "The search engines key on the content – so that's what's important. The title is also important for positioning and conversion off the search engine results page."

If you want search engines to find you, avoid flash or frame pages. "Search engines can find flash or frame pages, but it's harder for them," says Heather. "Fast has indexed Flash for a long time now, but it can be horrid for usability, and it won't gain the best rankings. HTML is truly the best bet."

Note: Portions of this article are adapted from The Online Advantage, written by Ilise Benun for The Creative Group (www.creativegroup.com).

Section 7

What Works Best in E-Mail Marketing: Long or Short Copy?

"What works best in e-mail marketing?" I got asked for the umpteenth time the other day. "Long copy or short copy?"

It's a quandary for direct marketers much more so than general marketers. Here's why:

There's a widely held viewpoint that, on the Internet, the less copy the better. Web marketing experts tell us that the Internet is faster-paced than the "snail mail" world, that attention spans are shorter, and long messages get zapped into oblivion with a click of the mouse. "Keep it short!" they extol in countless advisory e-zines.

General advertisers, for the most part, also believe that when it comes to copy, the shorter the better. Often their print ads have large pictures and only a handful of words. So they have no trouble embracing the "people don't read" mentality the Web marketing gurus say works best.

But traditional direct marketers whose products are typically sold with long copy direct mail packages and self-mailers – newsletter publishers, seminar promoters, magazines, book clubs, insurance, audio cassettes – have a problem. It goes something like this:

"In print, I have to use long copy to make the sale … or I just don't get the order. We've tested short copy many times – who *doesn't* want a cheaper mailing piece with less ink and paper? But it has never worked for our product. Now my Web marketing consultant says the e-mail should be just a few paragraphs. If a few paragraphs won't convince people to buy offline, why should things be any different online?"

And they are right: Just because a person buys online doesn't change the persuasion process. If he needs the facts to make a decision, he needs them regardless of whether he is ordering from a paper mailing or a Web site.

Yet we also have a sense that the Web marketing gurus have at least a clue as to what they are talking about. We sense that our 4-page sales letter, if sent word for word as a lengthy e-mail, wouldn't work. People would click away long before they got to the end.

I think I have some sensible guidelines to answer this puzzle.

First, we need to quantify what we mean by "short" vs. "long."

When a Web marketing guru talks about "short" e-mail, he probably means only three or four paragraphs. So when he says long copy doesn't work, he is against e-mails of more than a few paragraphs.

If I say "long copy *does* work," I mean long compared to the typical e-mail – not compared to the typical direct mail letter on paper. A "long" e-mail, which may fill several screens, is closer in length to a 2-page letter – short by direct mail standards – than to a 4-page letter. And it doesn't even come close to an 8-page letter.

Second, we need to quantify how much shorter online copy is than offline. Should you translate your entire package, word for word? Should you compress it to half its length? Less?

Kathy Henning, who writes extensively about online communication, says, "In general, online text should be half as long as printed text, maybe even shorter." Not a precise formula, but a good starting point for estimation.

Third, and most important, we need to remember that the copy for e-mail marketing campaigns is not wholly contained within the e-mail itself. It is really in two parts.

The first half of the message is in the actual e-mail. The e-mail contains a link to a page on a Web site or server. When you click on that link, you jump to the page, where the remainder of the message is presented, along with the online order mechanism.

In a traditional direct mail package, the message is unevenly split. Consistently, 98 percent of the copy is in the letter and brochure, with the remaining 2 percent on the order form.

In e-mail marketing campaigns, the division is less balanced and more varied.

Fig. 1 shows the various ways the total copy can be divided between the e-mail and the response page.

There are four options as shown in the box at the center of the diagram:

A. *Short e-mail, landing page* (left upper quadrant) – Many marketers with simple lead-generating offers use short e-mails (the traditional 3 to 4 paragraphs) with a link to a "landing page." A landing page is a short Web-based form, usually with a headline, a couple of paragraphs explaining the offer, and a mechanism for the recipient to fill in his information and submit his response. This format is similar in length and style to the traditional one-page sales letter and business reply card used in lead-generating paper direct mail.

B. *Long e-mail, landing page* (lower left quadrant) – This is similar to A except the e-mail, by Internet marketing standards, is "long." For convenience, I define a short e-mail as any e-mail that, when printed out, takes half a page or less. By comparison, any e-mail that takes more than a page when printed out is "long." This format is similar in length and style to a direct mail package with a 4-page letter and a simple 4 X 9-inch order card.

C. *Long e-mail, micro site* (lower right quadrant) – This format has a long e-mail and a long landing page, known as a "micro site." The micro site is a custom URL designed specifically for the offer. Unlike a landing page, which is usually a single screen, the micro site's lengthier copy requires many screens. The micro site can be broken into distinct pages (see www.hypnoticwriting.com) or it can be one continuous document through which the reader must scroll (see www.surefirecustomerservicetechniques.com). This long e-mail/micro site format allows for maximum copy, and is ideal for translating lengthy mailings, such a magalogs, to the Web.

D. *Short e-mail, micro site* (upper right quadrant) – This format combines a short e-mail up front with a long-copy micro site on the back end. It is ideal for offers that require a lot of copy but are being transmitted to prospects who might not read a lengthy e-mail.

Notice in Fig. 1 that your lists can come from one of three sources:

1. *House files*. As with traditional direct mail, e-mail marketing works best when sent to your house list of customers and prospects. If your house files don't have e-mail addresses, there are several ways to obtain them. You can run your file through an e-mail address appending service, and expect to find e-mail addresses for between 10 percent and 30 percent of the records. You can also make e-mail address collection part of your ongoing marketing and customer service records. For instance, one of my vendors that awards gifts based on bonus points offered to add 300 bonus points to my account in exchange for my e-mail address.

2. *E-zine subscribers.* Theoretically you will get high response rates mailing to people who have signed up for your free e-zine. However, these folks are often freebie seekers, and may not be qualified prospects. Therefore, results vary. Some e-zine lists are pure gold. Others generate less sterling results.

3. *Rented opt-in e-lists.* You can rent e-lists for e-mail marketing campaigns at costs ranging from $100 to $300 per thousand. As with traditional direct mail, test lists in small quantities before rolling out.

Another option, also shown in Fig. 1, is to run classified ads in other people's e-zines with a link to your landing page or micro site. This lets you get your message to people at a far lower cost per thousand than solo e-mails. However, the circulations of many e-zines are unqualified and unaudited; therefore the quality of the audience you reach can be questionable. Again, you have to test.

The bottom line: E-mail marketing can work without having e-mails competing with *War and Peace* in word count. By strategically splitting your copy between the front-end e-mail and back-end response page, you can get your message across without having time-pressured Web surfers fleeing in terror.
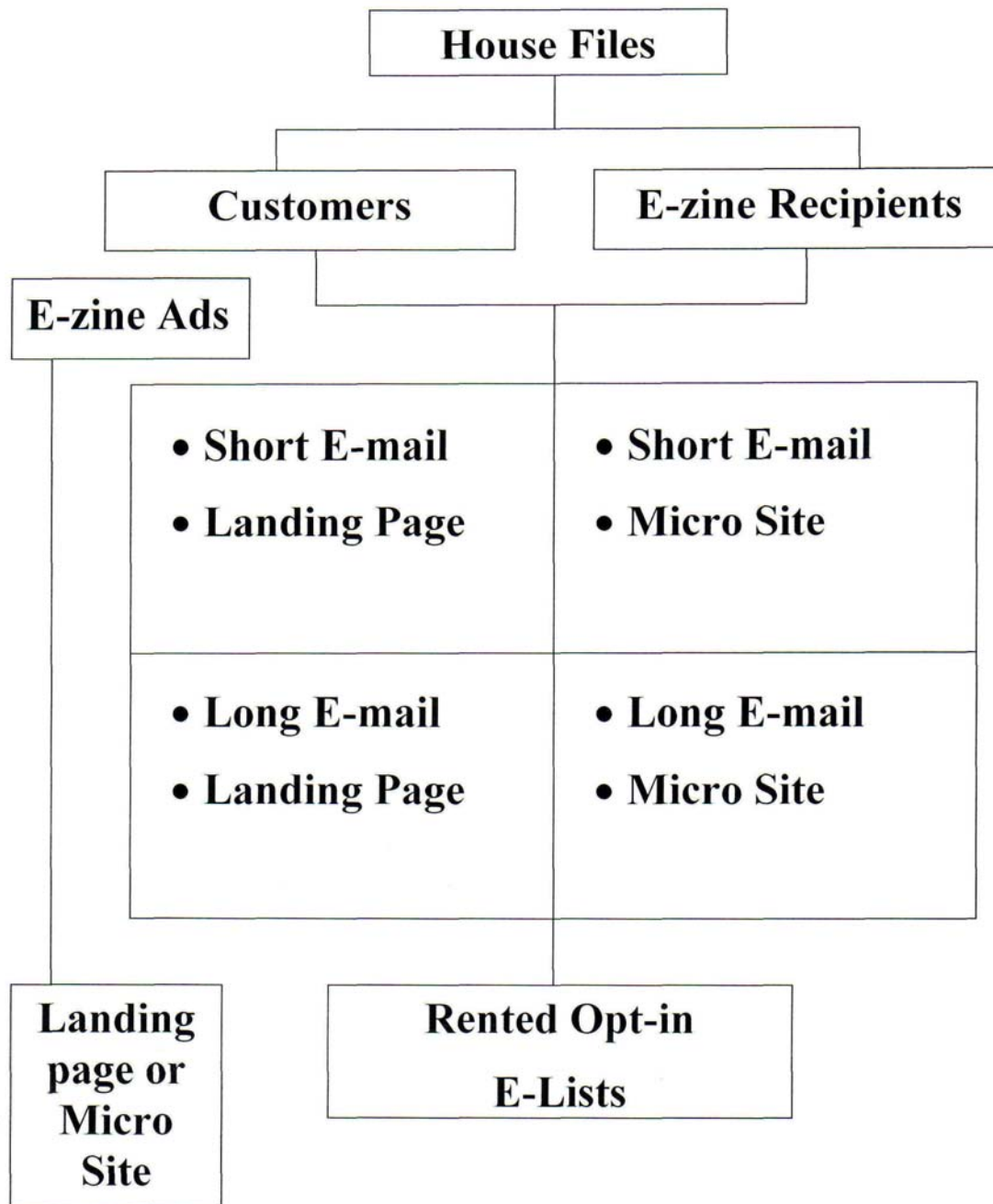

Figure 1. E-mail Marketing Model

Section 8

Selling Newsletters with Online Conversion

We publishing types don't give up.

When the Internet came into being, we said, "Direct mail works offline to sell subscriptions; why not online, too?"

So we rented e-mail lists and sent them e-mails asking them to subscribe.

It bombed.

But instead of giving up, we went back to the drawing board, asking, "If traditional acquisition direct response does not work online, let's find something that does!"

And that something is online conversion. Both traditional and online publishers are testing it, and many are enjoying promising results.

In a nutshell, here's an oversimplified version of how online conversion works:

1. You create some free content.

2. You offer people the free content online.

3. When they accept, you then upsell them to your paid subscription product – again, online.

Let's break down each step.

Step 1: Create some free content.

This is the easiest step. Just repackage some of your content as an information premium.

The content does not have to be long. Re-purposing existing articles works fine for this purpose. So do special reports specifically written for the online

conversion campaign. Or the same reports you offer as premiums in postal direct marketing.

The premium is typically offered as a "free special report." It is usually available as a downloadable PDF file. Some marketers prefer to post the report as a multi-page html document on the Web.

<p align="center">**Step 2: Offering the free content**</p>

The most common way to offer the free content is by sending an e-mail to your house file. You can also test outside lists.

The e-mail offers the content as a "free special report." To get the free report, the recipient clicks on an embedded URL in the message text.

If the content is a downloadable PDF file, the recipient is brought to a short transaction page. He enters his e-mail address, and is then allowed to download and print the PDF file.

If the content is a series of sequential html pages, the recipient is again brought to a short transaction page. He enters his e-mail address, clicks SUBMIT, and is brought to the first page of the micro site where the report is available to read as a posted html document.

(Within the html report, put a number of links to a landing page or transaction page for your paid subscription product. Many readers may click on these links and order your paid product while they are in the middle of reading your free bonus report online.)

Either way, the reader must give us his e-mail address to read the free report, which is the key to the online conversion method.

There are other methods you can use to generate leads for your online conversion campaign, as shown in Fig. 2. Some publishers have had great success with postcards. Others have used banners or online ads in e-zines.

Step 3: Converting the leads to paid subscribers

Now two things have happened. First, we have captured the prospect's e-mail address, so we can market to him as often as we like at virtually no cost.

And second, we know that the prospect is interested in the topic of our content, because he at least requested a free article or report on it.

Since the content was free, we do not know at this point whether he will pay for more content on this topic. But he is a qualified lead in the sense that he is (a) interested in the topic and (b) responds to online marketing.

The next step is to send him a series of e-mails, known as the online conversion series, with the objective of converting him from a requester of free content to a subscriber or buyer of our paid content.

Planning the online conversion series

While the online conversion process is still relatively new, experience so far shows that our online conversion series works best with between three to seven efforts.

Some marketers like every e-mail in the series to attempt to make a sale. That is, they all have a URL the reader can click to reach a page from which the product may be ordered.

Others like the first two e-mails to be simply goodwill, promoting the value of the information and encouraging the reader to actually read the free content – and in some cases, even giving him more free content. These are called "free touch" e-mails, because they touch the reader without asking him to purchase.

Subsequent e-mails in the series ask for the order; these are called "conversion e-mails." In a six-effort series, the first one or two e-mails might be free touch; the remainder, conversion e-mails.

Designing the online response vehicle

When the reader clicks on the URL link in your e-mail, he may go either to a landing page or a transaction page.

A landing page has a fair amount of descriptive copy about the product you are selling and your offer. It does a strong job of selling the reader on the value of the product.

A transaction page has minimal description of the product. It is basically an online order form.

Some marketers always send the e-mail recipient who clicks on the link in the e-mail to the landing page, on the theory that the more sales copy there is, the more sales that will be made.

Other marketers believe that if the conversion e-mail is long and has a lot of sales copy, there is no need to repeat this in a landing page; and so they just send the prospect to a short transaction page.

Creating the conversion offer

The best offer for an online conversion effort is a free 30-day trial of the product. If you can set up your site so that the recipient's credit card is not billed until after the 30-day trial period, that's the best choice. Then you are truly offering a free trial or free 30-day subscription.

By comparison, if you charge their credit card as soon as they submit their order, it is not really a free 30-day trial; it is a risk-free 30-day trial. They are paying, but if they cancel within 30 days, they get a refund.

Planning the online conversion series

You can experiment with timing, number of efforts, and mix of efforts (free touch and online conversion) in your series.

A typical series might go like this:

Day 1 – e-mail #1, free touch. Thank the prospect for requesting your free content and reinforce its value.

Day 2 – e-mail #2, free touch. Encourage the prospect to read the free content and highlight its value. Point out some especially good ideas, tips, or strategies it contains.

Day 4 – e-mail #3, online conversion. Tell the prospect he can get more of the same content by accepting a free 30-day trial to your publication. Sell him on the publication and its value.

Day 7 – e-mail #4. Remind the prospect that he can still become an expert on the topic by getting your publication and accepting your free trial offer.

Day 14 – e-mail #5. Tell the prospect the free 30-day trial is expiring, resell him on the content you are offering, and urge him to act today. Tell him after that, it's too late.

Writing the online conversion series

Write your online conversion series e-mails the same as you would write other online and offline promotions to sell your products. Use the same copy, content, and organization. Get attention in the lead … generate interest … create desire for your product … and ask for the order.

One key difference: In your lead, always acknowledge that they are hearing from you as a follow-up to the free report or article *they asked you* to send them. This has two benefits.

First, they may feel slightly more obligated to read your message; after all, you did give them a gift. And second, if they liked the free content, it automatically puts them in a receptive mood for more of the same – even if they have to pay for it.

Should you try online conversion?

Every publisher who wants to market information products on the Internet should try an online conversion series.

Just renting an e-list of opt-in names and asking them to subscribe won't work; people who are online tend not to buy from strangers.

But send those same names an offer of a free article or report, and they will take you up on it. After all, what's to lose?

If you have targeted the right audience for your publication, and the free content you give is of high quality and value, then enough of the readers will want more of the same that they will be willing to accept a free 30-day trial of a paid subscription product on the same topic.

And if your paid subscription product is of high quality and value, a large percentage of the readers will not cancel, and you will have successfully converted free content requesters to paid buyers – your goal in online conversion.
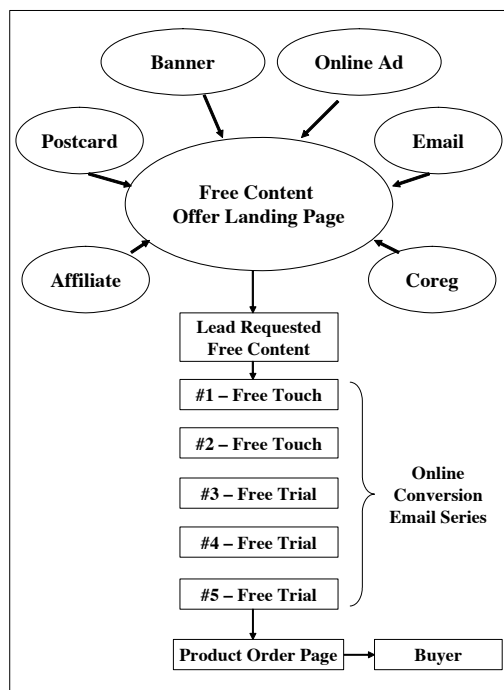

Figure 2

Section 9

15 Tips for Writing Internet Direct Mail That Works

Internet direct mail typically generates a response rate between 1 and 20 percent, although some do better and a few do worse. The copy in your e-mail plays a big role in whether your e-marketing message ends up at the bottom or the top of that range. Here are 15 proven techniques for maximizing the number of e-mail recipients who click-through to your Web site or other response mechanism.

1. At the beginning of the e-mail, put a "FROM" line and a "SUBJECT" line. The "SUBJECT" line should be constructed like a short attention-grabbing, curiosity-arousing outer envelope teaser, compelling recipients to read further – without being so blatantly promotional it turns them off. Example: "Come on back to Idea Forum!"

2. The e-mail "FROM" line identifies you as the sender if you're e-mailing to your house file. If you're e-mailing to a rented list, the "FROM" line might identify the list owner as the sender. This is especially effective with opt-in lists where the list owner (e.g., a Web site) has a good relationship with its users.

3. Some e-marketers think the "from" line is trivial and unimportant; others think it's critical. Internet copywriter Ivan Levison says, "I often use the word 'Team' in the FROM line. It makes it sound as if there's a group of bright, energetic, enthusiastic people standing behind the product." For instance, if you are sending an e-mail to a rented list of computer people to promote a new software product, your SUBJECT and FROM lines might

read as follows: FROM: The Adobe PageMill Team / SUBJECT: Adobe PageMill 3.0 limited-time offer!

4. Despite the fact that free is a proven, powerful response-booster in traditional direct marketing, and that the Internet culture has a bias in favor of free offers rather than paid offers, some e-marketers avoid FREE in the subject line. The reason is the "spam filter" software some Internet users have installed to screen their e-mail. These filters eliminate incoming e-mail, and many identify any message with FREE in the subject line as promotional.

5. Lead off the message copy with a killer headline or lead-in sentence. You need to get a terrific benefit right up front. Pretend you're writing envelope teaser copy or are writing a headline for a sales letter.

6. In the first paragraph, deliver a mini-version of your complete message. State the offer and provide an immediate response mechanism, such as clicking on a link connected to a Web page. This appeals to Internet prospects with short attention spans.

7. After the first paragraph, present expanded copy that covers the features, benefits, proof, and other information the buyer needs to make a decision. This appeals to the prospect who needs more details than a short paragraph can provide.

8. The offer and response mechanism should be repeated in the close of the e-mail, as in a traditional direct mail letter. But they should almost always appear at the very beginning, too. That way, busy Internet users who don't have time to read and give each e-mail only a second or two get the whole story.

9. John Wright, of the Internet marketing services firm MediaSynergy, says that if you put multiple response links within your e-mail message,

95 percent of click-through responses will come from the first two.
Therefore, you should probably limit the number of click-through links in
your e-mail to three. An exception might be an e-newsletter or "e-zine"
broken into five or six short items, where each item is on a different subject
and therefore each has its own link.

10. Use wide margins. You don't want to have weird wraps or breaks. Limit
yourself to about 55 to 60 characters per line. If you think a line is going to
be too long, insert a character return. Internet copywriter Joe Vitale sets
his margins at 20 and 80, keeping sentence length to 60 characters,
and ensuring the whole line gets displayed on the screen without odd
text breaks.

11. Take it easy on the all-caps. You can use WORDS IN ALL CAPS but do so
carefully. They can be a little hard to read – and in the world of e-mail, all
caps give the impression that you're shouting.

12. In general, short is better. This is not the case in classic mail-order selling
where as a general principle, "the more you tell, the more you sell." E-mail
is a unique environment. Readers are quickly sorting through a bunch of
messages and aren't disposed to stick with you for a long time.

13. Regardless of length, get the important points across quickly. If you want to
give a lot of product information, add it lower down in your e-mail
message. You might also consider an attachment, such as a Word
document, PDF file, or html page. People who need more information can
always scroll down or click for it. The key benefits and deal should be
communicated in the first screen, or very soon afterward.

14. The tone should be helpful, friendly, informative, and educational, not
promotional or hard-sell. "Information is the gold in cyberspace," says
Vitale. Trying to sell readers with a traditional hyped-up sales letter won't

work. People online want information and lots of it. You'll have to add solid material to your puffed-up sales letter to make it work online. Refrain from saying your service is "the best" or that you offer "quality," Those are empty, meaningless phrases. Be specific. How are you the best? What exactly do you mean by quality? And who says it besides you? And even though information is the gold, readers don't want to be bored. They seek, like all of us, excitement. Give it to them.

15. Including an opt-out statement prevents flaming from recipients who feel they have been spammed by stating that your intention is to respect their privacy, and making it easy for them to prevent further promotional e-mails from being sent to them. All they have to do is click on Reply and type "UNSUBSCRIBE" or "REMOVE" in the subject line. Example: "We respect your online time and privacy, and pledge not to abuse this medium. If you prefer not to receive further e-mails from us of this type, please reply to this e-mail and type 'Remove' in the subject line."

Section 10

12 More Tips for Writing Internet Direct Mail That Works

As we rapidly gain experience and test results from Internet direct mail, we are learning more every day about what works in this new medium. Here are some techniques that seem to be successful in increasing click-throughs and conversions.

1. Short statements that tease the reader, similar to "fascinations" in printed direct mail (e.g., "What never to eat on an airplane"), work well as

"SUBJECT" lines in Internet direct mail. Example: "Advice from Bill Gates" is better than "Bill Gates on Innovation."

2. As with printed direct mail, offers that contain a "bribe" – a discount, free gift, free shipping and handling, buy one and get one free – are extremely effective in e-mail marketing.

3. Free money is a powerful offer and, given the dynamics of online buying and the lifetime value of an Internet customer, it can often be profitable. Example: One marketer told potential registrants that one of them who signed up on the Web site during a specified period would win $500 in cash. A major national e-marketer offers an incredible $10 million drawing once a year as well as regular drawings with smaller cash prizes.

4. When you have a strong offer, put it in the subject line and the lead of your e-mail. Do not bury it midway in the text.

5. Do not make the offer exclusive to the recipient, as is sometimes done in traditional direct mail. Encourage the recipient to forward the e-mail – and the offer – to friends and colleagues. Example: "Give this special gift offer to your friends by forwarding them this e-mail now. They'll be glad you did!" E-marketers refer to this tactic as "viral marketing."

6. People on opt-in e-lists overwhelmingly prefer to respond to Internet direct mail online vs. calling a toll-free number or printing out a reply form that has to be faxed or mailed offline. That doesn't mean you shouldn't offer those other response options as an alternative. But you should always have a link to a Web-based response form embedded in your e-mail message. Example: A software marketer decided to offer an upgraded version only on CD-ROM with no option to download from their Web site. When they sent a direct mail with this offer, many recipients went to their Web site and

downloaded the <u>old</u> version – that's how strong their preference was to conduct the entire transaction online.

7. Most people think of an e-mail marketing campaign as having only one part: the e-mail. But in reality it has two parts: The e-mail the prospect receives, plus the Web-based response form he goes to when he clicks on the link embedded in the message. The headline and copy at the top of the response page should carry the theme of the e-mail and motivate the reader to complete and submit the form.

8. Long copy often works best in certain segments of the direct marketing industry, particularly in the marketing of newsletters, magazines, and other information products. But initial testing seems to indicate that short copy works best in e-mail marketing. One solution is to use the e-mail to get the recipient to accept a free trial rather than pay for a subscription up front. A series of conversion e-mails then gives compelling reasons for the recipient to convert to a paid subscription. Another solution: Put more sell copy on the response form.

9. One marketing manager makes this wise observation: "People don't hate Internet direct mail, but they are often bored, indifferent, or annoyed by it." One way to overcome this is through personalization: adding customized information based on the prospect's previous buying habits, preferences, Web surfing, or other data. Example: Amazon.com suggests books you should buy based on books you have ordered in the past.

10. Always include an opt-out statement that makes it easy for recipients to prevent further promotional e-mails from being sent to them. Example: "We respect your online time and privacy, and pledge not to abuse this medium. If you prefer not to receive further e-mails from us of this type, please reply to this e-mail and type 'Remove' in the subject line." Most

e-marketers put this at the end of the e-mail message; some place it at the top.

11. When e-mailing to a house file, an ideal frequency seems to be twice a month. Make one of these e-mails an informative e-zine (a brief online newsletter); the other can be a special offer or promotion. Space them 2 weeks apart. E-zines should be at least 80% news and useful information, with perhaps 20% of the content promotional.

12. Before you begin e-mailing to your house file, send them an e-mail notifying them of your intention and stating the benefits (e.g., they will get special discounts available only online). Tell them that if they'd rather not get these e-mails, they can click reply and type UNSUBSCRIBE, and you will take them off the e-mail list. On subsequent e-mails to those who agree to be on the e-list, always include the opt-out statement as outlined in top #10. Never send any e-mail marketing message without including an opt-out option.

Section 11

Traditional vs. "Guerilla" Online Marketing

There are two types of marketing in the world today: (1) "Traditional" marketing with its relatively larger budget and reliance on standard methodology and mainstream media, and (2) "guerilla" marketing, which is reliant on non-traditional tactics, alternative media, and such tools as bartering and negotiating to cut costs to a minimum.

In offline direct marketing, "traditional" usually means sending either a solo direct mail package or a catalog to a house file or rented mailing lists.

"Guerilla" direct marketing in the offline world, by comparison, can involve anything from a package insert and bill stuffer, to per inquiry advertising and late-night TV spots on cable.

In online marketing, traditional marketing usually means banner ads or e-mails sent to rented e-lists of opt-in names. Cost per thousand (CPM) for these opt-in lists is typically $150 to $400 per thousand.

"Guerilla" online marketing, by comparison, seeks to generate inquiries, make sales, and build files of online customers through CPA (cost per acquisition) deals, banner exchanges, e-zine advertising, e-list swaps, affiliate programs, co-registrations, search engine optimization, and other low-cost methods.

Cost-per-acquisition means you pay for every name that the e-mail adds to your house file. These names are captured when a recipient clicks through to your landing page, registers, and hits "submit." The prospect may be ordering a product, or simply signing up for a free e-zine or special report.

"The idea in e-mail marketing is to acquire new names for the lowest possible cost per name," says Sarah Stambler, president of E-Tactics, an e-marketing agency (www.e-tactics.com).

In this regard, CPM can be expensive. Let's say you send out 1,000 e-mails and have paid $200 to rent the names. Out of the 1,000 people, 2% (20) click through to your landing page offering a free white paper. If 10% of those click-throughs convert to a sign up, you have acquired 2 new names at a cost of $100 per name.

By comparison, some e-mail marketing agencies and consulting firms are arranging CPA deals for their clients. Here the marketer pays a fixed rate per name acquired. For one client, Stambler acquired fresh B2B leads at $5 per name on a CPA deal. However, she says that CPA deals can be tricky to arrange, and many e-list owners are not receptive.

Al Bredenberg, publisher of EmailResults.com, an online marketplace for opt-in e-mail marketing, agrees, although his site does list a number of CPA providers with contact information.

"You have a much better chance of convincing e-list owners to work on a CPA basis if you can offer a track record of conversion rates established through previous promotions," says Bredenberg. "List providers are hesitant to take a risk on an unproven product."

Offering the e-list owner a piece of the acquisition in a cost-per-order (CPO) deal can also work. "You need to offer the list owner a generous revenue share in the range of 25 to 50 percent of each order," says Al. "A very low price point doesn't stand much of a chance, unless you can prove conversion rates are very high." Stambler says offering $5 to $8 per order on a $40 product is in the right ballpark.

Another tactic favored by guerilla e-mail marketers is co-registration. This is where a Web surfer goes to a site for one offer, such as a free e-zine, and is shown other, usually similar offers he can also sign up for at the same time.

"Cost for co-registrations varies," says Stambler. "At Lycos, you can pay $2 to $3 a name. Sweepstakes sites charge 50 cents a name or so."

The nice thing about co-registration deals is that they can be tested on a small budget. For instance, if the cost is 50 cents per name, a $2,000 investment will bring you 4,000 new names.

Cost per click (CPC), where the marketer pays for every person who clicks through the embedded link in the e-mail message to the landing page, is also available. But Stambler warns against it: "Cost per click is too expensive." If you pay 10 cents a click and get 1,000 clicks, you are charged $100 total. But if only two people sign up, your cost is $50 a name.

Finally, if you prefer to do more traditional online marketing and rent an opt-in e-mail list, don't be disheartened by the high cost shown on the data card. "Price is extremely negotiable," says Jay Schwedelson, vice president, Worldata (www.worldata.com).

According to Schwedelson, business-to-consumer e-lists renting for $150 to $300 per thousand can sometimes be had for $25 to $100 per thousand, if you negotiate. On business-to-business lists renting for $200 to $450 per thousand, you may be able to negotiate a rate of anywhere from $100 to $250 per thousand.

"Only pay for actual names delivered," says Jay, noting that 32 percent of consumers change their e-mail address each year. He also says that select fees can usually be waived.

Section 12

Web Sites Must Meet Marketing Objectives … and Many Don't

Since putting up my Web site www.bly.com in April 1998, I've received a ton of unsolicited e-mails, faxes, and phone calls – from casual Internet surfers as well as Web professionals – with all sorts of advice on how to make my Web site better.

Unfortunately, more than 90 percent of their suggestions are almost totally off the mark … and would be a complete waste of my time and money.

Why is this the case? It's not that site visitors don't have valid opinions on graphics or content, or that Web professionals don't have good ideas. They do.

The problem is, all the advice is given with no thought as to the business objective of my site … and whether the enhancement would further this goal.

For example, a Web consultant called and said: "You are not getting nearly as much traffic as you should. I can help you get much more." He would advise me, he promised, on how to help my Web site get more hits than the New York Yankees. I politely explained I had absolutely no desire to increase hits to my Web site, and was not interested in what he was selling.

Frankly, he was baffled. Maybe you are too. "Who doesn't want more hits on their Web site?" you might be thinking. The answer: Plenty of folks.

Before you can meaningfully enhance a Web site, you need to understand the business of the person or company sponsoring that site … as well as the business objectives they want the site to achieve.

In the case of www.bly.com, I'm a freelance writer specializing in direct marketing. I serve a higher-end clientele – major direct marketers, Fortune 500 companies, and substantial technology firms – and charge accordingly.

This makes me different from many entrepreneurs who have Web sites – in two important ways.

First, 99.99 percent of people cruising the Internet are simply <u>not my prospects</u>. I'm highly selective, and don't work with small firms, start-ups, mom-and-pop operations, home-based businesses, and wanna-be entrepreneurs … precisely the mass market that's cruising the Internet looking for free marketing information and advice.

Second, with more business than we can handle, our office (I have two assistants) can't waste time responding to low-level leads. Handling inquiries from casual Internet surfers takes time and effort … and we need to devote those limited to the needs of our many ongoing clients.

Then why do I have a Web site? That's the key relevant question, and it's one almost no one who seeks to advise me asks.

My Web site exists primarily for instant inquiry fulfillment to qualified prospects. What does that mean? Before the Internet, when a serious prospect called, we'd send him an information package describing my services. That meant a lot of priority mail and overnight courier bills. And even with overnight shipping, the prospect often waited up to 24 hours to get his hands on the material.

Having a Web site eliminates that cost and wait. When a prospect wants a package, we can send it, but we first ask, "Do you have access to the Web?" If they do, we send them to www.bly.com where they can instantly get all the information they need to make a decision about using my services.

What should that information be? In his book *Roger C. Parker's Guide to Web Content and Design* (MIS Press), my friend Roger Parker says content should consist of two components:

- Information your prospects need to know in order to buy from you.
- Information you know that will convince prospects to buy from you.

  My web site covers both these areas. The "need to know" stuff includes:

- An overview of my services (our home page).
- An online portfolio of my copywriting samples.
- Pages on each major service (copywriting, consulting, copy critiquing).
- My credentials (on an "About Bob Bly" page).
- Client testimonials.

  The stuff that helps convince prospects that I'm the person they should hire to write their copy includes:

- Descriptions of the marketing books I've written.
- Samples of how-to articles I've written on marketing.
- A list of recommended vendors that shows I have the connections to help potential clients get whatever they need done.

As you see, my Web site is totally oriented toward the needs of my potential clients, and hardly at all to the casual Web surfer. But does this mean I don't want *you* to visit www.bly.com.? Not at all.

On the contrary: I invite you to stop by. You may enjoy reading and downloading the free articles I've posted (click on HOW-TO ARTICLES). And I'd be pleased and happy if you clicked on PUBLICATIONS and bought any of my books (though you would not be buying them directly from me – our publication page links to amazon.com, from which we get a 15 percent commission on every book they sell through our site).

And what if you're a small entrepreneur and need professional marketing help? Just click on VENDORS. You'll find a list of folks who can help you with everything from Web design to mailing lists. But do me a favor. When you call them, tell them Bob Bly sent you. They're busy too, and it helps if they know you're a qualified referral.

Section 13

5 Ways to Capture E-mail Addresses
of Landing Page Visitors

Most Internet marketers I know who use landing pages to make direct sales online focus on conversion: getting the maximum number of visitors to the landing page to place an order for the product being advertised.

Other Internet marketers, when writing landing page copy, focus not only on conversion, but also on search engine optimization: key word selection and meta tag creation that can increase traffic by raising the site's search engine rankings.

But in addition to conversions and unique visits, savvy Internet marketers are also concerned with a third performance metric: e-mail address capture.

If you have a two percent conversion rate, then for every 100 visitors to the landing page, only two buy – and of course, during these transactions, you capture the e-mail addresses of those buyers.

What happens to the other 98 visitors -- those who do not buy? You will not be able to add their e-mail address to your list unless you incorporate a deliberate methodology into your landing page to capture it.

Here are four different methodologies for capturing the e-mail addresses of landing page visitors who do not purchase. Every landing page you operate should use at least one of these methods:

1. *E-zine sign-up box*. This is a box where the visitor can get a free e-newsletter subscription just by entering his name and e-mail address. You can see an example of a simple e-zine sign-up box at www.bly.com and countless other Web sites.

The e-zine sign-up box placed prominently on the first screen is a widely used method of e-mail capture for Web sites. But it is less commonly used for micro-sites and landing pages.

The reason is that, if your headline and lead properly engage the reader's attention, he won't bother to sign up for the e-newsletter – instead, he'll
start reading.

Then, if he loses interest or reaches the end but does not order, and instead clicks away, you haven't captured his e-mail address.

2. *Squeeze pages.* Also known as preview pages, these are short landing pages that require the visitor to register – by giving his name and e-mail address – before he is allowed to go on and read the long-copy landing page. To see a squeeze page at work, visit: www.squeezepagegenerator.com.

In some cases, the long-copy landing page itself is positioned as a "report" which the visitor can read only if he submits his name and e-mail address first. For this to work, your landing page should be written in an informative, educational style.

Many squeeze pages offer a content premium, such as a free report, just for submitting your e-mail address. Those seeking to capture snail mail as well as e-mail addresses make the premium a physical object that must be shipped, such as a free CD.

Squeeze pages work well when your primary source of traffic is organic and paid search. Reason: search visitors clicking to your site are only mildly qualified, because they are making a decision to visit based on only a few words in a search engine description or paid Google ad.

Therefore, they may not be inclined to read long copy from a source they are not familiar with. A squeeze page lets them absorb the gist of your proposition in a few concise paragraphs. The main advantage of the squeeze page is that it ensures capture of an e-mail address from every visitor who reads the full landing page. In addition, these prospects have been pre-qualified, in terms of their interest in the subject, and so are more likely to stick with long copy.

3. *E-mail capture sidebars.* These are forms built into the main landing page as sidebars, again making a free offer. In a long-copy landing page, the e-mail capture sidebar usually appears early, typically in the second or third screen, and may be repeated one or more times throughout the page. Example: www.rocketfrench.com.

The drawback of the e-mail capture sidebar is that the prospect sees it before he gets too far in the sales letter, and therefore before you've sold him and ask for the order.

Therefore, the risk is that if your product teaches, say, how to speak French, and the e-mail capture sidebar offers free French lessons, the visitor will just take the free offer and feel no need to spend money on the paid offer.

4. *Pop-under.* When you attempt to click away from the landing page without making a purchase, a window appears that says something like, "Wait! Don't leave yet!" – and makes a free offer. To see how this works, go to one of my sites, www.becomeaninstantguru.com.

The big advantage of the pop-under is that the visitor sees it only *after* he has read to the point where he is leaving without ordering. Therefore, the free content offer doesn't compete with or distract visitors from the paid product offer.

The disadvantage is that about half of Internet users run pop-up blockers on their PCs, and these blockers will prevent your pop-under from showing.

5. *Floaters.* A floater looks and functions much like a pop-up window, but it's actually part of the landing page's HTML code, and therefore, won't be blocked by a pop-up blocker. You can see a floater at http://bhg.com/.

The floater blocks a portion of the landing page when you click onto the site. You can enter your e-mail or click it away without doing so. Either action removes the floater and allows you to see the complete landing page.

As you can see, all of these e-mail capture methods offer some sort of free content – typically a downloadable PDF report, e-course delivered via auto-responder, or e-zine subscription – in exchange for your e-mail address.

Why bother to maximize capture of visitor e-mail addresses on your landing pages and other Web sites?

There are two primary benefits. First, by sending an online conversion series – a sequence of e-mails delivered by auto-responder – to these visitors, you have another opportunity to convince them to buy and increase your overall conversion rate.

Second, the best names for your e-mail marketing efforts, far better than rented opt-in lists, are in your house e-list. So the faster you can build a large e-list, the more profitable your Internet marketing ventures will become.

How much more profitable? Internet marketing expert Fred Gleeck estimates that, for information product marketers, each name on your e-list is worth between ten cents and a dollar or more per name per month.

Therefore, a 50,000-name e-list could generate annual online revenues of $600,000 a year or higher. In other businesses, the sales could be significantly higher. Hewlett-Packard has 4.5 million e-zine subscribers, from whom they generate $60 million in monthly sales.*

* *B-to-B, 4/4/05.*

Section 14

Double or Triple Your Landing Page Conversion Rates with Taguchi Testing

Direct marketers are forever saying, "Test, test, test."

But in actuality, many direct marketers do little or no testing at all.

Sure, the big-volume consumer direct marketers – like Publisher's Clearinghouse and Phillips Publishing – test all the time.

But many small and mid-size companies say they don't have the budget, time, or a large enough universe to make testing worthwhile.

Even among big direct marketers, testing is often limited to simple A/B split tests – headline "A" vs. headline "B," or a price test between $99, $199, and $299.

And that's in direct mail. In space ads, A/B split testing is increasingly rare, as the majority of publications neither offer nor encourage it.

But thanks to technology … specifically the Internet … testing is undergoing a revival using a technique called "Taguchi testing."

If you're already familiar with and using Taguchi testing, you may get a few useful ideas out of this article.

But if you are not, then listening to what I am about to tell you could be the most important development in your Internet marketing this decade.

Since I am not a Taguchi expert, I won't attempt to go into the technical or statistical details, which I don't really understand anyway.

Instead, let's discuss Taguchi testing on a high level.

Specifically, Taguchi testing is a system where, with a landing page or other online direct response promotion, you test not one but many variables – economically and in a relatively short time frame.

David Bullock, President of Results Squared, a consultancy offering Taguchi testing services to direct marketers, says that his program typically involves testing the following promotion elements: three pre-heads, six headlines, three subheads, three salutations (e.g., "Dear Home Builder" vs. "Dear Lumber Buyer" vs. "Dear Wood Trader"), three lead paragraphs, three visuals (e.g., a product photo vs. a photo of the inventor vs. a photo of a happy customer), three guarantees, and three calls to action.

But you can choose to test other elements – bonuses, prices, even different lists of bullets in the copy – really, anything you want. Other factors Bullock often tests include traffic source (e.g., organic search traffic vs. Google Adwords vs. e-mail) and what he calls "predisposition to purchase."

"Predisposition to purchase" is a measure of how convinced the prospect is of the offer's value before he even clicks onto the landing page. For instance, a visitor responding to an e-mail sent by a joint venture partner to his list of loyal

readers has a greater predisposition to believe the message than a visitor who finds the page from a keyword search.

With specialized Taguchi testing software, each unique visitor to the site sees the landing page with a different combination of the elements being tested.

The results are measured, tabulated, and analyzed. Reports are generated to show which headline pulled the best, which lead paragraph pulled best, which visual pulled best, and so on.

The advantage is that you are testing multiple versions of many key variables in landing page performance, and not just two versions of one variable as is usually the case with traditional A/B split tests.

Therefore, conversion is increased incrementally for each variable, e.g., a 20 percent lift in orders for the best headline, a 17 percent increase in conversion for the best lead, and so on.

By incorporating the winning versions of all variables tested in the final landing page, Taguchi testing can double, triple, even quadruple or more the conversion rate of your landing pages.

To do Taguchi testing, you need to write complete copy for your landing page along with the needed elements listed above: the six headlines, three subheads, and so on.

Then, you give the copy to your Taguchi testing service and you are ready to roll. You can find several Taguchi testing vendors listed under "Taguchi Testing" on the Vendors page of my Web site www.bly.com.

In the "good old days," it would take many weeks, or even a couple of months, to get a valid reading on a direct mail test – and even then, it was usually just an A/B split of two different packages, prices, or headlines.

But because Taguchi testing is done online, you get the results much faster. Depending on the amount of traffic being driven to the URL and the conversion rates, says Bullock, a complete test can be completed and verified in 3 to 5 weeks.

The amount of traffic required also depends on conversion rate, since statistical validity of testing is based not on "number of pieces mailed" – or online, on amount of traffic – but on number of responses – or in the case of a landing page, number of sales made.

Typically you want to get at least 1,000 unique visits per test cell. Depending on the number of test cells, you need anywhere from 12,000 to 20,000 visits for a complete test.

Section 15

Experts Share SEO Copywriting Secrets

In November 2006, at the annual conference of the American Writers and Artists, Inc., search engine optimization (SEO) copywriter Heather Lloyd-Martin shared her methodology for writing Web pages optimized for organic search.

Heather's proven approach to SEO copywriting – she's one of the top practitioners in the field – requires a few extra steps not used in writing for print media.

First, determine the correct key words and phrases to be used in each Web page. These are the words and phrases that the Internet types into the search engine when looking for information on your product.

Copywriter Dianna Huff advises having separate pages for each product and service you offer. You then optimize each page for the specific key words and phrases related to the product or service featured on that page.

Naturally, you want to use those terms that Internet users search for most. You can find them by using such keyword research tools as Wordtracker www.worktracker.com and Keyword Discovery www.keyworddiscovery.com.

Why must you use these tools before writing each page on your Web site? Because they show you the key phrases that prospects actually type into a search box to find products and services your company offers. When you incorporate these words and phrases into your Web site copy, the search engines rank you higher in the results that show up when searches on those words and phrases are performed.

The second step is to select, from the most frequently searched terms, two or three key phrases that are targeted for your Web page and grammatically fit into your copy for that page.

When writing copy for a Web page, make sure each of the two or three key phrases you selected appears at least three to four times within your copy – more if you can make it fit. But avoid "key word stuffing" – over-use of key words that makes copy sound awkward and artificial.

Read what you have written aloud. If your text sounds like spam, delete some of the key phrases until the copy is less stilted, and more natural and conversational. Remember, you are writing for human beings first, and computer algorithms second. The key phrases must smoothly flow within the writing.

Example: say the most frequently searched word for your product is "used widgets," and you are having a half-off widget sale. A good headline for your Web page might be: "Save 50% on XYZ Company's used widgets."

Where do you drop these key phrases into your copy? Place them in each Web page's headline and subheads, the main text (top to bottom), and the call to action links (hyperlinks). Use key words as underlined hyperlinks, e.g., <u>dental veneers</u>, <u>teeth whitening</u>.

In your copy, write benefit statements near your main key phrases. When Google displays a brief excerpt of your page content in its search results, the benefit statement will appear along with the key word, enticing prospects to click through to the page.

Huff says descriptive key word phrases containing two to four words are better than single key words, e.g., "Boston cosmetic dentists" is better than "dentists." Reason: a patient in the Boston area needing cosmetic dentistry can more easily find your site.

Another way to optimize your Web pages for the search engines is with meta tags. These are key words or phrases embedded within the HTML code used to create each Web page.

As far as SEO goes, the most important meta tags are Title, Description, and Keywords. These tags control what surfers see when your site is listed in the search engines, which means they help people decide whether to visit your site.

"Title" is what your visitors see at the top of their browser window when visiting your site. Make sure each page has a title that makes sense to your visitors.

Be descriptive. Failure to put strategic key words and phrases in the page title is often why Web pages are poorly ranked. Title meta tags should be 50 to 75 characters including spaces.

"Description" is the opening statement people see when your Web site comes up in search engine findings. The description should concisely answer the question, "What is your product or service and what does it do for the customer?" Recommended length: 50 to 175 characters, again including spaces.

"Keyword" meta tags, as the name implies, are the key words and phrases that Internet users search most often when looking for your product or service. In

addition to strategically placing these key words and phrases in your Web copy, they should also be listed in your meta tags.

Don't cram the keyword meta tag with every key word and phrase you find using the research tools; five to seven key words in the meta tag is ideal.

Look at the meta tags on *your* Web site. From your browser's tool bar, choose the "view" menu and then click on "source" to open a Window containing the HTML code for that page. If they don't fit the criteria above, rewrite to improve.

One more point: these SEO copywriting tips apply primarily to pages on traditional Web sites. Search engines typically rank long-copy landing pages low, and SEO copywriting does not significantly improve the rankings of single-page Web sites.

About the author:

BOB BLY is an independent copywriter and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in business-to-business, high tech, industrial, and direct marketing.

Bob has written copy for over 100 clients including Network Solutions, ITT Fluid Technology, Medical Economics, Intuit, Business & Legal Reports, and Brooklyn Union Gas. Awards include a Gold Echo from the Direct Marketing Association, an IMMY from the Information Industry Association, two Southstar Awards, an American Corporate Identity Award of Excellence, and the Standard of Excellence award from the Web Marketing Association.

He is the author of more than 50 books including *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Direct Marketing* (Alpha Books) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt & Co.). His articles have appeared in numerous publications such as *DM News, Writer's Digest, Amtrak Express, Cosmopolitan, Inside Direct Mail*, and *Bits & Pieces for Salespeople.*

Bob has presented marketing, sales, and writing seminars for such groups as the U.S. Army, Independent Laboratory Distributors Association, American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and the American Marketing Association.

He also taught business-to-business copywriting and technical writing at New York University.

Bob writes sales letters, direct mail packages, ads, e-mail marketing campaigns, brochures, articles, press releases, white papers, Web sites, newsletters, scripts, and other marketing materials clients need to sell their products and services to businesses. He also consults with clients on marketing strategy, mail order selling, and lead generation programs.

Prior to becoming an independent copywriter and consultant, Bob was advertising manager for Koch Engineering, a manufacturer of process equipment. He has also worked as a marketing communications writer for Westinghouse Defense. Bob Bly holds a B.S. in chemical engineering from the University of Rochester and has been trained as a Certified Novell Administrator (CNA). He is a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the Business Marketing Association.

Bob has appeared as a guest on dozens of TV and radio shows including MoneyTalk 1350, The Advertising Show, Bernard Meltzer, Bill Bresnan, CNBC, Winning in Business, The Small Business Advocate and CBS Hard Copy. He has been featured in major media ranging from the LA Times and Nation's Business to the New York Post and the National Enquirer.

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