

60 Ways To Increase Your Mail Order Catalog Sales

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60 Ways To Increase Your Mail Order Catalog Sales

Perfection in a mail order catalog is like infinity...you can continually approach it but never quite reach it. In the case of many catalogs, however, it is not necessary to achieve perfection or even approach it very closely - in order to make the catalog vastly more profitable than it is at present. Relatively small improvements can result in a more-than-proportionate enlargement of that all-important figure on the bottom line of the financial statement.

Making as many improvements as possible as quickly as possible is probably the most profitable procedure. But even making each new catalog a little better than the one which preceded it can produce substantial increases in sales per catalog and in total sales over a period of time.

Following are 60 suggestions that should help your catalog do a better selling job for you if you are not already using these ideas. Whether you use all of them in connection with your next catalog or adopt a few at a time in the course of producing several future catalogs, the ultimate result should be very noticeable and very gratifying.

BEFORE YOU CREATE YOUR CATALOG....

1. Look at your present catalog with extremely cold, critical and unsympathetic eye. Pick out all the faults-large or small-that you could find if you were no longer the owner of the catalog but a nitpicking customer who has been disappointed in his or her last purchase from you and is still sore about it. Such a review could be very enlightening-even if it should prove slightly embarrassing-and could make your new catalog much more profitable.
2. Put your "letterman" on your team. Review all incoming correspondence from customers and prospects during the last two years for comments, suggestions or criticisms that may be helpful in preparing your new catalog. Screen all future correspondence of this nature as it arrives and place copies of the useful letters in a special file to be reviewed before starting your next catalog.
3. Think of your catalog as a means of helping your prospects accomplish something they want to accomplish or create an effect they want to create-and prepare your layouts, copy and illustrations accordingly.
4. For each major type of product you sell, determine as many reasons as possible why different groups of prospects or

customers do buy or should buy this product. Arrange your groups of prospects or customers in their orders of importance. For each group arrange the reasons for buying in order of their importance. Then arrange the reasons in their order of importance to your total group of prospects or customers. Use the most important reasons as the basis for the copy and illustrations you use in this catalog.

If there are significant differences in the primary reasons for purchasing different types of products, make the presentation for each specific type of product fit the product of using the same type of presentation for different types of products...

5. If the preceding reasons indicate that different appeals are needed for different groups of prospects or customers, change the wrap-around, letter or introductory page of your catalog to appeal to different groups, and separate your mailings accordingly.

6. Plan your catalog completely before you start preparing layouts and copy.. Use all 60 suggestions in this list as your guide for your planning..

7. Plan to ring your cash register more often by using approaches in tune with the times.

8. Plan to attract new customers-reactivate dormant customers-and get bigger and better orders from present customers by adding new and excitement and extras pleasure to owning or using the types of products offered in your catalog.. For example, feature dramatic new items, unusual items, items that are especially timely, etc... Include unusual facts of interest about specific items.

9. Plan to add interest to your catalog-and give it a much longer life--by including helpful information on how to use, operate and maintain your products...unusual uses, etc.. This is information that customers can use to advantage and will want to keep for future reference, Such information also increases customer confidence in your company which correspondingly increases the customer's inclination to buy from you.

10.. Determine whether items that were unprofitable or barely profitable in the present catalog should be promoted more vigorously in the new catalog or should be dropped and replaced by new products, Never keep an unprofitable product in your catalog just because it is one of your favorites. If it doesn't sell, get rid of it!

11. Give your company a distinctive personality. Promote this personality in all future catalogs as a means of making your company not "jut another mail order marketer" but a very special

marketer in the minds of your prospects and customers.

WHEN YOU CREATE YOUR NEW CATALOG...

Use Procedure 12 to 19 to make your prospects want your products:

12. Write your copy to tie in with and stimulate the specific reasons for buying discussed in the preceding section.

13. Wherever possible show your prospects how your merchandise can accomplish the results desired by the prospects to a greater degree than competitive products-and prove it by citing results of lab tests, field tests, awards received, other special recognition- and especially testimonials and case history stories, preferably with photographs. Give the prospect every possible incentive to buy from you rather than somebody else.

14. Put special emphasis on your products and/or services which are exclusive or markedly superior to those of your competitors-and tell your readers WHY your products and/or services are superior!

15. Take the prospect "behind the scenes" if practical and show what you do (especially exclusive or improved procedures) to make your products better than competitive products.

16. Make the most of new items the first time you offer them; they are only new once.. Give them every opportunity to succeed saleswise by giving them preferred position and allowing adequate space for you to do a proper educational and selling job on them at the time they are introduced.

17. Assure prospects that it is easy to use these products...that instructions are included with each order (if true) and/or are available in specific books or magazines (preferably obtainable from you)...and cite case histories to prove how successful other customers have been in using them.

18. Tell prospect how to start using your merchandise properly and what other action should be taken-and when-or state that this information will be included with the shipment.

19. If your products are bought primarily for pleasure or are considered a luxury or "non-necessity", help the prospect rationalize the value of the purchase.

Use Procedures 20 to 26 to make it as easy as possible for the prospect to make an accurate selection of the types of merchandise and the specific items of each type best suited for his or her purposes:

20. Group all items of the same type in the same section of your

catalog.

21. Arrange the groups of items in their present or potential order of importance to you profitwise. Put the most important group at the front of your catalog and the least important near the end of your catalog (but not on the last three pages).

22. Within each group, arrange the individual items in descending order of quality, price, popularity or promotional possibilities.

Give the most important items the most valuable positions and extra space for copy and illustrations. Allocate positions and space to the other items in the order of their importance.

23. If practicable, use the Sears system of offering the same type of item in three different qualities-- GOOD, BETTER and BEST- with different price ranges to match the differences in quality. Usually it is more effective to talk about the BEST quality first and the GOOD quality last.

24. Use COMMON copy to present features or qualities that are the same for all or most items of the same type.

25. Use INDIVIDUAL copy to talk about the features or qualities that make each specific item different from all or most of the other specific items in the group.

26. In preparing the INDIVIDUAL copy above, use "parallel construction" to help the prospect make a point-by-point comparison of the specific items as quickly, easily and accurately as possible.

Once the prospects have selected the merchandise they wish to buy, make it as easy as possible for them to order Procedures 27-31

27. Be sure your ordering information is easy to understand.

28.. Make your order form easy to use, with adequate space to write the necessary information.

29. Put in one or more extra order forms to make it easier for customers to order again..

30. Encourage prospects to order by phone on credit, charge or c.o.d. sales and encourages them to telephone for further information they may desire.

31. Offer a 24-hour phone-in service through an arrangement with a local telephone answering service who can answer your phone during the hours that your business is nor normally open.. This

is especially convenient for the customer who shops in your catalog during evening or weekend hours.

Make it as easy as possible for customers to pay for their orders
Procedures 32 and 33

Offer credit card service on orders for a specified amount or more.. By putting a minimum on credit card orders you will often increase the original order to at least that minimum amount. Credit card orders tend to be nearly double the size of cash orders.

33. Make it easy to determine shipping charges so they can be included in cash-with-order payments.

Use order starters and sales stimulators such as 34 to 42

34. Use a wrap-around letter on the front of your catalog to stimulate ,ore orders and to do a selling job on the merchandise in the catalog; also to make special appeals to special groups or call attention to merchandise in the catalog of special interest to special groups.

35. Use the wrap-around to offer order starters (loss leaders or hot items to get prospects in to the catalog).

36. Offer specials at intervals throughout the catalog to entice readers to start an order. Once they buy even one lonely item they'll tend to order other items to go with it.

37. Offer logical assortments of mixed or matched seasonal items to provide extra variety and pleasure at any given period of time. Make suggestions for these assortments and provide inducements for prospects to order them.

38. Offer assortments of mixed or matched items designed for use during different seasons in order to provide variety and pleasure throughout the year (or most of it) instead of during just one season.

39. Offer a free guide or plan for using each assortment above correctly and offer information on how to make the most effective overall use of the assortments.

40. Offer a gift or discount for orders of certain sizes and use a stairstep graduated approach to increase the value of these discounts or gifts as the size of the order increases.

41. Offer a gift-shipping with gift cards.

42. Provide extra services such as "Seeker Service" for items not listed in the catalog. Through extra service techniques you will make your customers more dependent on the information you provide and they will become more dedicated customers.

Stimulate promptness in ordering Procedures 43 and 44

43. Use action incentives to spark early orders, such as premiums for ordering by a specified date; special offers for a limited time only; etc. When a time limit is involved, send a reminder (letter, promotional mailing, second catalog, etc) timed to arrive two weeks ahead of expiration date (as nearly as you can time it with current third class mail service).

44. Mention frequently and prominently in your catalog that anyone who orders merchandise from this catalog will automatically receive the next catalog free. If you wish, this offer can be modified to require the purchase of a specified amount during the life of the catalog or by a specified date.

Other suggestions Procedures 45 to 53

45. Use the back cover of your catalog for special offers; also the inside front and back covers and the pages facing the inside covers.

46. Use teaser copy and cross-references throughout the catalog to entice readers (into other sections. This can be especially effective when related accessory items are sold.

47. Concentrate service information on a Service Page; locate it on a page conveniently adjacent to the order form; and use frequent cross-references to this page throughout the catalog to stimulate extra page traffic.

48. Humanize yourself and your catalog by making it seem like the catalog came from helpful, friendly people. If your business is truly a "family business" don't hide that fact.

49. Watch your language! Avoid using technical "industry or business jargon" in your selling and service copy; keep legal phraseology to the absolute minimum in your guarantee.

50. Make your entire catalog harmonious in layout and copy style but not monotonous. Include enough variety to keep the reader interested instead of becoming bored.

51. Give your catalog a longer life by emphasizing the length of time that you will be able to ship from it and suggesting that readers keep the catalog for future reference.

52. Ask for referrals from your satisfied customers; also names of friends who might like to receive a copy of the catalog. Consider testing the "cluster concept" that neighbors are very similar and nail to your customers next door neighbors.

53. Sell subscriptions to your catalog by providing a location on the catalog for readers to remit 50 cents for a "full years subscription to your catalog." You can also suggest that they give a "gift subscription" to a friend very inexpensively (and thus pay for the catalog you mail to the referral).

AFTER YOU CREATE YOUR NEW CATALOG...

54. Use the basic or major catalog to establish the value and regular price of the merchandise. Use other, smaller catalogs or solo mailings to promote sales from the major catalog or to provide special reasons for buying (reduced prices on individual items or special assortments, closeout, etc).

55. Ask the recipient to pass the catalog along to an interested friend if the recipient already has a copy or is no longer interested in this type of merchandise.

56. Re-mail the same catalog to your better customers 3 to 5 weeks after you mail it the first time.

57. Prepare an alternate cover for the catalog and mail the same catalog to your entire list several weeks later. You'll find it will do just about as well as the first mailing did.

58. Mail to your BETTER CUSTOMERS monthly, featuring items carried in the catalog- don't rely solely on the once-or-twice-a-year catalog.

59. Use your catalog as a package stuffer-enclose one with every order you ship. Your best prospect is the person who just placed an order with you and received prompt and safe delivery of the items ordered.

60. Be prompt in acknowledging orders (with thanks), answering inquiries, shipping merchandise and making refunds or exchanges if necessary. Remember the old adage of that great retailer Marshall Field, "the customer is always right." Less than 2% of the population will intentionally try to take advantage of you and the other 98% are well worth cultivating.

...And just as every good mail order catalog has something extra thrown in for good measure make the customer happier...here's our extra one for good measure!

61. If you receive a change-of-address notice from one of your customers, immediately mail a copy of your catalog addressed to "The New Residents at (the former address of the customer)" because the new residents probably has tastes and interests very similar to those of your customer-after all, he bought the same house! To give this mailing added power, you might tip a note

onto the front cover of the book stating that "the Smiths used our catalog regularly, maybe you'll find it equally useful."