

Write Sales Letters... That Sell!

Never separate yourself from the community.—Hillel

by Adam D. Bishop, MBA

The sales letter can be an extremely valuable marketing tool for your agency. Because the sales letter is perceived as person-to-person communication, it captures one of the key advantages over other marketing media in your mix—the voice of one person speaking to another. Our experience has been that a mailing containing a sales letter will perform better than a mailing without one.

Who do you send your sales letter to?

You should send your letter to referral sources—people whom you deem to be influential over those who are considering or are in immediate need of Home Care services. The following is a list of referral sources that will provide your agency with the most referrals.

- ✓ Case Managers (HMO's, Insurance Companies)
- ✓ Discharge Planners (Hospitals)
- ✓ Elderly (65–85 years of age)
- ✓ Children with elderly parents
- ✓ Trust Officers
- ✓ Administrators of assisted living facilities
- ✓ Physicians (General Practitioners)
- ✓ Funeral Home Directors
- ✓ and other high probability referral sources

The best source for finding your list is the Standard Rate and Data Services (SRDS). This catalog/directory contains every commercially available mailing list, including source details, select prospects, and reference to list broker by category. This is where I recommend that you begin your search for the right list. Most main city public libraries have a current or year-old set of SRDS directories. Two great sources for prospect lists are:

1. Best Mailing Lists 1-800-NYC-BEST

2. Act One Mailing List Services 1-800-ACT-LIST

What are the Benefits of using a Sales Letter?

The sales letter can help your agency generate an immediate cash flow surge into your agency. How can it do this? A well-written sales letter, which contains a direct response message or an offer directed towards your prospect, compels the reader to take immediate action. There are very few marketing media that stimulate such prompt action from the prospect.

The sales letter provides your agency the opportunity to package its sales strategy and clone it! No matter how many sales people your agency has, it would be impossible to cold-call each and every potential prospect and deliver your sales presentation to them. There just isn't enough time to be able to physically accomplish this daunting task. But, by packaging your sales presentation into a letter, your agency can reach all of your prospects—not only once, but as many times as you need in order to make the sale.

Benefits of a Sales Letter

- ✓ 100% chance that your prospect will see your sales message!
- ✓ Person-to-person communication
- ✓ Increased response rate of direct-mail package
- ✓ Multiple sales presentations without face-to-face meetings
- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✓ Achieves a direct response from prospects
- ✓ Can include a promotion/sales offer
- ✓ Can test and/or change sales offer/promotion on demand
- ✓ Can include testimonials from happy clients

How do people read sales letters?

Writing interesting copy, having great testimonials and providing an irresistible sales/promotional offer isn't enough to create that perfect sales letter. You must be aware of *how* your prospect will read your letter so that you can learn to compose the layout of your sales letter for maximum readership. People tend to scan a letter from top to bottom, looking for graphically emphasized words or phrases (headlines, sub-headlines, captions, characters in uppercase, bold or italic type, underline, etc.). By using graphically emphasized words or phrases, your prospect will stop for a fraction of a second (according to some marketing experts, about two-tenths of a second) to read that one small part. This allows you to control what you want your prospect to focus on in your letter.

Spots on the letter that can grab your reader's attention:

- ✓ Headline above salutation
- ✓ Signature area
- ✓ Postscript (P.S.)
- ✓ First few paragraphs of your letter
- ✓ Highlighted copy
- ✓ Captions under an image
- ✓ Quotations and testimonials

Readers generally look at the signature area and glance at the P.S. before returning to the top of the first page. All of this takes just seconds. This holds true whether or not your letter *is* personalized with the recipient's name or has a generic greeting, like "Dear Discharge Planner." However, if your letter is personalized, the recipient will first look at his or her name, and *then* check the signature at the bottom of the letter. Then the recipient will resume the usual scanning pattern.

Do not underestimate the value of writing letters to prospective clients and referral sources. Good basic communication is good basic marketing. For example, if you write a letter to former clients, you will want to begin by thanking them for having used your services. Then tell them about the new services you have introduced, and any "special rates" or "discounts" you wish to promote. This is good communication, and it is very good marketing!

Your letter should:

- ▶ **Answer one basic question:** "What makes your agency so different that I, the reader, should do business with you?"
- ▶ **Be informative.** If someone is truly interested, they will want as much information as they can get so they can make a good decision.
- ▶ **Identify the key benefits your services will offer** to each of the individuals to whom you are writing.
- ▶ **Answer every objection they might have.**

Send direct mail letters out at least three times. This generally doubles your response. To determine if direct mail is profitable, calculate the cost of mailing, including printing and postage. Calculate how much you profit from the mailing. If your profit is less than the cost to mail, that is when you stop mailing.