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# **A 75-Point Checklist for Your Direct Mail**

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*By Jeffrey Dobkin*

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# A 75-Point Checklist for Your Direct Mail

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## Envelope

- ✔✔ Teaser Copy - Objective: Open package!
- ✔✔ Use the Jeff Dobkin 100-to-1 Rule: write 100 lines, go back and pick out your best one
  - Remember - people sort their mail over the wastebasket
- ✔✔ Best General Teaser Line Ever?
  - ✔✔ **“Gift Certificate Enclosed”**
    - Cheap to print
    - Light to ship
    - High perceived value
    - Direct at overstocked or deep margin merchandise
    - Easy to track
  - Free Gift Offer
  - Check enclosed [offer]
  - Wholesale pricing enclosed
  - Write on every envelope “Open Immediately...”
- ✔✔ Alternate to teaser
  - Name and business address on corner card
  - Corporate headquarters on corner card
  - Fake check in window
- ✔✔ Postage
  - Printed stamp, actual stamp, meter, or indicia
  - Recommend: “Standard Mail”
  - Bulk Rate Design - is now “Standard Mail” -
    - Don’t you dare say bulk rate!
  - Recommend: Pitney Bowes Stamp with “Bulk Rate” in very small letters, vertical.
  - Indicia with very, very small “Bulk Rate”
- Postal Discounts
  - ✔✔ Start with envelope size first and work backward -
    - Envelope is where you START your package design.
    - Keep size in mind when creating interior
  - ✔✔ Make sure your envelope won’t cause additional mailing expense
- Addressing
  - Window or closed face?
    - Window - more business oriented. Official looking.
    - Better than labels, which are always my last choice
  - ✔✔ Great teaser can overcome a label
    - Direct imaging on envelope - best: Builds credibility
  - Order Early - envelopes often have the longest lead time. Inside Tint - not expensive but needs still more time

## Order Card

### Criteria For Success: 2 very key elements

- ✔✔ 1. Can someone order from this card if they found it laying on their desk?
  - ✔✔ 2. Would they want to?
  - ✔✔ Don’t beat around the bush - it’s no secret this is the order card!
    - Say on the top of the form:
      - \_\_\_Yes! Please Rush Me...
      - \_\_\_Yes! Send me my 3 FREE GIFTS!
  - ✔✔ Graphics match offer - but mostly match audience!
    - ✔✔ USE ITALICS - IT’S OK, REALLY!
    - ✔✔ Mark it “Rush Order Form!”
- Would you rather order from an Order Form or from a Rush Order Form!**

- ✔✔ The order card should contain a brief recap of the entire offer, including price, free gift, guarantee - so savvy prospects can order directly from this card after they throw out everything else. Make sure someone finding this card can - and will want to - order.

### Address Block:

- Room for name, address, and phone - with 14-point leading (Hey, all you old guys - remember leading? With real lead?)
- ✔✔ Leave appropriate room for information -
  - State only needs room for 2 letters. Anything else is a waste.
  - Phone only needs 10 spaces. Any arguments?
  - Lots of room for card number. Move expire date after to after signature, use a smaller block for the signature. Reason: Would you rather be able to read the credit card numbers clearly, or read the signature (which you probably won’t be able to read anyhow - it’s a formality for charge orders).
  - For clearest printing or numbers: Vertical line set next to a one pica (12 points) underscore. To get a vertical line thin and short, use a smaller point size (5 or 6 point) |\_|\_|\_|\_|\_| (not |\_|\_|\_|\_|\_|), adjust underscore width by character size also.
- ✔✔ Leave a prominent place for the list code.
- ✔✔ Color cards differently for different offers, prices - this makes it easier for cashiering.
- ✔✔ BEST: Pre-print your order card with a name and address - you can then use it as the address label to show through a window envelope. Pre-addressing the order form or order card insures you’ll capture your Priority Code Number (for tracking).
- ✔✔ **Copy Point: Encourage calls.** Show your TOLL FREE PHONE NUMBER in LARGE NUMBERS. Don’t forget, even though this is an order card, still go for the CALL - it’s the FASTEST, and most immediate, gratification for customers, and the fastest, most positive way to get orders for you. Say “For *fastest delivery* order TOLL FREE - CALL 800-234-4332!” Encourage questions: “Your questions are also most welcome!” because they encourage sales. I talk to people who only have websites - and don’t encourage people to call. I have a name for them: “Less busy.” Sure, you can get away with this if you’re E-Bay.
- ✔✔ Copy Point: Write “PLEASE PRINT” over the fill-in name and address area so customers do.
- ✔✔ Copy Point: “Please include correct amount or your order will be delayed!” This line helps insure correct amount is enclosed with order.
- ✔✔ Include your Guarantee
  - Place your guarantee in a graphic that shouts “Yo Buddy - here’s your GUARANTEE!” Box it off with a few embellishments. If your guarantee is “We shall sell no wine before its time,” you may want to look around for a better one.
  - Need a great guarantee? There are lots of great guarantees - just get a few catalogs.
- ✔✔ Make sure your order card fits in the order envelope.
  - (I guarantee you’ll only make this mistake once!)
- ✔✔ Get free spec samples from the paper houses - make sure everything fits.
- ✔✔ Include your company name and address on form - in case someone needs to know it!
- ✔✔ **Bottom Line:** The order card should contain everything customers need to know about your offer, so they can order directly from the card after they throw out everything else.
- ✔✔ Check to make sure it FITS into the Reply Envelope again.

## Reply Envelope

Do you need this? Do you want a reply?

- ✔ Checklist of what must be printed on envelope:
  - “\_\_Order Form Enclosed”
  - “\_\_Payment or Credit Card information enclosed”
  - “\_\_Name and shipping address - no PO boxes, please.”Everything else is secondary.
- ✔ Include a “From” box in envelope corner the customer fills in:
  - This is your second chance to make sure you have their name and address spelled correctly if you can’t make out their writing on the order form.
- ✔ Check blocks for
  - \_\_Rush Order Enclosed!
  - \_\_Entry (into contest) Enclosed!
  - \_\_Correspondence Enclosed!Separate envelopes in early pre-processing before cashiering.
- ✔ Don’t forget on back of envelope to print “For Questions Or For Fastest Delivery Call Us TOLL FREE: 800-234-4332!”
- ✔ Include your phone number for questions (and orders)
  - When you get a question call, ask if you can take the order now. You’ll get \$\$ faster, they’ll get their order faster - you’ll get more re-orders.
- ✔ Use Special Colors - big blocks of it - or an overall tint = Better Delivery!!!! I guarantee this will help if you’re the proud owner of PO BOX 13749602.
  - Different tints can show different prices, different offers, different lists.
- ✔ Check to make sure all correspondence being returned fits.
- ✔ Insert components in what order? Don’t let the mailhouse set the order, or which way each piece is facing. Envelope last.
- ✔ Is this a limited mailing of a personalized campaign? For best response here - place a live stamp on the reply envelope.
- ✔ Order the envelope early - it has the longest delivery time.

## The Brochure

Purpose: It’s designed to BRING CREDIBILITY TO THE LETTER

- Supports the letter. Shows features with benefits.
- Shows you are a real firm - includes pictures.
- Customers can order with confidence - their order will arrive and they’ll be happy and satisfied.
- ✔ Clearly show what you are selling: Jeff Dobkin’s 5-Second Rule: can readers tell what you are selling in 5 seconds or less?
- ✔ Splash with color! Here’s that place to turn on the four-color!
  - Design it to keep people in package longer - the longer they stay in the package, the more likely they will buy.
- ✔ Bulleted lists work well and have high readership.
- ✔ Photo captions have highest readership, use a benefit here.
- ✔ Extensive use of compelling subheads...
  - Use imaginative subheads over all copy blocks
  - Use Jeff Dobkin’s 100-to-1 Rule - write 100 subheads, go back and pick out your best one!
  - Show product, because you can’t in the letter.
  - Technical, semi-technical, with mixed in benefits: Most people don’t care if it’s a .050” tube with a .12” wall thickness - but it makes you sound like you know what you’re talking about and your product is well developed.
- ✔ Design brochure to fit the envelope.
  - The brochure tells, the letter sells.
- ✔ Check The final weight.
- ✔ Check the final weight again.

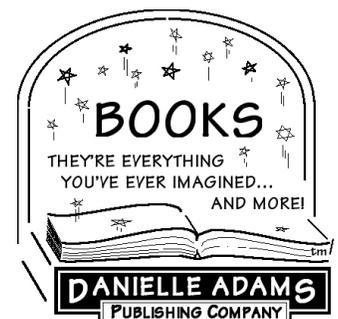
## Copy/Offer

- ✔ Start out with the objective to keep the reader in the package and interested in what you have to say.
- ✔ The first line or two doesn’t sell, it just gets their attention and ques their interest. Create these lines with the 100-to-1 Rule.
- ✔ Then, lead with your biggest benefits and best offer first!
  - How can you best express your offer? Add to offer:
    - Buy one, get one FREE!
    - Hurry up incentive - limited time offer!
    - FREE GIFT with offer!
- ✔ **Great price** - put it up front, early in package.
  - Mediocre price** - move to middle after benefits.
  - Poor price** - bury 3/4 of the way through package after the benefits and explanation of free gifts.
- ✔ Think: Who is the exact person you are making this offer to?
  - Who is your PRIMARY target? Don’t forget - this is the person you are writing to.
- ✔ Who in your firm decides what price is best? Answer: no one!
  - TEST! Let the market select the best price
- ✔ Include FREE GIFT, better yet, 3 FREE GIFTS!
  - Best Gifts: Printed materials** - they are cheap to produce, ship easily, and require little or no inventory.
- ✔ **Booklet Titles Drive the Offer - and Response.** You can have people order just to get the premiums - which is OK with me.
- ✔ Long packages are only for professional writers.
  - The Jeff Dobkin 2-Paragraph Rule of Readership Survival:
    - whenever you have 2 paragraphs back-to-back that are dull or boring your readership will fall off, so will your income.
- ✔ Long package if consultive sell, or expensive product.
- ✔ In support of long copy: You are writing a package for the two people in 100 who are thinking about buying - these are the two people you are writing for, not the other 98.
- ✔ Purchasers will read your long copy because 1) they are ready to buy and interested and hungry for information, 2) they are looking for reassurance that they have made the right decision, 3) it is the only reading material in the bathroom.
- ✔ In larger sales or B2B mailings recipients may throw out your long 4-page letter, but will be happy to read 4, 1-page letters!
  - This will also build continuity.

## The Letter

- ✔ Letters can increase your response by 30 to 40%.
- ✔ Use a letterhead with a selling or endearing (branding) slogan.
- ✔ Most effective space in your letter? Upper right-hand side of first page. Use a Johnson Box. Summarize your best offer and FREE gift there. OK to set in different type style.
- ✔ Write the widest salutation - Too narrow a salutation will turn off readers. Options: “Dear Colleague,” Add “and Friend,” after salutation. Neighborhood alignment: “Dear Neighbor,”

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## Letter Layout

- ✔✔ Make it look like a letter; Courier style type - set solid:12/12  
Short on space? Select typeface accordingly:  
Courier 10/12 or even 10/11. Still need more space? Use Bookman 8/9 or New Century Schoolbook.  
Still really, really short on space? Use Times Roman  
Indent all paragraphs 4 or 5 spaces. FL - RR, never justify.  
Dobkin Rounding Technique: first line shorter on right than subsequent lines in paragraph.
- ✔✔ DON'T LET THE COMPUTER CALL THE LINE ENDINGS!  
Your computer is STUPID - it doesn't know what looks good, or what makes the most sense in terms of breaking a line.  
Adjust copywriting for widows/orphans.  
No paragraph longer than 7 lines, max.  
Vary paragraph length.
- ✔✔ **Foreshortened paragraph in center**  
May be smaller type, italics, or different typestyle -  
This is a good way to save on space if your letter is too long.  
Attracts eye to this area.  
Breaks up copy into better-looking blocks.  
You - yes, you - you need this in EVERY letter.
- ✔✔ Bulleted list of benefits in center
  - Bulleted lists have highest readership.
- ✔✔ Use letter design graphic elements:  
**Bold** - once a paragraph or just a few times in letter. Does the bold inadvertently break across two lines? If just a few words are in bold don't run on two different lines  
*Italics* - emphasize action words, phrases. Less intrusive.  
Underline occasionally, don't break onto two lines  
CAPITALS - use only once or twice in letter.
- ✔✔ **FREE** - always set in caps. Use FREE in prominent word-placement positions like corners and end of lines. Set 2 points larger if possible, so it stands out.  
Dash - keeps people reading, use frequently.
- ✔✔ Keep letter adjusted for scanning readers. If their eye drifts down the page does it fall on a coherent story.
- ✔✔ **Sign Legibly**  
Your signature may be referred to as "the great scribble" by your office, but customers want something they can read and a name they can relate to.  
Always use a "P.S."  
Restate offer, give biggest benefits.  
Offer premiums or gifts again.  
Show guarantee unless blocked off elsewhere.  
Ask for action twice, give phone number again.
- ✔✔ **Give Phone number several times in letter.**
- ✔✔ **Ask for order several times!**
- ✔✔ One page letters are OK if you...
  - If you don't need to sell too hard
  - If you don't need to explain anything
  - If the audience is familiar with your product/service
- ✔✔ If letter is slightly too long for one page:  
These tips are shown in preferred order -
  1. Look for widows that can be eliminated.
  2. Steal space by reducing leading between paragraphs.
  3. Reduce type size/leading or use a condensed typeface .
  4. Bring copy margins out to edge of page, allow letter to run from top to bottom of page, then reduce printer output to 90%. This will reduce printed vertical dimension by one inch, and reduce horizontal dimension by 3/4 inch.
- ✔✔ If your letter must run to two pages  
Least favorite way: print on back of page one (I only do this when there is a weight restriction or the budget is tight.)
- ✔✔ If weight allows, go to two separate pages  
Preferred: Use an 11 x 17 inch sheet, print on pages 1 and 3.

**My Preferences** - there are no 2-page letters. Go to an 11 x 17 inch sheet, create a 3-page letter. Back page may be left open, or better yet continue with light letter copy, or a separate ad on the back that doesn't look like part of the letter.

## Order Form/Catalogs

- ✔✔ If you have a 50-page catalog, how many order forms do you have in it? Only one? Let's talk!  
Preaddressed is best - you'll get all tracking info and won't have to struggle reading someone's handwriting - at least for their name and address.  
Have your phone number in bold to encourage calls.
- ✔✔ Shipping Costs - are you penalizing people for ordering more?  
Doesn't a larger order mean you have more room to bury a shipping cost?
- ✔✔ Are your part numbers for each item designed to help you internally or assist the customer in their ease of ordering?

## Lists

The MOST important element in any mailing.

RFM? Compiled? Response? Confused? See the chapter "How to Buy a Great Mailing List" in the book, *Uncommon Marketing Techniques!*

- ✔✔ 12 places to buy a list  
Magazine Publisher's subscribers list • List Brokers • List Compilers • Associations (Check out these awesome directories: *National Trade and Professional Associations of the United States* - from Columbia Books: 888-265-0600, and *The Encyclopedia of Associations* by The Gale Group (800-877-GALE) • Trade Show Attendees - for schedules check out [www.TSCentral.com](http://www.TSCentral.com) & [www.tradeshowdataweek.com](http://www.tradeshowdataweek.com) • Catalog Houses • Catalogs of Mailing Lists (ask for my articles containing these) • CD ROMs • Internet • Your Competitors • List Reference Directories: SRDS List Source (800-851-SRDS), Oxbridge Communications Directory of Mailing Lists 800-955-023 • ...and the best? Your House List!

12 Questions to ask a list vendor

- Ask the origin of the list.
- Who is the list audience made up of?
- Does the list include actual purchasers or merely inquirers?
- How old are the names on the list?
- How often - and how recently - has it been cleaned?
- How recently have the people on the list made a purchase?
- Can you get a select of multi-buyers - and how frequently they've purchased?
- How often has the list has been rented?
- How many other mailers have tested the list?
- How many people continued after their test?
- How many people rolled out to the rest of the list?
- Ask if you can get a free sample of 2,000 names to test.

Hope you enjoyed this! I'm outta here...

*Bio: Jeffrey Dobkin is a direct marketing, catalog and web content writer. He also writes promotional marketing campaigns and complete direct marketing packages. He specializes in direct mail letters, and consults in the Direct Marketing field.*

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