

# Bob Bly's Proven Formula for Writing Winning E-Mail Sales Letters

As we rapidly gain experience with Internet marketing, we are learning more every day about what works – and what doesn't. Interestingly, test results have shown that many (though not all) of the rules that work in traditional direct mail can also be applied to this new medium. To successfully increase click-throughs and Internet sales, you need to use a combination of "old" and "new" techniques like these:

1.

Like "fascinations" in printed direct mail (e.g., "What never to eat on an airplane"), short statements that tease the reader 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 universally powerful offer – and given the dynamics of online buying and the lifetime value of an Internet customer, it can often be profitable. Examples: One e-marketer told potential registrants that one of them who signed up on their website during a specified period would win \$500 in cash. And there's a major national e-marketer that 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.

In traditional direct mail, the offer is sometimes made exclusive to the recipient. But in e-mail marketing, it's better to encourage the recipient to forward the e-mail – and the offer — to friends and colleagues. (E-marketers refer to this tactic as "viral marketing.")

Example: "Give this special gift offer to your friends by forwarding them this e-mail now. They'll be glad you did!"

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 website. When they sent a direct mail with this offer, many recipients went to their website and downloaded the old version – that's how strong the 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 made 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. Most e-marketers put this at the end of the e-mail message; some place it at the top.  
  
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."

[AWAI Board Member Bob Bly has been a professional writer for more than 15 years, receiving more than \$2 million in advances, fees, and royalties from more than 100 publishers, editors, and corporate clients worldwide. Bob has written over a dozen books that have helped thousands advance their writing careers. These include "Secrets of a Freelance Writer," "The Copywriter's Handbook," "Business-to-Business Direct Marketing," and "Internet Direct Mail: The Complete Guide to Successful E-Mail Marketing Campaigns" (coauthored with Steve Roberts and Michelle Feit). Bob not only knows how to create winning copy, he also knows a great deal about the business of copywriting.]

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