

12 Ways to Use Lift Notes to Boost Response

By John Forde

So, what's a lift letter?

No, it's not a sales device for selling Wonder Bras ... though I suppose it could be. A lift letter is simply a short note – usually one- or two-sided – enclosed with a direct-mail package to "lift" response rates.

There's not much mystery to it. But once you figure it out, there are infinite possibilities to what it can do for you in a promo package ...

Before we dig into this, you're asking: Just how much value should I place on writing a lift letter?

Lift letters can push reluctant buyers to your side of the fence. They can be cheap to write, quick to produce, and are often the first thing direct-mail prospects read. And yet – as simple as they are – a good lift letter can sometimes boost your response rates by 25% or more.

Interest perked? Good. Because you can apply the "lift letter" idea to all different kinds of formats, in all different kinds of ways.

For instance ...

For self-mailers*, a version of the lift letter might be done as a cover-wrap or as an added note on the inside front cover ...

[* A self-mailer doesn't require an envelope. The address label and postage are included on the package itself.]

For envelope packages, where you'll see lift letters used most often, a lift letter is usually a note from the company president ... a note that looks hand-written ... a Post-It note ... or even a "buck slip" (which, though technically not a letter, serves the same purpose).

And for an e-letter promotion, there's also a version of the lift letter that typically evolves as a note that sits above the body copy ... as an endorsement letter with a link that leads to a full-blown online promo ... or perhaps as a pop-up box that appears either before you get into the online promo or just when you're looking to leave it ...

The same rules that apply to other pieces of direct mail apply to lift letters.

For instance, personal is far better than impersonal ... keep sentences and paragraphs short ... and focus hard on benefit, always benefit.

Beyond that, there are special things a lift letter can do for you. Here are just a few ideas ...

1. Use a lift letter to counter a key buying objection.
2. Use the lift letter as a place to test your "second-best" or alternate promo headlines.
3. Use lift letters to give readers an extra testimonial.
4. Write the lift letter as an endorsement (approved, of course) from an authority or a celebrity.
5. Make your message sound even more important by getting your company president to sign it. (Warning – that doesn't mean you should make the letter sound "corporate.")
6. Handwrite the lift letter or use an extra-friendly tone to get an even more personal feel.
7. Use a lift letter to emphasize a time deadline on the purchase.
8. Zoom in to focus on the best aspect of the offer (premiums, guarantees, discounts).
9. Use the lift letter to emphasize long-standing credibility. (A formal letterhead might work well here.)
10. Use the lift letter to keep the message newsworthy. Let it cover events that have happened since the initial mailing of a control package.
11. Use the lift letter to underscore the ONE THING that really gives your product an edge over everyone else.
12. Or use the lift letter to emphasize track record, unusual and impressive credentials, or to make the benefits of the most important package feature especially clear ...

I could go on with the list. But let's look at theory in practice ...

Copywriter David Yale gives examples of his own lift-letter work on his website, www.controlbeaters.com. Here's one case.

Yale wrote a lift letter to give some boost to sales of a book by a lesser-known golf pro:

"It was tested – and the results speak for themselves ... the lift note boosted response by more than 25%, and added almost 33% to profit per piece mailed."

How did it work?

"It turns out the foreword to the book was written by the author's friend, Johnny Miller, a pro who was far better known. Miller had written a glowing endorsement ... I just adapted Miller's foreword and turned it into a lift letter, complete with his photo."

Great idea, great result. But then he gives another example with a different outcome:

"Everyone knows extensive track records help sell investment newsletters ... and our editors had made dozens and dozens of trades ... most of them were successful. [In our lift letter] the list filled three 8 1/2 x 11 sheets. And we added a certification by our accountant ... "

So far, so good, right? This sounds like a great idea. Did it work?

"Are you ready for this?" asks Yale. "It cut response in half!"

Wow. It just goes to show you the value of testing. Yale's theory was that too MUCH of a good thing is overkill. The list was long and nobody likes reading four pages of convincing, compounding prose.

But that doesn't discredit the idea of lift letters in general. In fact, it reinforces it. How so? Because lift letters aren't just a way to boost response, they're also a way – if you're disciplined about testing – to test ideas at lesser expense. It costs a whole lot less to insert a lift letter than it does to produce new envelopes or main-letter copy.

Enough on this. I think you get the picture. Though, here's one last idea for making a quick buck as a freelance writer: Why not find someone else's working promo ... wait until you've seen it come around a few times ... and then offer to write a lift letter.

I remember someone doing that with one of my own packages when I wasn't looking ... he charged the publisher \$300 ... I complained, but the complaints fell on deaf ears ...

His lift letter had boosted the response by 30%!

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1 Response to "12 Ways to Use Lift Notes to Boost Response"

Okay,

Your articles, Quick Tips, and Special Notes are very helpful, to me. Especially the ones featured in the Companion Series.

Thank you.

Patricia del Valle – over a year ago

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