

What makes a good offer?

You're in business... trying your best to sell your cleaning service, so here's a friendly piece of advice. Always make an offer. Make offers in your ads, on the phone, when you network with people, at your sales counter, on delivery runs, and even in your email correspondence. Every chance you get... make an offer.

A bad thing happens when you don't make offers... NOTHING!

If you don't make an offer, you'll never get a sale. On the other hand, if you make frequent, targeted offers to prospects and customers and if you make your offers irresistible, the sales will roll in.

Here is a brief checklist of offer ideas to help boost your response rate.

1. In any direct mail marketing campaign, the offer is the second most important component. The first is your target or list and the third is your copy. It follows that you should spend at least as much time tinkering with your offer as with your headline.

According to Claude Hopkins, the father of modern advertising, "When you're prospecting, you should make your offers so great that only a lunatic would refuse to buy."

2. There are only three reasons why prospects won't buy from you.

First, they may not want or need what you offer and if that's the case, don't waste your time trying to get their business.

Second, they can't afford your service, which is a big problem for them if they have a "dry clean only" wardrobe.

The only other reason why people don't buy is they don't believe you. You haven't established enough credibility with your prospects. And one of the best and most effective ways to establish this credibility is to let them in on your inside secrets. Let them in on the reason why you're doing what you're doing.

If you're offering your service at a particularly low price, tell your prospects why and tell them the truth. Don't try to make it sound like you're slashing prices just because you're a nice guy, or that you're doing it simply because you like them. They won't believe it. Are you celebrating a special anniversary or event, introducing a new service? Are you tying your offer to a seasonal holiday? Are you offering your service at cost for a limited time in order to win new customers? Whatever the reason, merchandise it to the hilt and your response will rise. If you don't have a reason to run a special offer, come up with one. A believable reason gives your offer traction.

3. With a few exceptions, try not to sell more than one thing at a time. Cleaners are famous for offering the "kitchen sink" and putting every service they provide on sale. This weakens the proposal. Instead, target one service and sell it thoroughly. Doing so will get a better response.

4. Test the same type of offer being repeated by your competitors. There's a little bit of "spy versus spy" going on here. You know what your competitor is up to. You're watching him... and if he happens to be running the same offer over and over, it's probably working. Right? If so, you might want to craft an offer like his but use a little of Claude Hopkins' advice and make it outrageously irresistible.

5. Make a guarantee and make it as strong as you can. Unfortunately, the dry cleaning business is known for its many problems... such things as wrinkles, spots, broken buttons and work not done on time. A money back guarantee attached to an offer will often be enough to attract a prospect, who might otherwise be skeptical about your business.

6. Attach a time limit to your offer. A hard deadline after which no orders will be accepted will significantly boost your response. Whatever the limit you set, don't fudge or give in to greed by accepting orders beyond the limit. If you do, your customers will eventually discover that your deadlines mean nothing and you will have killed this golden goose.

7. Offer an extra bonus for a fast response... sometimes called an "early bird bonus." This works best if you mail your offer by first class postage. The delivery date of standard mail is hard to predict and, at times, the early bird date will have already passed by the time the mail hits the neighborhood, so be cautious of your cut-off date.

8. Always try to offer a unique or appealing premium, which is something given free or at a reduced price with the purchase of a product or service. Including an attractive premium in your offer not only boosts your response rate but will cost you a lot less than a discount on service.

9. If you're like most cleaners, you want to know whether to give 25% off or 7 pieces for \$29.95 or \$3 off on a \$15 order or perhaps an unconditional \$10 in free service? The actual offer you make is something that must be tested. For example, which of these offers do you think pulled best? Please note that all are identical but expressed differently...

- A. 50% OFF!
- B. Half Price!
- C. Buy One, Get One Free!

These three offers have been tested quite extensively and "C" always wins hands down. In fact, "Buy One, Get One Free" consistently out pulled the other two offers by more than 40%.

Make your offers as effective as possible by combining as many of the above ideas together as possible. To view an example of an ad that incorporates almost all of these elements, please see the Mak Marketing Direct Mail ad on page _____ of this National Clothesline issue.