



## Market Knowledge

### **Using Offers to Improve Response Rates in Ads**

Are all of your ads generating an effective response rate? If you answered “no”, you’re not alone. Sometimes even with the best message and eye-catching graphics, buyers don’t respond.

All too often I see advertisements that are nothing more than a plain poster for a company’s product. Headline, photo, phone number, web site. Wasted platitudes about “the people company” or “excellent service”. No one calls, no one writes. The advertiser misses a valuable chance to engage with his customer.

If you want to get buyers to raise their hand and express interest in your product, you’ve got to include an offer in your ad. This important “call to action” encourages the customer to initiate contact with you.

So what makes a good offer? First, it has to be something of value or use to the customer. Second, it should make your company seem unique or better than your competition. Most important, it should motivate the prospect to contact you immediately.

Offering a free buying guide can be a great offer. Buyers are always looking for practical tips on how to make better choices in their purchases. Provide them with a helpful, un-biased list of attributes that they should consider when making a decision. Facts, graphics and comparisons can demonstrate the advantages to your product or service. Many companies already have this information but fail to use it effectively.

A complimentary video can also deliver the same buying-guide message. A successful contractor in the Midwest offers free DVDs to any local homeowner that would like to learn more about irrigation systems. As he explains the components and benefits in the video, he is subtly selling his own expertise, experience and capabilities. None of his competitors have a similar presentation, so his message stands out. This unique offer has improved both his response rate and his close rate.

Some companies rely on discounts or low advertised prices as a call-to-action. Often these work best if the customer has already decided to buy the product and simply needs a little nudge to place the order with you. A small discount is typically not effective in motivating someone gathering information or looking for the best provider. Discount offers can also devalue your expertise in the eyes of upscale buyers, so be careful of your audience.

Inviting a prospect to visit your web site is a good thing to do, but it’s a pretty low-level offer. A web site can share additional information and add depth to your ad program, but it is not an action-oriented motivator.



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Offering low value free gifts (coffee mugs, pens, etc.) or entries into a raffle can be effective sometimes, but often tend to increase ad responses from prospects that are focused on the gift or the reward rather than your product. Use them carefully.

Take the time to carefully craft the message and the design of all of your ads, but don't skip over the important part of including a response-generating offer. Nothing will do more to turn casual readers into measurable interested prospects.

### *About the Author:*

*Jeff Carowitz is a leading expert on marketing for the green industry. As a consultant with Strategic Force, he works with manufacturers, wholesale distributors and contractors in developing marketing programs for profitable business growth.*