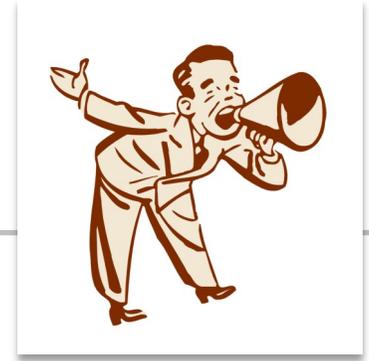


A Call for a Better Call-to-Action



By: John Hoeschele | SMS | December 2015

In an era when marketing dollars are under incredible scrutiny and when the average cost of a single, full-page ad placements in even the most obscure vertical-niche publication hovers around \$8K (not to speak of the unspeakable cost of insertion costs for consumer publications) – it’s surprising how many print advertisements, direct mail solicitations, and websites offer little in the way of forwarding the sales cycle than the anemic, all-but-innocuous “For more information, call 1-800...”

With a little imagination, audience empathy, and preparation on the tracking- and fulfillment-end of your organization’s toll-free line, it’s easy to transform every ad’s “call-to-action” (CTA) into a response-oriented eye opener that will not only create an inquiry – but help to propel the prospect along the sales cycle and reduce cost-of-sales through pre-qualification.

Here are dozen winning CTAs you can adapt to *your* product or service:

Third-party reviews – If an industry publication or consumer advocacy group has given your product or service a favorable review, have it reprinted and offer it as a response tool in your ad. Even test reports affirming your product’s safety or performance claims (by third parties such as UL or CSA) can prove to be powerful sales tools; without tampering with the results, you may simply wish to pretty up such technical reports for public consumption.

An education – Providing your prospects with information *relating to* your offering engenders more trust than an overt sales pitch exclusively *focused on* that offering. Clearly a play from the public relations handbook, consider casting your product or service in a “How to...” guide or “Did you know...” booklet to establish yourself as source of knowledge

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in matters surrounding your product. The more you add real value (and, oddly, the less you blatantly plug yourself!), the more your audience will trust you.

Product samples or demos – Any salesperson will tell you that nothing sells like killer demo, so why not do your sales force a favor and offer one in your ad or on your website?

Product too big or costly to “sample” or demo in person?

Work with a good interactive group to create an animation

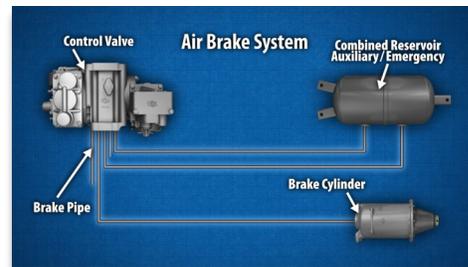
that simulates your product or service’s chief attributes. A

good example of this would be today’s eyeglass-ordering

websites – where you can select import your picture and

then ‘see’ how the glasses like look on you, without ever leaving your chair! (For another

example, check out one of several animation videos SMS developed to demo solutions for our client [New York Air Brake](#), shown above.)



Technical or applications assistance – Putting readers in touch with a technical expert instead of a salesperson can break down caller resistance. Just be sure your technical experts are exactly that, and not call-center personnel with a script that falls apart after a couple savvy customer questions.

Sales-channel info – If you’ve spent the first three quarters of your ad, mail solicitation, or online landing page selling your product or service, use the CTA to tell consumers where they may purchase it if not directly from you. They’ll be one step closer to a sale -- and your true channel partners will appreciate that you’ve bird-dogged a lead for them.

Club membership --- Consider turning prospects into loyal, repeat customers in one fell swoop by creating a “club” or branded community. Here, you establish a bond from the get go – by offering them membership benefits such as substantive newsletters, special discounts, exclusive invitations, members-only upgrades or training, advance new-product trials, or points toward future purchases. (And don’t forget to provide a club card and some logo’d premiums such as coffee mugs and wearables.) There is no product category so sophisticated it cannot be packaged this way, no customers so sophisticated that they don’t appreciate a well-conceived, truly rewarding membership... Think “air miles.”

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Upgrades – Recognizing that your prospects may already own an earlier version of your product or a competitor’s, offer them an upgrade – be it a trade-in, buy-back, an accessory to the original, or a conversion kit.

Sweepstakes – Start with one of your chief product or service benefits, then brainstorm your way to a relevant or creative sweepstakes/prize offering that tracks to that benefit. For instance, if you offer “speedy delivery” – consider free NASCAR tickets as a grand prize and free Starbucks coffee as runners-up prizes. Product differentiated by “rugged construction?” Consider an expense-paid trip for two to the nearest NFL game for the top prize, and genuine leather work-gloves as a spiff for second-place participants. And so on.



Testimonials or case-histories – Something like idea #1 above, only this time the third-party endorsement and credibility building comes from a customer... But be careful to resist the temptation of putting words in your customers’ mouths: Nothing

is so easy to spot and so quick to undermine your goal of adding credibility to the sales process. (See the interviews we did for our client [Railway Supply Institute](#), wherein several members of this trade association explain the value of membership in the organization.) Another idea in this vein: If you get stellar reviews, even on 3rd party websites like Yelp or Trip Advisor, consider linking to them from your website; such transparency says loads about your confidence and brand.

A guarantee – This deal-clincher is rarely used these days except for those oft-satirized, late-night television ads hawking gizmos that invariably sell for \$19.95. But guess what? They work. Can’t guarantee every aspect of your product or service? Fine; focus on something specific. Point is, decades of “guarantee” response rates suggest is always better to consider a gutsy, overt backing of your product vs. hiding behind more waffle-worded claims of superiority.

A business case – Sell a product with a higher ticket price but a lower installed cost over time? Got features and benefits that copy-cats have skimped on in order to undercut your

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price? Do your prospect the honor of putting it in writing -- complete with pie charts and bar graphs if you have them -- and make your case as if it mattered. You'd do the same to justify your job or your marketing budget...doesn't your prospect deserve the same business case?

If you insist on offering “more information” in our CTA, at least be specific -- Why yawn “Send for our catalog” when you can tantalize with “Send for our hot-off-the-press, free 256 page catalog loaded with specifications, handy installation tips, and beautiful full-color illustrations.” In no time at all, your advertisement's so-called “call to action” will actually live up to its name.

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