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How to Increase Your Copywriting Success by Building a Super Powerful Prospect List

By Veteran Copywriter and
Copywriter's Coach, Chris Marlow

Take a look at your prospecting list, if you have one. Where did all those names come from?

Most likely they're a hodge podge of names from a hodge podge of sources...with few added to your list solely on the criteria that they're especially good leads.

Now ask yourself how successful your clients would be if their lists were compiled in such an unscientific manner?

When you consider that the single most important element of a direct mail campaign is the list (followed closely by the offer, and THEN the copy), it becomes painfully apparent that a sloppy list is a liability indeed!

So how do you go about creating a solid list of quality prospects that you can mine for years to come?

There are some methods you can use and sources you can tap, and I reveal a few of the best here. However, it always boils down to looking in the right places for your particular specialty.

MY FAVORITE STARTING PLACE

Roughly half of my coaching students are new copywriters and when it's time to share my list building strategies with them, I always introduce them to Who's Mailing What <http://www.whosmailingwhat.com/>, a rich online archive of more than 130,000 direct mail packages collected from more than 7,000 companies since 1994.

For about \$30 per year, you can go into the archive and literally see "who's been mailing what," which can be a real boon for copywriters who specialize in the dozens of categories — publishing, financial, collectibles, technology, and more — covered by WMW.

For instance, I specialize in software. And while there are more than 7,300 software companies in the U.S., I need only 300 to keep busy. So which 300 should they be? Well, the BEST 300 of course...the 300 that I know are direct mailers...the 300 that I know are financially stable...the 300 that I know are well respected and trustworthy.

When I started compiling my list, I mined Who's Mailing What to discover the names of software companies that had mailed over the past two years. As "sure mailers," these companies became the richest names on my list, and remain so today.

OTHER GREAT PLACES TO LOOK

Nearly every large industry has an association, and most associations have member lists. To get your hands on the list you often need to join the association, but unless the price is really exorbitant, it's usually worth it. Remember, time is money in the freelancer's world, so the faster you can put together your list, the faster you can market to it.

The library is another place to look for lists. In addition to my "sure mailers," I added the world's most profitable software companies to my list, tracked down at the local library in the Computer and Software section of the Dunn and Bradstreet Gale Industries Handbook.

I completed my goal of assembling 300 strong names by surfing the Internet in search of newsletters, Web sites, and publications that serve the software market. There I found lists like "The Top 50 Software Venture Capital Investments," which listed software companies that had recently been infused with millions of dollars each, in venture capital.

SOME STRONG SOURCES FOR GENERALISTS

Although I believe that every business freelancer should carve out a niche for him or herself, many start out as generalists. If you fit this category, you'll find some excellent list-building sources at the library.

Chuck Thompson, one of my early coaching students, discovered the "Mail Order Business Directory" at his Chicago-area library. It lists over 5,000 names, addresses, and basic facts about U.S. firms doing business by mail.

Library sources I used in my early days of freelancing included the "Standard Directory of Advertisers" and "Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies." Also known as "the red books" by

industry insiders, you should be able to find them at any main library; I've had less luck finding them at the local level (and they're too expensive for most freelancers to buy).

The "Standard Directory of Advertisers" contains information on over 24,000 U.S. and international advertisers who each spend more than \$200,000 annually on advertising. Each listing includes advertising expenditures by media, contact information, address, and more.

The "Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies" contains detailed profiles of nearly 13,500 U.S. and international advertising agencies, including accounts represented by each agency, fields of specialization, contact information, and much more. These directories are truly exciting sources of information for the freelancer who recognizes the value of smart targeting.

Finally, you never know what you'll come up with while searching the Internet. After helping dozens of coaching students build their niche market list, I have a folder full of rich places to look for high quality names.

Compiling your own personal prospect list is never fast or easy, but there is a silver lining. And that is that no other copywriter will be marketing to the same exact list that you are. So do your homework and make your list as strong as it can be. Because most of your success will flow from your list, it pays to make it as powerful as it can be.

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Award-winning copywriter Chris Marlow has written for the nation's leading businesses for more than two decades. For information on powerful copywriting, visit:
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