

### OFFER



by Raul Vazquez

In my article that appeared in the January 2003 issue, “Are You Maximizing Your Advertising Dollars?”, I discussed the value of direct response advertising and its effect on a dealership’s bottom line. This month I want to focus on the offer you make to the customer, the basis of every successful direct response campaign.

Contrary to popular belief, the fact that you spend money on advertising does not entitle you to a response. Another misconception is that all offers generate a similar response. Neither can be further from the truth.

The only advertising which generates a good response is advertising that motivates your target market to respond. On a recent trip to San Francisco, I stopped in Houston and picked up a copy of the *Chronicle* and found four offers of particular interest. The first two ads we will discuss almost look like they were written by the same person as they share similar problems. Neither ad has a very impressive headline and neither is particularly believable. The first ad opens with, “Local car dealer in trouble.” If that is not enough the sub-headline says the dealership is forced to sell new vehicles at a loss. If I am a customer, I move on, but let’s keep reading. The name of the dealership does not appear until the second paragraph of the ad so the people who move on would never know the name of the dealership. The ad goes on to say that the dealership cannot control its inventory so they need to get rid of cars to make room for new ones. I guess the offer is that the customer can get a deal on a car because their dealership is so poorly operated. I would guess that the salespeople at this dealership had a very boring weekend.

The second ad is even more ridiculous. The headline reads, “Local automotive dealer shocks community by selling used cars and trucks for as low as \$77.” This dealership must think people are stupid. Reading on, there is no sub-headline that tries to explain the headline. The name of the dealership does not appear until the second paragraph, long after I have moved on to something else. For the few who continued to read, they were rewarded with the reason why they are going to sell a car for \$77.

This ad is deceiving and they even admit to it in the ad. Even though the ad says that the sale is for one day, it really creates no sense of urgency. I get the feeling that you can get this deal any day.

The third ad had a headline that read, “Local dealers waiving down payments.” It was a good headline so I kept reading. The sub-heading tells us the dealer is allowing buyers to take over payments for a small acquisition fee. The ad also has a picture of a customer with a caption about the offer and throughout the ad they bring your attention to two key statements. The first states that payments can be as low as \$99. The second highlighted statement gives the reason why. I have yet to read the ad, but I know what the offer is, who is making it, and believe it. If I were shopping for a car in Houston I would read this ad.

The last ad made the statement, “Easy credit and zero financing cause a flood of repossessions.” That got my attention and is believable. The sub-headline tells us that the dealership is having a repossessed vehicle sell-off. Without reading any further, I know what is going on (flood of repossessions), what benefit that is providing the customer (easy credit and zero financing) and who is making the offer. This tells me what the payoff is to the customer as a result of these repossessions. I always like the fact that the name of the dealership appears in the sub-headline because most readers will never read past this part of the ad so at least they see the name of the dealership. This ad also calls for action from the customer and gives a sense of urgency both of which are critical elements to any direct response ad. What I really do not like about the ad is that there is no other highlighted text throughout the ad. This, however, is not the end of the world because those in the market for a car will read the ad.

While these dealers all paid about the same for their ads, the results were much different; the keys to your success are simple if you follow just a few simple rules. First, know your market and its hot buttons. You have these customers in your dealership on a daily basis. You have to know what they want to hear. Second, make an offer and

attach to it a promise or guarantee. Use testimonials; they work. Customers make the best testimonials, followed by owners and GMs, and finally, celebrities. Third, validate the offer. Give the why behind it. The more outlandish the offer is, the better the validation needs to be. Fourth, create urgency in your message. Let the customer know that this offer will expire soon. And finally, ask for action. Tell the customers what they need to do to take advantage of your offer. For the record, none of the dealerships I talked about in this article really do a good job of asking for action.

What seems so simple really is NOT for most dealerships. Go back through your ads now that you have these

rules in front of you. I think you will be surprised how many of your ads do not include the elements needed for a successful direct response campaign.

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*For comments/questions regarding this article, check the reader response fax on page 50 or e-mail Raul at [rvazquez@wosfmagazine.com](mailto:rvazquez@wosfmagazine.com).*