

Getting Dollars In Your Mailbox Through Mail Order!

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Getting Dollars In Your Mailbox Through Mail Order!

Welcome to the World of Mail Order!

Hundreds, even thousands, of dollars can come to you through the mail, every day, when you build up a successful mail-order business, and we're going to show you how to do it! You don't need complicated equipment, a lot of capital, or an expensive office to start with. But you do need determination, a place to work (your home will do fine for a beginning), and a good product.

Before you begin to sell anything, take a moment to think about the possibilities of mail order. In order to hit the real jackpot in terms of money, your mail order business, whatever it is that you will eventually sell, must be well planned, timely, and draw lots of repeat business. You are going to have to look at what other mail order operators are selling, to see what kinds of products sell well, week after week, in the kinds of publications that you too are thinking of running ads in. And don't forget to check back issue of these same publications check out which ads stopped running, which products flopped!

Remember that the better prepared you are before you actually place your first ad, the better able you will be to cope with buying, selling, shipping and all the other new responsibilities you will have. But don't let all this talk of responsibility scare you away - mail order is still one of the least complicated ways to get set on the road to financial independence, and possibly great wealth!

|Let's Tackle First Things First!

If you're contemplating starting a mail-order business, the first thing you have to decide is what you're going to sell. both as to general category, and then specifically. Your wife's home-made candy; your own greenhouse-raised plants; a small useful "novelty" item; racing tips; or what? Try and ask yourself a few questions about what you intend to sell. Is it exclusive? Or can your prospective customers get the same thing more easily right at their neighborhood store? Is it really appealing, can you point out something (or many things) about it that make it something the customer's just gotta have? And does it have a really sufficient mark-up (of which more hereafter).

More mail-order failures can be traced to the lack of the right product than any other source. Sure it's important to promote it right, write appealing copy, be efficient in shipping, follow up the sale, etc, etc., but if you haven't got what the people

want, nothing else will help.

So don't blunder into the business, plan it out. Think about whether you have some special expertise which you can bring to bear in the selection of what you're going to sell. Always try to fill a need. Try to appeal to basic human instincts, acquisitiveness, curiosity, avarice, sexuality, greed, and so on. But appeal subtly, on the subconscious level, don't let'em know you know what makes'em tick. You've got to be a sort of amateur psychologist, to have a high percentage of successful items, or else you must just somehow sense what will sell.

|Two Great Ideas You Can Use!

If you haven't a specific field in mind, here are two suggestions for you. The first is to sell information, or to put it another way, "sell paper". Think up some information you think many people would like to know, and try and assemble it for them in a handy form, using your own knowledge, or research you can do in books at your public library. For instance, a list of hotels, by city and state, which agree to accept guests with pets - something very useful to animal-livers traveling with their dogs and getting turned away by the majority of motels they try to stop at.

The second is how you can find the one really special, really "cute" and exciting item that you can promote the hell out of and (we hope) sell tens of thousands of. In this area of mail-order, fortunes can be made overnight, if you "know how to pick 'em". It's a knack, a "feel", and it's usually inborn, and not a product of training. You may have it, and not know it! If you are one of those people who can sense the needs or desires of a large group, then before long you may locate an item that can bring you real money!

How you can find your own special "hot item" before the public has even seen it anywhere is by attending trade shows, given every year, and sometimes twice a year, in major cities. New York, Chicago and San Francisco are the biggest centers, but local ones appear also in Miami, Houston, New Orleans, and many other cities.

You can find out about these shows by calling your local convention bureau or exhibition hall, and enquiring about their schedule for the year. Very big hotels with exhibition facilities sometimes host them too. Or you can write to major exhibition managers and get their schedule for the next twelve months or more.

|Ad or Brochure - Which Way for You?

To start a mail-order business, we would suggest placing small display ads at first, rather than creating expensive mailing pieces and sending them out to a rented list. To create, print, insert and mail brochures is a costly and very skilled affair, and is not usually undertaken by beginners. Also it is generally necessary that the item(s) offered be relatively high-priced to assure a profitable rate of return - what with today's high cost of postage, not to mention paper and printing. A single \$1.95 item, no matter how saleable, could never be profitable in a mailing - by the time you add up the cost of printing and postage you find there is nothing left for you! But if it is well-chosen, it could be a smash hit in a small ad, and make a lot of money for you, because, of course, if it works for you in one magazine very well, the chances are very good (though not certain) that it will be at least profitable, even if not as profitable, in other media.

[Markup, Markup, You Gotta Have the Markup!

Other than an unsuitable product, or one that people just don't want, the biggest other mistake you must avoid is having insufficient markup. You cannot afford to buy the same product that a retailer does, and expect to survive. Many retailers can do perfectly well with an average markup of 100% over cost, that is they buy the merchandise at 50% of its retail price, or, to look at it another way, they sell at twice the net cost to them (this is a very rough approximation, retailers' margins vary all over the lot depending on the line of business they're in; for instance, grocery supermarkets operate on far less gross markup than that).

But you cannot exist in mail-order with a two-times-cost mark-up (potentially you might be able to with a very high-ticket item selling for \$500, but we're not concerned with that here). You need at least a three-times cost multiple, and, if you can get it, four-, five-, six- or even ten-times is far far better. The higher your markup - the greater your chance of success. Your costs are far higher than a retailer's. Advertising space cost is your biggest expense, and then you have to handle each order individually, pack it for shipping, provide a carton, take it to the post office, etc., as well as pay your general overhead expenses. Always remember that the higher the multiple, the smaller the number of items you have to sell to make an ad profitable.

[Now to Prepare Your First Ad

You've chosen your "perfect product" for your first mail-order offering, and decided on the price you're asking, and now you

are faced with making an ad! Unless you are a writer/artist, this is a formidable obstacle. But it can be surmounted. We don't suggest you call a big advertising agency. In short, they don't want you (you won't be spending enough), and you don't want them (you wouldn't be able to afford their production charges!). If you're handy with words, try writing the ad after all the usual 1", 2" or 3" mailorder ad only contains 50 or 100 words of copy (look at what others are doing in your favorite magazine) - and show it to some friends to get some criticism and ideas. If you get a thumbs-down reaction from your test audience, (or if you don't really feel that you want to tackle the writing in the first place), locate a copywriter to help you through the classified columns of your local newspaper. Place a very short minimum-space ad, something like this:

COPYWRITER. Small mail-order co. needs occasional ads written, freelance basis. Call 123-4567.

in the "Help Wanted" section. You'll get plenty of calls, and this will enable you to select someone with whom you're compatible, and who won't charge you an arm and a leg!

|Appearance and Presentation Are All-Important!

The "look" of your ad is very important. Don't neglect it. Not only the picture of the product, whether that be a photograph or a drawing, but also the layout, choice and weight of typefaces used, and so on. Unless you are an expert, don't try doing it yourself . . . you need a professional. It is simple to find one. Just proceed as above for the copywriter, but place an ad for an art director. He will take your basic thoughts, and transform them almost magically, into a really "pro"-looking ad. He'll be able to "spec" the type for you, and recommend a typesetter who can set it for you (or he may quote you a flat price for preparing the ad which includes the type).

I hope there's enough here to have whetted your appetite for a go at the fascinating world of mail-order. If you want additional information, consult a full-length book on the subject.

Good luck!