

# A Tale of Two Marketing Campaigns

*One failed. The other succeeded. Here's why.*

Increasingly, marketing executives for technology companies have been telling Goldberg Communications that they're looking for a "fresh approach" to developing a dialog with potential customers. All of these executives want to get attention in a relatively slow growing, increasingly crowded marketplace with ever lengthening sales cycles.

This is a story of two such marketing campaigns. One failed to meet its objective, the other succeeded. These campaigns offer important insight into what works and what doesn't in today's competitive marketplace.

## Campaign A: The Bad Beginning

Recently, a software company serving mid-sized to large enterprises began planning a marketing campaign. The goal was to generate qualified leads interested in meeting with a direct sales representative.

The executive team decided to use a seminar series to target CIOs of companies in several vertical markets. The marketing group selected the industries, the cities in which to hold the seminars, the topic, as well as independent and company speakers. It then purchased mailing lists and developed creative to get the message out.

The result was a series of six seminars to be held on both sides of the Atlantic that would target CIOs in six industries. The team also developed two Webinars for interested prospects who could not attend the events. To promote the events, the team mailed three-dimensional teasers to attract attention, followed by a cover letter and fun invitations containing language that reflected the vertical industry. A telephone call from the inside sales team topped off the efforts to market the seminars.

The results? After frenzied calling, half the projected number of people registered for the first event and only a quarter of the registrants showed up. Almost no one signed up for the remaining events and they were cancelled. While the Webinars garnered greater response, much of this was from existing customers, not the new prospects the company had hoped to attract.

## Campaign B: Sweet Smell of Success

Dejected, the marketing team picked itself up, dusted itself off, and tried again. This time, at the urging of the regional sales directors, the team focused its campaign on a business-line-manager job title in an area where the sales team was having success. The group created a simple white paper based on detailed research on the selected business process—and included customer case studies. They wrote a personal sales letter and included it, along with the white paper in a plain white box. To attract attention, they included pieces of a board game that exactly illustrated the line of business being pursued.

The results were phenomenal. Ten percent of the recipients agreed to a meeting with one of the direct sales representatives. Even more impressive, two thirds of these meetings resulted from inbound calls.

## Post Mortem

To understand the dramatic differences in results, we need to look at the three key factors that affect any direct mail campaign: the audience, the offer, and the creative.

### Audience

The most important factor in any direct mail campaign is the target audience and the quality of the list. In this campaign, the executive team wanted to go after a CIO audience because it hoped to make enterprise-level sales that would increase the average size of each deal from historic levels. While inadequate lists, which included names that were not CIOs, were a factor in the failure of Campaign A, the real problem was the choice of target audience.

Why? Because that wasn't how the market bought the product. Feedback from the feet-on-the-street sales force indicated that the company had been struggling to secure deals under this model for quite some time.

Instead, the most successful approach for selling the company's product, according to the account executives and sales directors with the greatest proven success, proved to be getting a foot in the door in relatively small deals spearheaded by line-of-business managers. The high quality of the product and the professional services organization meant that the company was then highly successful in upselling existing customers on larger projects.

The sales team thus felt that the best new prospects for the company's products were line-of-business business managers responsible for a particular process that the company's product addressed. The other key target was the IT project manager who supported that line of business. While the list in Campaign B also had problems—not all the recipients had systems that supported the company's product—the campaign pulled because it went to the right decision maker.

### Offer

Offers of valuable information are a tried and true method for generating response for high-tech marketers. But the method you choose to present that information can make a huge difference in response rates.





At the time these campaigns were run, seminars and Webinars were both popular offers among high-tech companies for demand generation campaigns. The audience proved not to be so enthusiastic. When the company's inside sales force made follow-up calls to CIOs invited to the seminars, at least one responded in an annoyed tone with, "You have 30 seconds to come up with one good reason I should take time out of my day to go to your seminar."

The problem is that seminars require a great deal of people's most precious commodity: Time. A stand-alone seminar series simply isn't an appropriate tactic to generate interest in people who have no familiarity with the company—particularly when they're the wrong target audience. Seminars or presentations are most likely to attract new prospects when they're held in conjunction with a third-party event, such as a major trade show, where the prospect has specifically taken the time to come and gather information from a wide variety of vendors.

The Webinar had a somewhat better response because it took less time out of people's day. Still, a Webinar is somewhat inconvenient because the audience has to be at their desk for an hour at a specific time. Thus, the Webinar was most effective with existing customers or people already engaged with the company in some way because the invitation is a warm contact and people are more likely to have a pre-existing interest in the company and product.

In contrast, results from Campaign B bear out the often-cited research that white papers are one of the most effective informational offers for most high-technology marketers. A white paper is most attractive to a person with limited familiarity with the product because the time commitment is minimal and because white papers are perceived as information of value, rather than sales collateral.

To achieve good results, however, a white paper can not simply be a brochure in white paper clothing. It must be well written, without marketing jargon. Additionally, the content must solve a problem rather than attempt to convince the reader why the product is the best thing since the iPod or Xbox. White papers that are little more than brochures will not be successful as demand generation offers because they presume an explicit interest in the product.

The white paper included with the package in Campaign B was

based on careful research and described the problem the audience faced that the product addressed, why existing technology did not address this issue, and the solution to this problem. The sales letter summarized these issues. The positive response demonstrated that the campaign had hit a nerve.

**Creative**

As described earlier, the creative in Campaign A, which was sent out to thousands of people worldwide, consisted of a dimensional teaser, followed by a large flyer. Campaign B was a simple sales letter and white paper, placed in a box, with a few game pieces that directly tied to the theme of the white paper.

The DMA's 2005 Response Rate Report shows that dimensional direct mail is one of the most effective forms of direct marketing. However, almost no one who received the dimensional teaser in Campaign A could remember receiving it. This turned out to be because the CIO audience is deluged with hundreds of such offers, so it's extremely difficult to stand out. Additionally, CIOs typically delegate research on software solutions to trusted advisors. Most people who received the dimensional box in Campaign B recalled it immediately because it went to the right audience and because the creative perfectly illustrated the content.

**Lessons Learned**

The greatest lesson to come out of these two campaigns is the importance of getting the basics of list, offer, and creative right. To determine the right list, talk to successful reps in the field to find out who is involved in the purchase decision and gear your campaign to this audience, rather than the one you hope it could be. You also need to clean the list before the mailing goes out. For a campaign for prospects with no prior relationship with the company, an offer of a white paper that describes a business problem and how to solve it is a better offer than a seminar because it requires a much smaller time commitment. And finally, fun creative does attract attention, but only when it works hand-in-hand with content to deliver the right message to the right audience.

*About Goldberg Communications*

Goldberg Communications is a strategic marketing communications company headquartered in North Carolina's Research Triangle. The company specializes in developing and writing superior marketing materials for high-technology companies that enhance demand generation, speed the sales process, and build relationships with new and existing customers. Founded in 1996 and originally located in California's Silicon Valley, the company has produced hundreds of successful marketing pieces for clients ranging from start-ups to some of the biggest names in high tech.

*About the Author*

Cheryl J. Goldberg is principal of Goldberg Communications. Prior to starting the company, she worked as a senior copywriter for Sybase, Inc., and in senior editorial positions at leading technology publications including PC Magazine and PC/Computing. She has also written for publications including Entrepreneur, InfoWorld, Oracle Magazine, Sybase Magazine, and Working Woman. Since 1999, she has authored the Hi-Tech Communicator, a free quarterly newsletter for technology marketers.



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