

FREELANCER'S BUSINESS BULLETIN

November 2004

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Dear Subscriber,

Welcome to the November 2004 issue of Chris Marlow's Freelancer's Business Bulletin (FBB).

This month I'll answer a question posed by Chris M., a copywriter who wants to know what to do when a direct response campaign fails.

Chris asks, "How do you bounce back in your freelance business after a client royally screws up a DM campaign?"

The short answer is that no copywriter wins all the time. The law of averages in the business of marketing won't support it.

Many factors must combine properly to make a winning campaign, and the degree of your success will depend on the degree to which EACH element is "right on."

Marketers depend on the copywriter to guide them in the creation of the campaign. So the copywriter should first have her pulse on the two most important aspects of any mailing:

1. The list
2. The offer

The list is the most important element of any campaign because if there's anything wrong with it (poorly targeted, old and dirty, etc.), it won't matter how great your offer is or how masterful your copywriting. The campaign will probably do poorly, or fail.

The offer is the second most important element of a direct response campaign. An expert copywriter will make sure the offer is extremely appealing to the target audience before he ever starts copy. In fact, there are many copywriters (myself included), who consider exceptional offer development to be the "secret weapon" behind their winning campaigns.

So setting yourself up for success is the number one rule for creating winners.

But of course, that's only half the battle. Chris tells me that the venerable Dan Kennedy once told her face-to-face that if anyone was going to screw up a direct marketing campaign, it's the client.

And while one can't lay 100 percent of the blame on the client all of the time, clients do have a way of monkey-wrenching the best laid plans.

How clients sabotage their own direct response campaigns, leaving egg on the face of their copywriter

In my opinion, many direct response campaigns fall short of their potential because the marketing team is constrained by time and/or budget. Often times they agree with the copywriter's vision for the campaign, but substitute poor offers for good offers, or push copy too fast, or other types of "corner cutting" to meet time or money pressures.

Other less obvious elements may be at play as well. Years ago when I was senior writer for Rosen/Brown Direct, a well-known direct response agency, we were baffled by a syndrome that emerged.

Our unique selling proposition was that we could get the client blockbuster response rates. On that basis we won lots of clients. But when it came time to execute their campaigns, the marketing directors would often put roadblocks in the way of our success. Richard Rosen and I were puzzled as to why.

Years later Richard told me he'd figured it out: Everyone wants high response rates initially, but if you get high response rates, it raises the bar for future campaigns.

It was his hypothesis that ultimately, the marketing director wanted good but not phenomenal success. This would maintain their job security without setting them up for super-high expectations in future campaigns.

What this all means to the copywriter who has suffered a failed campaign

First, all copywriters suffer failed campaigns. (You just don't want it to become the norm.) In fact, if you're doing it right, you're encouraging your client to test lists, offers, headlines, and more. Sometimes these tests will fail.

When I promote myself I pretty much offer "guaranteed" success. But that's only if the client allows me to run the whole show...and that means having a hand in list selection, and in creating the all-important offer.

As you'll recall, these are the two most important elements of a direct response campaign...unless you're a mature marketer who's exhausted the available lists to test and tested enough offers to know what works best.

Then, and only then, is copy the sole star of the show. So when making promises, make sure you base your expected success on the confidence you have in the three crucial elements of any on- or offline mail campaign: the list, the offer, and the copy, in that order.

After the fall: How to pick up the pieces

In agencies, and more sophisticated marketing departments, a meeting will sometimes be called to discuss the results of a campaign. If anyone ever tells you there will be a "post-mortem," that's what they're talking about. It's a negative term, for sure, and I'll be glad when it's no longer trendy marketing language as I think it implies an expected negative result.

If the client doesn't call a post-mortem, and the results were dismal, then I'll call a meeting to go over every element of the campaign, and offer a write up as to why I think the campaign failed.

This is a very smart step to take, and for lots of reasons. First, you may uncover a "buried" influence. I recall one client who came to me and said "We don't want any response, we just want them to know we exist." To which I replied, "If we're making the effort, why not see what we can get? It doesn't cost us anything more."

When the campaign pulled a 0.7% response rate, the marketing director was disappointed. But when I reviewed the campaign from beginning to end and wrote up my analysis, we were all reminded that the number one objective of the campaign was awareness; any response would be gravy. On that basis, the campaign was then seen as a success.

A post-mortem analysis will uncover weak offers, reveal poor targeting, and sometimes lead to market intelligence you can use in subsequent campaigns. For instance, a back-end analysis of a recent campaign for the client I just spoke about revealed that the extra cost of personalizing does NOT pay off for a segment of their target audience.

By calling a post-mortem and by offering a written analysis of the campaign results, you show your client that you're not a fly-by-nighter. That you believe in your work. And that you're still their "partner."

I've found that the client is usually willing to work with you to make the next campaign more successful, by learning from past mistakes. Slinking away with your tail between your legs tells them that you were in it only for the paycheck.

Stand up to the situation and see what you (and your client) can gain from it. Not only is it the professional thing to do, but it can turn a failure into a learning experience, and provide value for future

campaigns.

Happy Holidays, and see you again in 2005...

The Freelancer's Business Bulletin goes on vacation every December. Therefore your next issue will arrive in January.

I won't be sitting around twiddling my thumbs, however. I'll be implementing new software designed to make the Freelancer's Business Bulletin a more pleasant reading experience for you.

Also please expect a request to re-subscribe as I am now going to a double-opt in process, to stay on the right side of the law. I sincerely hope you will stay with me in the new year!

Update on the soon-to-be-released 2005 FREELANCE COPYWRITER FEE & COMPENSATION SURVEY — the world's first and only comprehensive survey on copywriter fees and economics...

After months of compiling and analyzing Survey results, and obtaining additional information on copywriter pricing from industry experts, the Survey is now in production.

Slated for worldwide release in January 2005, the 2005 FREELANCE COPYWRITER FEE & COMPENSATION SURVEY will be offered to Freelancer's Business Bulletin subscribers before anyone else, in a special edition announcement of this newsletter. Watch for it in December!

Special Announcements:

*** JOHN AND KEVIN FINN of Finn Communications in Redondo Beach, California, are agents to copywriters who

work on commission only and/or earn incomes in the \$200,000 to \$1,000,000+ range.

If you fit this category, please contact John at john@johnfinn.com or Kevin at kevin@finncom.com, or call 310-373-0743. If there's a "fit," John and Kevin will thank you with a recently published marketing encyclopedia by Jay Abraham valued at \$10,000.

Other Important Stuff:

*** Send this newsletter to your freelance friends! The Freelancer's Business Bulletin was conceived for copywriters, but contains the same information any business freelancer can use to build their business.

*** Got a burning question about some aspect of building your freelance business? Send it to chris@chrismarlow.com and it may become a newsletter topic!

*** Did a friend send you this newsletter? Get your own subscription at <http://www.TheCopywritersCoach.com> where you'll also get the valuable complimentary Report, "The Secret to Successful Projects Every Time - Guaranteed!"

To your freelance prosperity,

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Veteran freelancer and award-winning copywriter, Chris Marlow has written for the nation's leading businesses for over 20 years. She also offers business coaching and master-level copywriting to new and aspiring copywriters and other business freelancers who want to accelerate their success.

Check out the benefits of coaching at:
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