

by Jay Conrad Levinson

Usually, the best and most successful marketing is not created right off the bat. Instead, it's the product of improving with minor but crucial changes in details.

Embracing the concept of tweaking will dramatically improve the results you gain from direct marketing. Great campaigns don't usually get fired from a cannon to hit the center of the target. Instead, they come close to the target and it's tweaking that moves them ever closer to the bullseye.

Tweaking means devoting energy to finding an even better mailing list, an even more cogent message for your envelope or mail subject line, a still better way to state your message. The more research you continue to do, the more you'll learn what customers love about you -- and about your competition. This tweaking will add firepower to your messages.

The best tweakers are the experimenters. Although they may have a winning direct response campaign off and running, they are constantly testing other markets, other messages, other direct marketing methods, tweaking here and there to build their direct marketing muscle.

We all know that great things rarely happen instantly and that includes direct marketing campaigns. Even the best have to be tweaked or they atrophy with time. The sense of urgency that is so necessary for direct marketers becomes less immediate with repetition. Where repetition is crucial for mass marketing to take hold, it is of lesser importance in direct marketing. Certainly, offers may be repeated, but the line you don't want to cross is a lot closer than you think in this arena.

The most successful direct marketers play an endless game of increasing not only their response rates, but more importantly, their profits, with each marketing effort they make. Their primary ally is not their budget but their desire to tweak, to improve, to break records. They are not defeated by failures in their experimentation, merely enlightened.

Direct marketing guerrillas know that those records are established to break, not to serve as a permanent standard. That means change is part of the game in order to steadily increase profits. It means new records are being established on a regular basis, not because of major new marketing campaigns, but because of minor improvements on a consistent basis.

Customers are changing and guerrillas are keeping abreast of their new wants and needs, their expectations and hopes. What worked like a miracle last year may be a total loser this year. That direct mail campaign that generated so much profit last year is being surpassed bigtime by that website you create this year. But these marvelous things aren't going to happen because of a flash of genius. Instead, they'll happen because of tweaking and experimentation.

One of the rewards of solid tweaking is the ability to get your marketing noticed, especially in a society besieged with direct response marketing.

Guerrillas are fully aware of the proliferation of direct response marketing in the world today. They see it on their computer monitor, in their mailbox, on their telephone, on radio, on television, on signs, and in the magazines and newspapers they read. Their awareness gives them the insight that it is more difficult than ever for their snowflake to be noticed in the blizzard.

There are countless other snowflakes out there, each one enticing and hoping for attention. Each one competes with yours because it insists on attention, money, time and a meeting of the minds. How can you hope for your snowflake to be the one that starts the avalanche of thought that leads to a sale?

You begin to answer this from the inside of your prospects' minds. What do they read or watch? What are their foremost interests? You can be sure that they do not respond to direct response offers, but that they do respond to what captivates their interest.

Do that by making your offer so fascinating to them that they are truly enticed. That offer should be more about them than about you. It must stand apart from the other offers being made to them on a non-stop basis. But even if it is too good an offer to pass up, how can you be certain it will get their attention in the first place?

It must be unique to their eye. If it looks like all the other direct response pleas, it will be tossed or ignored just as they are. Ninety years ago, you could have simply mailed a letter to them. But today, with so many others mailing letters and grabbing for attention, you must go about your business differently.

Guerrillas accomplish this by using alternate modes of delivery, unique graphics and colors, precision timing, brutal honesty, emotionally-charged verbiage and a tangible feeling of one-to-one communicating. They never waste the time of their prospects and direct their marketing to the center of the bullseye, never trying to say everything to everybody, but concentrating instead on saying something to somebody.

Their tweaking includes studying what their competition is doing and then doing it better. They research what direct response tactics are working for others and then adapt these tactics to their own needs. They experiment with technology. They learn from customers exactly what motivated them to become customers. Research and patience, along with serious tweaking, help their snowflakes weather the storm.