

CREATIVE

I'm Stupid.

by Randy Jones



I admit it. I'm stupid—but I'm certainly not alone.

The public—you, me and everyone we know—are becoming “stupid”

because we're all running out of time, and *convenience* rules the world. Between work, car pools, and way too many electronic devices, we're too busy to pay attention any more. We scurry around in our own little worlds acting “stupid” because we no longer take the time to be smart.

And look at how marketers suffer as a result. TiVO makes it easy to skip commercials. Deleting “junk email,” is a breeze. Commercial-free radio is taking over (I'm totally Sirius).

To reach “stupid,” we have to get *creative*—and by “we,” I mean all of us working in the creative side of direct marketing.

To be fair, maybe three percent of your prospects are (obviously) smart because they responded and bought from you! It's the remaining 97 percent that we need to talk about. That's a lot of folks who need some education. The fix? **You have to be a little bit stupid and a whole lotta smart at the same time.**

Here's the smart part. Know *both* your prospect and your customer and don't assume they are identical, because they will react differently to different offers and products.

I recently worked on a new creative piece for a major retailer. I started by jotting down what I *know*. Based on a previous test, I knew the custom geodemographic segments that performed well. I knew, by product category, what my audience was most likely to buy.

What I *didn't know* was what creative message and format would grab their attention; plus, how much could I spend on “clever” and still produce an attractive ROI. Let's face it—“clever” can cost money.

I have always believed that *less is more*. (“Stupid” has a very short attention span!) I also advocate that *different is better*. That, and *get to the point*. Two custom PMS colors are never going to outperform a truly outstanding offer. An oversized #14 envelope is never going to surpass smart list selection. And, just like they say on HGTV, don't be afraid of color. Color stands out!

Consumers are very smart about one thing—they know when they are being duped with an inferior offer and extraneous fluff. They expect you to make it easy for them, mail them offers that have real value, and not waste their time. My household consists of two adult males and my teenage son. Imagine our surprise when a local grocery store used our loyalty card purchase history to mail us coupons for Feminine Hygiene Week. We were dumbfounded. The grocer was just plain dumb.

Dumb is bad and costly. **But intentionally being stupid can be exciting and liberating.**

Try this. Take folding comps of your creative pieces home and mix them with your mail from that day. If you didn't *know* it was your piece, would you notice it? Is the offer clearly stated? Are your benefit statements strong enough?

In my case, my creative piece is right there, next to my gas bill and my “Restoration Hardware” catalog. I allow myself to become an average consumer and ask myself if my piece works next to the competition.

Ultimately, all our work will be judged by someone who knows infinitely less about our product than we want to believe. We have to level the playing field by viewing our work as they will see it. Sometimes, by not thinking so hard, we learn even more.

When I hire new employees, I realize I can only take advantage of their brilliant ignorance for a short time. In a few months, darn it, they are going to be *trained in our way of thinking* and their fresh perspective will diminish.

Yes, I also encourage stupidity. I was recently reviewing a new design for a publishing client. It was *good*, but I knew the client expected *great*.

“But Randy, we always do it this way.”

“True. But if you didn't know what we *always* do, you might create something new and different because you wouldn't be inhibited by assumptions or unnecessary expectations.”

Brain cells were metaphorically stripped away and, *abracadabra*, the next two designs were outstanding—a magical combination of what we knew worked and what would get a consumer worked up.

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