

THE EFFECTS OF APPLYING SUCCESSFUL DIRECT  
MAIL MARKETING TECHNIQUES TO THE MAIL SURVEY

Curt J. Dommeyer, California State University, Northridge

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Although mail researchers have paid considerable attention to the monetary incentive, they have neglected to investigate aspects of it that have been shown to be productive by direct mail marketers. Direct mail marketers have stated that prepaid checks, sweepstakes, and early-bird incentives are effective at encouraging responses to direct mail offerings. Moreover, "peek-a-boo" techniques, i.e., techniques which allow the potential respondent to view a reward through the window of an envelope can enhance the effectiveness of a monetary incentive. The purpose of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of these techniques in a mail survey. With the exception of the sweepstakes approach, none of these techniques praised by direct mail marketers has been reported on in the mail survey literature.

Method

A systematic random sampling procedure was used to select 600 subjects from the current telephone directories of two large U.S. cities. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of six treatments. Except for the control group, each treatment offered the potential respondent a form of the monetary incentive. The following monetary incentives were used: 25¢ coin (prepaid), 25¢ personal check (prepaid), 25¢ money order (prepaid), early-bird incentive (postpaid), and a \$25 sweepstakes (postpaid). Each of the incentives was described in the postscript of the initial cover letter. The amount of money allocated to each incentive appeal was constant - \$25.

All of the cover letters and questionnaires were mailed in a windowed envelope. All of the incentives, only the money order incentive was visible through the windowed envelope. Recipients of this incentive were able to see "TO THE ORDER OF" printed to the left of their name and address.

Results

The treatment groups were compared on six dependent variables: response rate, response speed, response quantity, number of item omissions, group answer bias, and cost per usable questionnaire. Significant differences among the variables, namely response rate and cost per usable return. A modified least-significant difference test revealed that the 25¢ coin incentive produced a higher response rate than did the sweepstakes approach (50% vs. 30%,  $p < .10$ ). None of the incentive appeals, however, yielded a significantly higher response rate than the control appeal (37%). In terms of cost per usable questionnaire, it was observed that the control appeal and the 25¢ coin incentive were the most cost effective while the early-bird and sweepstakes incentives were the least cost effective.

Conclusions

This study indicates that, for a mail survey, prepaid cash is the best form of the monetary incentive. The other forms of incentive examined in this study did not produce a higher or quicker response rate, and they were less cost effective. Moreover, the other forms were more difficult and time consuming to administer.