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Anatomy of a Control: Mayo Clinic Bends the Rules

By Hallie Mummert

“Beat the control and reduce the cost per order.”

That was the task assigned to Hollis, NH, freelance copywriter Mark Everett Johnson and Moore Response Marketing designer Kendra Smale by the marketing group at the Mayo Clinic *Health Letter* in 1995.

At the time, the *Health Letter* control package was a 9" x 12" inline format that had been going strong since it launched the newsletter in 1985.

How do you top that? Johnson, Moore Response and the Mayo Clinic decided to spend more money to go bigger and slightly bolder with an 11" x 14" inline package that takes advantage of proven response boosters like personalization and sticker tokens.

Creative Meets Brand

In a general sense, direct mail cannot be subtle and still be successful. The best campaigns get in your face.

This concept runs in direct opposition to the Mayo Clinic and its desire to protect its reputation as one of the world's most respected medical institutions, says Johnson.

Rather than treat this concern as a drawback, Johnson and the Mayo Clinic pair the credibility of the institution with a strong offer and interactive creative to produce a six-year control that shows few signs of wear.

An Envelope that Sells Quietly

The outer envelope's spartan yet graceful composition sets the tone

of the mailing immediately. The corner card prominently positions the Mayo Clinic name, and further down the front of the envelope, a line drawing of the Mayo brothers (the doctors who co-founded the institution) reinforces the brand.

While the outer features no four color, die-cuts or flashy bursts, it does take advantage of one of the main benefits of inline production: the ability to personalize a mailing economically.

The recipient's name is centered with a few lines of offer copy above the address block. In 20-point type, the recipient's name commands attention as the largest copy on the envelope.

The Mayo Clinic prints the prospect's

name again with a re-statement of the offer in the bottom, right-hand corner of the envelope to draw the prospect's eye to this important message.

While the back of the envelope is blank, Johnson doesn't see it as a waste. He explains that a blank page encourages people to look at the other side; if you have a strong message, that's the only place you want prospects to look.

Besides the ease of producing a package with variable copy and the look of a matched mailing with less fuss, inline formats provide another benefit: Prospects can't stuff the elements back into the envelope easily.

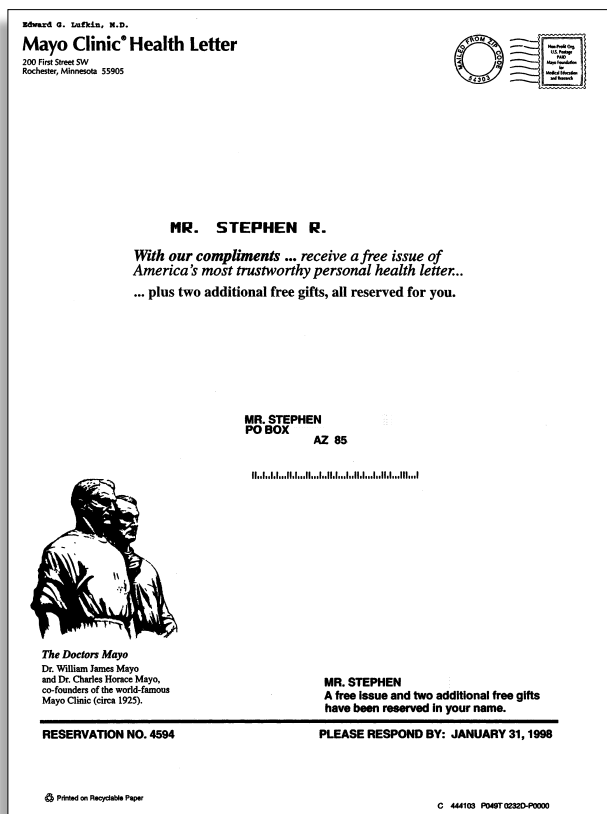
As this control's outer envelope began to fatigue, Johnson and the Mayo Clinic swapped the drawing of the Mayo brothers with the Mayo Clinic's three shields symbol and tweaked the styling of the copy for a new look.

A Credible Letter

Johnson is "old school" when it comes to letters. He prefers Courier typeface and very little spot color, which is evident in this six-page letter.

There are only three subheads, printed in blue, and they all appear on page five to introduce the elements of the offer: 12 issues of the *Health Letter*, a year-end index, three bonus essays and two premiums with order. The signature is also in blue.

The rest of the letter is packed with bulleted teaser copy devoted to leading medical topics. The Mayo Clinic tests new teaser items occasionally to keep the content fresh. However, says Johnson, they've found that it's not necessarily the more cur-



rent topics that pull the best response. Some evergreen teasers, like those about relieving arthritis and headache pain, remain relevant with audiences over time.

A photo of the current newsletter editor, Dr. Robert Sheeler, supports the Mayo Clinic's unique selling proposition of being a newsletter created by a medical institution and not a publishing company.

The Order Card

Of all the elements, the order card has pretty much remained unchanged. Shaped like an upside-down "L," it features two notches that entice prospects to perf off the reply piece. The two remaining pieces contain a strong guarantee, a few testimonials and three reply stickers that get placed on the reply piece. In red, green and blue, these stickers stand out from the rest of the monochromatic design.

As all mailers should, Mayo Clinic tests pricing structures; recent efforts have broken the \$24 yearly price into three installments of \$8 each. Not only are pricing structures inexpensive options to test on the production side, says Johnson, but they can account for at least a 10% swing in response.

A peculiar highlight of the order card is the nature of the testimonials printed on the back. Instead of coming from satisfied readers, they're all from leading U.S. publications like *Money* and *U.S. News & World Report*; there is even a testimonial from Ann Landers.

Johnson explains that even though the Mayo Clinic receives nice letters from readers, these stories tend to contain personal, medical-related information that the institution prefers not to share publicly. To get a similar level of impact, the Mayo Clinic turns to reviews from respected third parties.

Mayo Clinic® Health Letter

Rochester, MN 55905

**NOW TRY AMERICA'S MOST TRUSTWORTHY PERSONAL HEALTH LETTER ...
FREE!**

July 9, 1999

Mr. Stephen R. Warsaw
PO Box 3737
Carefree, AZ 85377-3737

Dear Mr. Warsaw:

It is my pleasure to extend a special free trial offer to you along with an invitation to accept three free gifts.

As a physician at one of the world's finest medical clinics, I invite you to receive 2 exclusive free gifts - PLUS a free trial issue of MAYO CLINIC HEALTH LETTER - direct from our renowned team of 2,000 top physicians here at Mayo.

At Mayo Clinic, we believe that you can work with your doctor to improve your health in MANY ways . . . provided you have the LATEST and BEST information . . .

The Mayo brothers opened their practice here one century ago. The world has been beating a path to our door ever since.


Presidents, foreign heads of state, movie stars, international business leaders, and men and women from all walks of life - over 4 million in all - have come here to the world's largest medical group practice.

Mayo Clinic is open to all, but not everyone can make the trip here for treatment. Many health matters are best handled by preventive care anyway. And dozens of daily health concerns are best treated at home, by you and your own doctor.

Yet how do you KNOW the health information you are relying on is the absolute BEST currently available?

That's the idea behind MAYO CLINIC HEALTH LETTER. . . to put the world's latest and best consumer health information in your hands each and every month.

(over, please)



From the desk of:
Robert D. Sheeler, M.D.
Medical Editor
Mayo Clinic Health Letter

Mayo Clinic Jacksonville • Mayo Clinic Rochester • Mayo Clinic Scottsdale

Inserts that Sell and Support

When Johnson began working on a new control, the first thing he noticed was the absence of a premium.

Besides giving prospects more incentive to accept the trial issue, the editorial premiums the Mayo Clinic uses also serve another purpose. The bulleted teasers in the sales letter promise information on a wide range of topics, but that research isn't, of course, what comes in respondents' first issue of the newsletter. The premiums, says Johnson, are specific and serve as an assurance that respondents will get the information promised them by the direct mail package—which helps conversion.

A letter-size insert promotes the two most popular premiums offered: a report on weight loss and another on back care. The Mayo Clinic has recently tested and replaced one of the premiums with a new report on arthritis.

Getting the Reply Envelope Noticed

While business reply envelopes (BRE) don't sell the product, they do need to pull their own weight in a mailing.

The Mayo Clinic gets the most out of this BRE by crafting it out of bright yellow paper and adding personalization and response-oriented copy ("Mail Room: Send Free Gifts Right Away").

According to Johnson, these moves are a no-brainer, as it costs nothing with in-line production to add more copy and it's already been proven by other newsletters that brightly colored BREs improve response.

The Mayo Clinic has tested the reply portion of the order card as a business reply card in the past and mailed a white paper BRE, but this souped up version works best.

Rules are Made to Be Tested

Marketers follow a lot of rules in creating successful direct mail. But the real breakthroughs have been discovered by understanding the rules well enough to know when to test them.

At first glance, it would seem that the Mayo Clinic's aversion to the more extreme bells and whistles of direct mail would limit its success, says Johnson.

But, he explains, this control's longevity (it's been tested against a survey-style effort and a package created by a competing vendor) shows that taking the higher ground and using a flexible production process can work in an age of information overload. ■■

IDEAS IN ACTION

- Go with your unique selling proposition, even if it challenges conventional direct mail wisdom.
- Conduct at least one price test each year to plumb for significant response boosts.
- Try sprucing up your BRE with some promotional copy. It adds nothing to the cost and could help response.
- A premium can do wonders for your response and conversion rates, but make sure it has value for your audience.