Making Contact: How to Reach Truly Important People

Direct mail professionals are usually happy with a 1 percent response rate. Using “contact marketing,” Stu Heinecke expects, and occasionally achieves, a somewhat higher response rate—100 percent.

Of course, Heinecke is working from a much smaller list. Instead of targeting tens of thousands of prospects, he targets a handful of people and sometimes even one person. But his lists are smaller because they’re more exclusive. He’s trying to reach heads of Fortune 500 or even Fortune 50 companies, not to mention presidents, prime ministers, and celebrities.

And he succeeds just about every time.

Heinecke will explain contact marketing, the term he created to explain his approach, and discuss his forthcoming book on the topic during, “Contact Marketing: How to Get a Meeting with Anyone,” a Special Webinar Series webinar to be held at 12:30 p.m. on April 27, 2015. To register, click here.

Setting New Records

A cartoonist who majored in marketing at the University of Southern California, Heinecke achieved early success with campaigns for Rolling Stone and Bon Appétit, in which he used a postcard with a cartoon. In both cases, the response was “beat the publishers’ controls and set new records,” he says. “It was a home run.”

Building on that success, he was determined to reach the vice presidents and directors of circulation at all of the biggest publishing houses.

“I needed a 100% response rate, not 1%,” he said. “I needed to get through to all of them.”

He produced an 8” x 10” print of a cartoon and personalized it for each person he was trying to reach; the result was “millions of dollars from a campaign that cost less than $100.”
Heinecke continued honing his marketing methods for several years. He founded cartoonists.org, which raises funds for charitable causes; wrote and illustrated two books, *Drawing Attention* and *Big Fat Beautiful Head*; sold his cartoons to the *Wall Street Journal* and other major media, and was nominated to the DMA Hall of Fame.

His methods for reaching prospects continued to work, but he realized that he probably wasn’t the only marketing professional with an off-the-charts success rate using contact marketing, so he decided to interview others to find out what else works.

His latest book is the result of interviews with most of the people he identified as the top 100 sales thought leaders, as well as marketers, CEOs, and executive assistants to famous executives. He asked his interviewees, “If you absolutely must connect with someone who is impossible to reach, how do you do it?”

Based on their responses, he identified four categories of “contact marketing” that almost always work:
- Gifts and visual metaphors
- Free and nearly free
- Information, insight, and media
- Media and over-the-top

**Gifts and visual metaphors.**
The approach Heinecke has used for his business falls into this category. He usually starts with an 18” x 24” foam-core postcard and creates a cartoon about the person he’s trying to reach on one side, then he writes a note on the other side explaining why a phone call or meeting should take place.

“When it’s delivered to CEOs, they show it around the office,” Heinecke says. “It’s too big to file away and too important to throw away. They end up sticking it on the credenza in their office. It draws a lot of attention, which means the sender’s message continues to receive attention over a long span of time.”

As another example, he cites a successful turnaround specialist who uses a sword and a battle theme for branding.

“He reads papers for stories about missed earnings estimates,” Heinecke explains. “When he identifies a potential client, he has a sword made and he sends it with a handwritten note, saying, ‘I noticed the story in the paper about the missed earnings estimate. I wanted to let you know I’ve got your back.’ The sword is packaged in a wooden box and delivered. It gets a 100 percent response rate.

“If he’s going to make $200,000 every time he connects, spending $1,000 on a sword is a great investment.”

Heinecke also cites John Ruhlin, founder and CEO of Ruhlin Group, who specializes in high-end gifting plans. He demonstrates how well they can work with his own marketing by sending a card to a CEO or other prospect that says, “You’ve been gifted a $150 custom-tailored shirt. A clothier will be by shortly so you can order cloth samples.”

The clothier takes measurements and shows samples, but doesn’t make a pitch, Heinecke says, so “at that point, the CEO is asking, ‘Who sent you?’ ”

The shirt is delivered two weeks later, along with the message, “I think we can be a great fit for you.”

**Free and nearly free.**
If you’re able to obtain the right contact information, the telephone, email, mail, and social media can each be used as no-cost or low-cost methods to reach people, which is how Heinecke reached the people he interviewed for his new book.

“When to send an email, what it should say, and what you want the reaction to be are all important,” according to Heinecke. “Be brief and ask a question that engages the recipient. There has to be a hook. If you want to reach senior executives by email, the best time to reach them is on Saturday morning or Sunday evening, when they often take the time to read and respond.”

Something as simple as re-tweeting the tweets of someone you want to reach can also be effective, while writing a blog post about the person you’re trying to reach can sometimes create a response.

One of the people Heinecke interviewed, online marketing strategist David Meerman Scott, suggested that important people typically have Google Alerts set up for their names. Scott wanted to reach someone who had just published a book. He was the first person to review it and the positive review he wrote on his blog triggered a call.
Information insight and media.
Sharing information that appeals to prospects is also helpful.

“They made all 70 connections,” he says. “People are all too happy to oblige. They want to tell their stories.”

Over the top media.
An early contact for Heinecke was Rick Bennett, who runs a small agency that specializes in “guerilla warfare marketing.”

One of Bennett’s clients owned a small start-up that he wanted to sell to Oracle founder Larry Ellison. Ellison is difficult to reach, but Bennett ran a letter to him as a full-page ad in the Wall Street Journal.

He figured that Larry Ellison was probably one of the readers of the Journal,” Heinecke says. “Many of Larry’s friends and colleagues saw it, called him, and said, ‘Did you see this ad in the Wall Street Journal?’ I love the audacity of that – using $10,000 to reach one guy.”

It turned out to be a small investment with a huge return, as the client sold his business to Oracle.

In another case, a company that was trying to sell a $250,000 software package to a Fortune 50 technology company met with the engineering group and generated interest, but the purchasing department wouldn’t approve it. The head of the software company knew he needed to reach the CEO to override purchasing, but the CEO was very well known and especially difficult to meet.

“Out of desperation, he had a homing pigeon delivered to the front lobby with a letter to the CEO that said, ‘Your engineering department loves it. I’ve been trying every way I can think of to meet with you, so I would like you to write down the name of your favorite restaurant, and a date and time, and put it in the capsule and release the pigeon and I will meet you there.’

They ended up meeting for lunch. The CEO brought along a letter of intent for the purchase of the software.

What Not To Do
While the carrier pigeon approach worked, Heinecke cautions against using animals, as they may be unreliable and they may be harmed in the process. It is also important to distinguish between contact marketing and sales stunts, he says.

“I caution readers that this is not about performing sales stunts,” Heinecke says. “They have no place in contact marketing. Sales stunts, done without integrity, are outside the scope of contact marketing.”

As examples, he cited a person who parked in the parking stall of a CFO of a Fortune 50 company and waited for the person to attempt to park.

“There's nothing of value being delivered,” he says. “Nothing building a relationship.”

Another person sent his 14-year-old daughter to pitch an account, which was “kind of a sad thing to do to your daughter. If you can't make the pitch yourself, it reflects poorly on you.”

If carried out properly, Heinecke says, “Contact marketing ends up leaving the target saying, ‘That was cool. Why can't we do something like that?’ ”

Click here to register for:
Contact Marketing: How to Get a Meeting with Anyone
12:30 to 1:30 p.m.
Monday, April 27, 2015