

# The Three-Legged Stool

By Brad Good

The three parts of a successful marketing campaign

Imagine settling into your favorite restaurant, pub or even lunch counter. You are hungry or thirsty, and ready and willing to spend your hard-earned money. You see one seat left at the bar or counter, and it is a stool with three legs. As you pull out the stool, ready to sit and enjoy a meal or some fine spirits, you notice one of the legs is badly cracked, bent or broken. You know that if you sit on that stool, you are probably going to fall over.

Your marketing planning is no different. At the Good Marketing Group, we refer to any campaign plan as the “three-legged stool.” Put simply: The three legs are the elements necessary to develop a targeted, successful marketing campaign. The three legs are “list,” “creative” and “offer.” While we mainly use the analogy for direct-response marketing planning (online or traditional mail), it can be applied to any marketing effort. Like a three-legged stool, if any one part of your campaign is weak, you could find your efforts toppled.

Here is a look at how the three legs share an equal weight of a campaign.

## LIST

This is the leg that tends to take the most abuse. It is kicked and repaired or replaced with inferior materials time and

again. This is also where the term “junk mail” is born. Your list is the base—the starting point. As a marketer, you should be as focused on the audience you are speaking to as you would be on a difficult installation or design that needs a specific part or engineering solution.

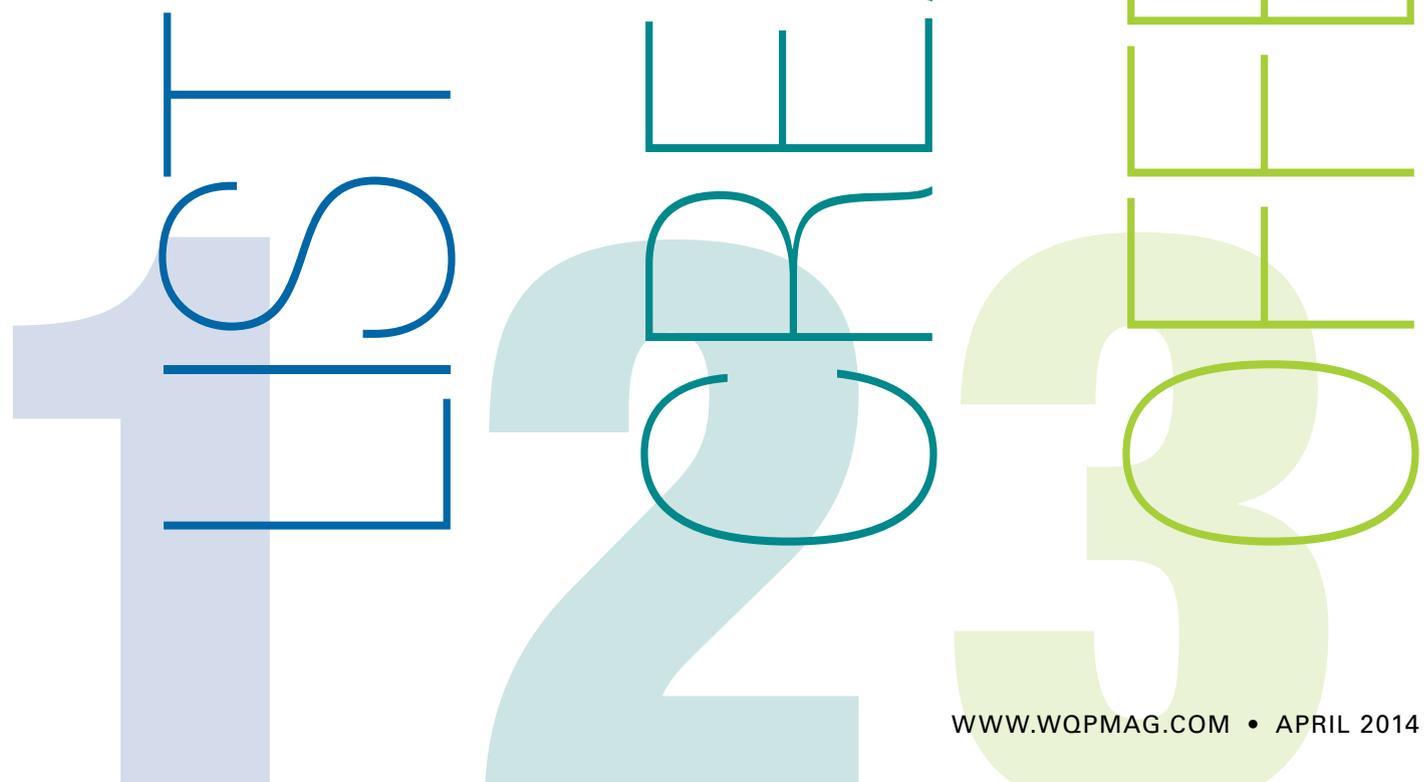
The list is where we tend to hear, “That seems expensive,” or “I did not know you could find information like that.” The solution? Ask. You want to take every trait you know about your

regular customers and apply it to your list. Even elements that sound trivial, such as square footage of a home, are important. When you merge them with other traits, such as income, number of children, interests, etc., you start to paint an overall image of your ideal customer.

If you cut back on your list budget, you are cutting back on responses. Of course, you have to stay on budget. Just be sure you are not bargain hunting here. When it comes to your list, you truly get what you pay for.

## CREATIVE

This leg is the design, artwork, copywriting, printing, etc., and it is often “over-engineered.” The creative is extremely important, but it must speak to the audience that you have just spent so much time researching. Good creative does not have to be 10 colors with high-priced paper and coatings—although it might be if those specs best reflect your product offerings, such as an exclusive



invitation to a special viewing or product launch. Keep in mind, this is the leg where you have the most control over cost. I have seen mail that is smaller and uglier, with fewer colors and less “wow factor” be a clear winner over an over-engineered counterpart. It may not have yielded as many responders, but the cost per qualified lead is lower, making it a clear return on investment winner.

**OFFER**

This is the leg that takes the second-most abuse. It baffles me that marketers spend the time, money and energy to develop, execute and pay for a marketing campaign, and then install this often-inferior leg, akin to something made of cardboard holding up a metal stool. I am sure you have seen the marketing campaigns I am talking about—the ones that do not offer real value: They are the

“We are so good. We’ve been around forever, and, even though we have no relationship with you, you’ll love us. But, we don’t believe in coupons, sales or discounts. So, shop with us anyway, not our competitor, who does” campaigns.

Those days are over. Are you guilty of this yourself? Would you respond to your offer if it was for someone else’s product that you were interested in? Your answer is usually a good indicator of whether or not you are promoting an offer of real value. Also, remember that you need to try to think like the general public. You always have an offer, even if it is your expertise and longevity, but the prospect must find value in it as well. It may not be enough if your closest 10 competitors offer the same thing.

Have an offer worthy of the privilege of a new or returning customer buying from you. They want to enter into a

relationship—it is that simple. It is possible to over-engineer this one as well. You don’t need to make yourself look like the proverbial used car salesman. You do need to look like you are giving something of value that creates a winning combination for both you and your customer.

Do not be afraid of loss leaders here. We all need to do it in the age of the Internet. Your customer can research 10 other providers and purchase from them in the time it takes to read this article. Make sure they see enough value in your product—that you are the first choice.

There is a science to marketing and direct marketing. Your prospects will respond if you have:

- Targeted properly (list);
- Created an attractive and cost-effective package with a clear message (creative); and

- Presented or demonstrated value (offer).

Additionally, we consider timing or seasonality the piece that binds the legs together. Make sure your marketing message is timely as well. (See “For Everything There is a Season” in the January 2014 issue of *Water Quality Products* for more on seasonality). Your marketing must be seated upon a strong foundation. Think of the three-legged stool when designing a campaign and your marketing will be strong. *wqp*

Brad Good is partner for the Good Marketing Group. Good can be reached at [bgood@goodgroupllc.com](mailto:bgood@goodgroupllc.com).

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