



APOGEE

PEAK OF FLIGHT

NEWSLETTER

How to get your donation request letter thrown in the trash

By Tim Van Milligan

If you write letters to manufacturers and vendors asking them to donate prizes and money to your local rocket club; I'm going to show you how to write them in such a way that they'll be thrown away as soon as they are opened.

note: I'm not picking on anyone... I get lots of these types of letters all the time, and I do want the clubs that write them to succeed. After all, if clubs die out, then eventually, my business will die out too.

Basically, most "trash-can bound" letters go something like this:

Dear Manufacturer:

I'm writing you to request your support and a donation of merchandise for our raffle to be held at our next launch. This is a big launch, and we're sure to get hundreds of people to show up.

In return for your support, we'll announce your company's name over the PA system several times during the day, as well as put a link to your company's web site on our club's web page. We'll also mention your company's name in the post-launch article that we'll print in our club's newsletter. If you can, also send some catalogs, so that we can put them in our registration packets.

As you know, we are a non-profit organization, so any donations you send to us are tax deductible. We are in urgent need for your donations, because we use the money to buy rockets for the needy inner-city kids that can't afford to make their own purchases.

Thank you again for your support. Please send stuff ASAP!!!

Signed: Local Club PR Person

If this letter doesn't get to the round file immediately, it will get put into the "get-to-it-later pile." If other manufacturer's are like me, they feel guilty about putting it into the trash can immediately. Like I said, we want clubs to succeed. But unfortunately, by the time it makes it to the top of the pile; the launch has already passed.

What is wrong with these types of donation request letters? Don't you see it? It's obvious. They are all self-centered. They don't have the manufacturer's interests in mind at all.

Here is the thing you have to know about all manufacturers and vendors. "They are not rich, and have a limited amount of money that they can spend on advertising."

Doug Pratt has a saying that goes something like this: "If you want to make a small fortune in the hobby business, you better start out with a large one." If the history of rocketry doesn't tell us that this is true, it would be funny. All current manufacturers are trying to buck this historic trend, and make a small fortune out of nothing. So realize this: "manufacturers and vendors have a limited amount of money that they can spend on advertising." (I hate to be redundant, but it usually doesn't sink in the first time people hear it.)

The purpose of advertising is to generate new customers, or to keep the one's you've got. Since rocketry is a pretty small hobby, manufacturers are spending a lot of money at a small audience. They can't afford to spend it on venues that don't generate significant results.

To be brutally honest, spending advertising dollars to chase customers from a group of poor people (no matter how needy they are), or as a tax dodge, is a bad business decision. The manufacturer isn't going to tell you this, because it makes him look like a greedy jerk. So what he'll do is just toss your letter into the trash can instead. You'll never get a reply out of him, or figure out why he isn't donating to your club.



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If you want good manufacturer support, you have to write your letter in such a way as to convince him that he will receive much more in return.

But don't make the mistake to think the manufacturer wants to advertise for the sake of "getting exposure." Coca-Cola can do this, but not a small rocketry vendor. There is only one result that a manufacturer wants to get in exchange for his advertising: "SALES"

Do I need to say it again? "A manufacturer or vendor only wants SALES!" Can you guarantee to the manufacturer that he'll see an increase in sales as a result of his donation? Probably not (unless you're really creative; in which case I'd personally love to hear your ideas).

So what can you tell a manufacturer in your donation request letter that will get his attention?

Returning to that sample above where the club was going to: announce the company's name over the PA system, put a link to the company's web site, and mention it in the post-launch article. These are a good start, but unfortunately, they are old techniques, and don't generate "SALES." Why not? Because the manufacturer doesn't have any control over the message that is delivered.

The PA systems are useless at getting messages out. If they were great, then the RSO would never have to scream at the crowd during a head's up launch.

You need to get creative! Think of things that your club has that would be valuable to the manufacturer. Try these for a start:

1. The club's roster. Most manufacturer's would love that information, so they could send direct mail to them.
2. Tell the manufacturer about recent product reviews that were printed in the club's newsletter. If you show the manufacturer that you've been proactive in helping him generate sales prior to the launch, he'll be more willing to support the club later. Your actions prior to the launch are more convincing than good intentions later.
3. Offer to print up coupons (with the manufacturer's prior approval of the artwork). These coupons could be put into the packet given to "new members" of the club. Don't expect the manufacturer to print them up themselves; because they rarely have time to devote to running down to the local copy shop

for a small coupon. Hint: Whatever you can do to relieve the manufacturer of a burdensome activity, he'll be grateful for when it comes to donation time.

4. In addition to supplying the manufacturer with the club's roster, also collect the names and addresses of each and every person that comes out to the launch. Those are great "fresh" prospects for manufacturers.

5. Instead of printing the name of each sponsor in the club's newsletter; give each one free ad space in the newsletter. Again, the manufacturer wants and needs to control the artwork so they can target the ad for the particular club.

6. Like number 3, instead of asking for catalogs for the registration packets, tell the manufacturer that you'll print up coupons for the people to send in and request a catalog. That is cheaper for the manufacturer, and it helps him prequalify the people in advance. Not everyone that gets a catalog in a registration packet is interested in the products that the manufacturer might be selling.

7. Offer testimonials for the manufacturer, particularly on the club's web site. This doesn't have to be like: "He's the GREATEST manufacturer," but should be something like: "He's an honest vendor, and has been supplying items in a timely fashion to our club members."

As you can see, these ways to offer something back to the manufacturer are very inexpensive. And they are things that manufacturers would value. This could make the difference between having your letter thrown in the trash can, or getting donations that you want. If all else fails, it is something different than the typical donation request letter.

About the Author:

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