



The Raphael Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
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Less Is More

I was recently listening to a radio ad for a local furniture store. The announcer said they were having a sale and continued with:

“A dining room table set that originally sold for \$300 is now on sale for \$249. A leather sofa with an original selling price of more than two thousand dollars is on sale for one third off. Drop into our lamp department and take your choice of dozens of floor and table lamps for almost half the original price. A kitchen table and four chairs with original price ranging from \$250 to \$400 now on sale as low as \$199.....”

The list went on and on (very quickly to fill the 30 second time slot).

When he finished I turned to my wife and asked, “What did he say?” Her answer: “I haven't the slightest idea.”

When promoting, advertising, marketing your products, try to limit yourself to a narrow number of offers. Beyond that, you lose your audience.

Architect Mies van der Rohe explained this with his phrase, “Less is more.” Also Buckminster Fuller who said it worked for his geodesic dome.

Both, however, were preceded by poet Robert Browning in his famous poem, “Andrea del Sarto,” where the artist speaks to his apparently unfaithful young wife, Lucrezia, with these words: “Well, less is more...”

(Or, if you prefer, consider the words of the sage Johnnie Cochran, “When in doubt, leave it out!”)

Direct marketing experts say the best direct mail letter is to first write what you want to say, then eliminate the first or second paragraph. Cuts down the copy and directs the reader to what you want them to consider buying. Every written word needs to move your selling story forward quickly and in an interesting way.

Less is more.

The German supermarket chain Aldi opened more than 40 years ago. Today their small shops have expanded to ten countries including the UK, US, France, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Australia. They describe their business as a “unique way of operating.” In comparison to a typical supermarket, it is indeed unique.

The average US supermarket carries more than 20,000 different items. Aldi has only several hundred.

Customers pack their own bags. Few fancy displays. Fewer national brands. They specialize in private labels priced as much as 30% lower than national brands.

Does this concept work? They were recently rated among the “Top 20 retailers in Europe” by Retail Intelligence, a European research organization.

Less is more

STORY: Sol Price started the warehouse club concept in America. Sam Walton visited his stores to capture ideas for Wal-Mart.

We interviewed him a few years ago and asked his secret of success.

He said he believed in “the intelligent loss of business.” He researched items carried by chain stores. He discovered 80 percent of the sales came from only 20 percent of their inventory. So he decided to ignore the 80 percent of the slow moving items and concentrate on the 20 percent that did the business.

Less is more.

We visited the Hermitage Museum on the banks of the Eva River in St. Petersburg, Russia. The four buildings hold three million exhibits and displays of world art. They say if you spend only one minute in front of each exhibit you would have to stay in the Hermitage for eleven years! We roamed through the buildings for four hours. A week later, we found it difficult to remember much of what we had seen.

Contrast that with a recent visit to the Musee de L'Orangerie in Paris at the edge of the Tuileries Gardens on the Place de la Concorde.

There, in a room all by itself, covering three huge walls, is Monet's *Les Nympheas (Lily Pads)*. People line up for the opportunity to look at the painting and continue viewing for long periods of time. Months later we still remember much of this magnificent exhibit.

Less is more.

Here's how to use this same three-word philosophy/direction/concept for your business.

1. Give your merchandise “breathing space.”

I recently visited a local department store. It was difficult to maneuver through the first floor. There were racks after racks of clothing each positioned against one another. I couldn't “see” anything except masses of fabric. I left.

2. Be a specialist.

Be known as an “expert” in what you sell. Otherwise you're like the man who jumped aboard a horse and galloped away in different directions.

3. Use e-mail - but also write your customers.

Are you building an e-mail list of your customers? Good idea. Inexpensive way to keep in touch with them with newsletters at no cost! BUT don't give up on letters! Letters are more carefully read. And re-read. E-mails are removed from computers daily to make room for more e-mails. Letters are more personal and longer-lasting.

4. Be aware of the disadvantages of different media:

Newspaper: Decreasing penetration. In most markets newspapers are read by less than half of households. A typical daily newspaper has 60 percent ads.

TV: Also decreasing audience share. In 1980 the three networks had 90 percent of the viewing audience. Today, it's only 36 percent! Reason: cable!

Direct mail: Average return of a “cold” mailing is only 2% - 3%. Much higher if they are addressed with your customer's name with a good offer.

Radio: Sell your merchandise, not a jingle. I like David Ogilvy's comment, “Would you go into a store and expect the sales person to start singing to you?”

Yellow Pages: Your ad is cluttered with all others for the same product. Too many similar books. Used to be ONE Yellow Pages. Now there's competition. Which one to look at?

Less is more.