The Council of Literary Magazines and Presses is pleased to publish Marketing Copy That Sells Literary Magazines as part of our series of monographs on marketing strategies for literary magazines and presses. This series has been generously funded by the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund.

Since 1991, CLMP has directed the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Literary Publishers Marketing Development Program, which has provided major marketing grants to thirty-six literary magazines and presses. Participants in the program received intensive marketing training and assistance in developing marketing plans tailored to each grantee’s organization. The goal of this program was to help these magazines and presses build larger and more varied audiences for the literature they publish.

From the beginning of the program, it was clear to CLMP that many literary presses and magazines would greatly appreciate and benefit from this kind of marketing training. That led to our developing this series of monographs as an effective way to disseminate marketing information to a wider range of publishers. As a complement to the monographs, CLMP also holds marketing workshops throughout the country.

In addition to Marketing Copy That Sells Literary Magazines, CLMP has published monographs on circulation development, publicity, textbook adoptions, bookstore promotions and distribution for literary magazines and presses. These monographs are written to serve as primers in the subjects they cover and to present marketing methods that can be implemented by novices as well as more experienced publishers.

—CLMP

Marketing Copy That Sells Literary Magazines

By Rebecca Sterner

Rebecca Sterner, author of Marketing Copy That Sells, has been a magazine publishing consultant since 1987. Her clients include magazines with circulation sizes ranging from several hundred to several million. Rebecca is also author of the marketing monograph Circulation Development for Literary Magazines.

Speak to almost any editor of a literary magazine, and he or she will tell you that the people who read literary magazines are just not “susceptible” to marketing. While the average reader of literary magazines is probably not responsive to the loud, brash, infomercial kind of marketing that many of us find distasteful, different approaches are appreciated by an educated consumer. In fact, a review of marketing endeavors implemented by many literary magazines shows that literary magazine readers behave like consumers of many other products—as long as they are properly “sold to.”

This monograph is designed to help busy literary magazine editors wear yet another hat—that of marketer. Good marketing recognizes the needs of prospective buyers of your product; in this case, readers. The exercises and explanations here should help you write marketing copy that makes prospective customers (readers) want to buy (and read) your product. And while it may seem hard to believe, some editors who have followed these steps actually learned to enjoy writing marketing copy.

Your Creative Strategy

Publishers should always be planning at least one year ahead. Your plan should include a budget, a schedule, an editorial strategy—and don’t neglect your marketing strategy. The budget should cover marketing activities such as publicity, renewals, new subscription offers, etc.

During your planning process, make sure you set aside time to develop a strategy for presenting your publication to the world. What language will you use to tell others why your publication is so important?
Involvistsa staff members and/or your most committed volunteers in this process and reap the benefits of your collective creativity. Ideally, you should set aside a half day, with no work interruptions, in a place that takes you away from your regular office goings and goings. If you set this time aside each year, you’ll find that marketing copy will flow much more easily and you’ll be better able to accomplish what you have planned.

The creative strategy is anchored by your literary magazine’s **positioning statement**. Your positioning statement is the sentence (or sentences) that answers these questions:

- **What does our product do?**
- **Whom is our product for?**

Another way to think about your positioning statement is to complete this sentence: “We’re the literary magazine that....”  (See Appendix I for samples from other magazines.)

**Sell Benefits, Not Features**

*Benefit Copy Sample*  
(See Appendix II for additional samples.)

**spelunker flophouse**

“As a subscriber to *spelunker flophouse*, you will enjoy quarterly issues of high-grade fiction, poetry and artwork, delivered directly to your door. Our magazine is beautifully bound with a four-color cover, which means it will make a great coffee table book that will let your guests know you’ve got keen, progressive taste in literature.”

- If you ask any literary magazine to describe itself, you’ll probably learn how many pages the publication is, how often it is published, whether it has a beautiful cover or not, whether it includes fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, photography, illustrations, cartoons, etc. What you probably won’t learn is how the magazine benefits its readers. In many CLMP workshops, editors have been asked to come up with the benefits to reading a literary magazine—a much more difficult task than coming up with a list of features, but this is the key to successful marketing.

Here’s an exercise to help you develop a list of benefits to reading your publication. First, imagine you are trying to sell a camera or a calendar (products more readily associated with advertising than a literary magazine). Complete the following sentences:

“Don’t sell me a camera, sell me...”

Possible answers might include: “...a way to capture memories or bring back fond memories,” or “...an easy way for me to create art.”

“Don’t sell me a calendar, sell me...”

“...a system to organize my life and reduce my stress,” or “...a way to look good when I remember the boss’s baby’s birthday.”

Now try:

“Don’t sell me a literary magazine, sell me...”

Fill in your own answers during your creative strategy session.

If you’re not sure whether your list includes actual benefits, ask this question of each listing: “How or why is this good for my customer (reader)?”

For example, if you list “...the best new fiction” as a benefit, it will probably fail the benefit test (because it is a feature, not a benefit). If you push further and ask “Why is this good for my customer?” you will come up with answers such as “...a satisfying way to learn more about the world,” or “...something that lets you show off to your book club when you discover a new literary star,” or whatever reason you believe good literature benefits your readers.
Learning to present the benefits of your product is the most basic of marketing fundamentals. Once selling benefits is mastered, however, there are slightly more complex ways to develop a creative strategy. One is to develop a “USP” (unique selling proposition) and the other is to understand the concept of “WIFM” (what’s in it for me). The following sections explain these two methods of formulating your marketing copy.

### USP — Unique Selling Proposition

The specific idea of a unique selling proposition was developed more fully by Rosser Reeves at the Ted Bates & Co. advertising agency. Reeves says that any product’s unique selling proposition must be based on the following principles:

1. Each advertisement must make a proposition to the customer: Buy this product and you will get this specific benefit.
2. The proposition must be so strong that it can pull new customers to your product. (Sure, you might have the only literary magazine that is produced by retired chimney sweeps who clean your readers’ chimneys once a year, but if all of your readers live in apartments without fireplaces, your campaign won’t be successful.)
3. The proposition must be one that the competition either cannot, or does not, offer. It must be unique—either a uniqueness of the brand or a claim not otherwise made in your particular field of advertising.

The unique selling proposition is a key point in your creative strategy session. If your team cannot come up with the thing(s) that make your literary magazine stand out from other literary magazines, OR if you come up with a proposition that another literary magazine could also make, OR if your claim is not accurate, your marketing strategy may fail. It may be time to do some real soul searching about the magazine itself. You cannot go on to produce effective copy until this step is mastered.

### WIFM — What’s In It For Me?

This section is for those of you convinced that purchasers of literary magazines cannot be marketed to. It attempts to describe a creative strategy process that takes into account the unique needs of your discerning, educated, tasteful readers.

The WIFM method of creative strategy doesn’t look upon customers as a force to be conquered. Rather, it believes that customers and sellers need to be on the same side. It assumes customers have needs and wants that they are seeking to fulfill, and that they count on those of us marketing products to help fulfill them. In fact, these customers will help us sell to them if we include them in the decision making process.

The WIFM method assumes that customers are:

- Intelligent;
- Interested in making life better;
- Individuals;
- Honest;
- More knowledgeable about our products than we are.

If you follow the WIFM process, you will begin to see your product from your customer’s perspective and not from your own. If you can do that, you will be more successful in selling your literary magazine.
**Four WIFM Basics**

When determining “what’s in it” for your customer, remember that your WIFM position must:

1. Base itself on consumer needs that drive the consumer’s selection of one brand over another.
2. Tell consumers why your literary magazine meets their needs better than every other literary magazine that it competes against.
3. Show why no other literary magazine can be substituted for yours.
4. Communicate your message precisely and specifically.

All of this is easy to describe, but hard to do. Take these steps to create a WIFM for your literary magazine:

- Put yourself in your customers’ shoes and try to see your literary magazine and all literary magazines through their eyes.

  ![Diagram]

  - Write down every need you imagine your customer might have. Try to see all of their needs, not just one or two. You should attempt to develop at least a dozen needs in this exercise — twenty would be better! Write each need on a separate slip of paper.

  ![Diagram]

  - Separate the needs into two piles:

    ![Diagram]

    - **1. PRODUCT NEEDS**
      
      These are the needs for your literary magazine. Each one should answer the question: why does anyone need YOUR literary magazine?

    ![Diagram]

    - **2. BRAND NEEDS**
      
      These are needs for all literary magazines. Each one should answer the question: why does anyone need ANY literary magazine?

    ![Diagram]

    - Now you can decide which needs you believe make the most effective WIFMs for your magazine.
Getting Ready to Write

Now that you’ve developed your literary magazine’s positioning statement, benefits and WIFM, you’ve mastered the most difficult and important part of marketing. But before you race off to your computer to begin writing copy, map out a direction first.

Carefully think through what the piece you are writing is supposed to accomplish. Is it to sell subscriptions? Renew a subscription? Ask for submissions? Sell gift subscriptions? Get a donation?

Who is the audience? How and when will they receive your piece? How will they respond to your piece? How much can you spend? Who will design the piece? How will you track the response? Do you understand all of the printing, production and postal pitfalls?

Each writer has his or her own method for writing. Some like to outline an approach first and fill in the details later. Others like to put everything in, then whittle it down to the most precise words and perfect fit. Some write the entire piece from beginning to end and then constantly move copy around and edit until they get it right. Some like to look at samples they admire from other marketers. Some don’t want anyone else’s work to get in their way. By now, you probably know what works best for you.

This section will give you a list of writing tips, some of which are presented as rules. While rules are meant to be broken, they are best broken by those who have mastered the rules or who have a very good reason for breaking them. Some of the tips are not rules at all, but are suggestions intended to give you new techniques to try.

Rules for Writing Copy

Writing Headlines

The headline:
• Stops the reader, or at least captures his/her attention;
• Stimulates interest in the proposition;
• Leads readers into the body copy;
• Selects prime prospects from the readers;
• Identifies the product;
• Offers a benefit;
• Summarizes the selling message.

Effective headlines:
• Present news;
• Make a claim;
• Offer advice;
• Give a command;
• Offer a challenge.

1. Use an active, not passive voice.

Write: "Sign up now for the best Martian literature."

Don’t write: "You should be reading the best in Martian literature."

2. Write with rhythm.

Read your copy out loud. Better yet, have someone else read your copy out loud to you. If it doesn’t sound right, or if your reader is stumbling over words, revise it. Mix up short and long sentences.

3. Make sure copy is produced in an easy-to-read typeface.

The average age of most literary magazine’s readers is 41, about the same as the average age for the onset of farsightedness.

4. Incomplete sentences are okay.

Even if they aren’t part of your literary magazine’s official style manual. Sometimes a series of incomplete sentences adds interest and draws the reader through the copy better than a “proper” sentence.

5. Positive sells better than negative.

If you find your copy dominated by sentences like “We’re not like any other literary magazine. We don’t print stuffy stuff. We refuse to... We never...,” something is wrong. While a few statements like these are okay, you should define your publication by what it is, not what it isn’t.

6. Personal sells better than political.

The benefits of reading your literary publication should speak to your prospects’ personal values, not their political values. Don’t suggest they should buy your publication to support you because of your political outlook. Rather, they should support your publication because it’s fun to read in the tub, or it will make them feel smart, or it will make them feel good.
7. Passion and enthusiasm are vital.
Don't hold back any excitement you feel for your publication. Think back to when you first took a job with your current publication, or when you launched it. What made you do it? If you’re too shy or can't muster up your own passion, rely on readers and reviewers who have gushed about your publication.

8. Use tried and true words.
Some of these words are: free; now; only; limited; new; announcing; introducing. Read other marketing copy and see what words capture your attention.

9. Use colorful, imaginative words.
Here is an example of headline and subhead copy for *Muse*, a children’s version of Smithsonian magazine:
“Like Smithsonian, but on a skateboard. Get rolling with *Muse*, the new Smithsonian for kids.”

10. Don’t write by committee.
Letters especially need to feel as if they are coming from one person, and going to one person. As with literary writing, too many participants can destroy the personality of a marketing piece. If your creative strategy is set in advance, and if the copywriter makes use of this creative strategy, there is no need to nitpick word choices.

11. When in doubt, sell.
Copy should call attention to the product, not to its own cleverness.

12. Be careful not to offend readers.
It goes without saying that you should avoid terms that are offensive for ethnic, gender or religious reasons. But beyond common sense and respect, other words can trigger negative reactions. Some readers are offended when a letter from a stranger begins “Dear friend.” Teenagers don’t want to be called “youngsters.” You may be describing your authors in a way that makes them uncomfortable. And, if you are promoting your magazine to prospects in another English speaking country, make sure you have the copy checked by someone who is an expert in that country’s language usage and how it differs from ours.

It’s better to write, “To order a subscription, return this order form and a check for $15 in the envelope provided” than to say, “A subscription costs $15.”

14. Tell the reader to buy now.
Although it may seem obvious, every promotion should clearly have what is known as a “call to action.” If you want the reader of your promotion to order a gift subscription, say so. If you want a donation, say so, and suggest an amount. Then give a reason why your prospect should take action right away. “This special offer ends on December 15” or “Supplies are limited. Respond today.”

15. Don’t take detours.
Write in a straight, easy-to-follow sequence. Ultimately, the copy should lead to the call to action.

16. Be inviting.
Often, literary magazine selling copy is dominated by a list of authors. Consider whether including a list of writers whose work appears in your literary magazine is a good thing, or whether it has the potential to put your reader off. Even the most educated and adventurous readers may feel like outsiders if they don’t recognize the authors on your list.
17. Cite awards carefully.

Are you sure your audience cares or knows about the awards you list in your copy? How do those awards benefit the reader? Don’t let awards do your selling and positioning for you.

18. Show, don’t tell.

Don’t write: “Our essays are provocative.” Write: “We scooped the whole nation when we published J.D. Salinger’s light, optimistic, change-of-heart essay “Chicken Soup and Angels: true stories of divine inspiration for writers.”

Rules for Letters

All of the previous rules also apply to letters (and are even more important to follow in letters). But the following list includes guidelines even more specifically for letters, whether you are writing direct mail pieces, renewal requests, gift promotions or requests for donations. (See Appendix IV for ideas about what not to do in a direct mail appeal; see Appendix V for a successful example.)

1. Long letters are usually better than short ones.

Take as much room as you need to tell the full story. Your letter is your salesperson. Yes, people really do read those long letters.

For renewal and billing letters, the first few letters in the series are often longer (a full page or two), selling the editorial product and special deals. By the end of the series, the only message is “Time is running out. Renew (or pay) now!” and so those letters don’t need to be long—usually only a half page.

2. Make sure the letter is easy to scan.

Break up the letter with short, bold subheads between every few paragraphs. Underline important words. Give your reader “hooks” that draw him or her into the letter.

3. Every letter should have a “Johnson box” (copy between your letterhead/address and the salutation). This copy is often bordered with a box, but it isn’t necessary.

4. Every letter should have a P.S.

5. The letter must come from one person.

Cross out every “we” and replace it with “I.”

6. Use a conversational tone.

If you can’t imagine saying your copy to someone, don’t write it.

7. Tell a story.

Often your prospects want to know the story of how the magazine was founded, what has made it special, who works on it, what the office is like, what famous writers think of it.
### A Few Final Suggestions

The following design gimmicks help readers move through copy more easily:

- Bullets;
- Margin notes;
- Checklist;
- Italic type;
- Bold type;
- Second color to emphasize important points;
- Outline of key points;
- Color breaks;
- Rules;
- Larger first letter;
- Boxes.

Here are some easy-to-manage tasks that will provide inspiration when you need it in a hurry:

1. **Keep a sample file.**
   
   Hang on to any solicitation that appealed to you. Better yet, copy the ones you responded to. Don’t limit your samples to literary magazines, but clip out headlines in catalogs, magazines, book reviews, etc.

2. **Display your promotions on a wall in your office.**
   
   Placing your promotions where absentminded staring can take place is an amazingly useful technique. One publisher keeps a bulletin board labeled “the wall of shame.” Mistakes caught in promotions are posted so they can be corrected or improved upon the next time a marketing piece is produced. Often you can solve problems or come up with better copy by being forced to confront the pieces every day, even by your subconscious mind.

3. **Keep a vanity file.**
   
   Copy wonderful letters to the editor. Positive reviews. Comments from writers.

4. **Run your copy through a formal critique.**
   
   Grade your copy, or have it graded by a firm, fair, encouraging and reliable critic.

5. **Keep a binder with samples of previous promotions.**
   
   Along with the sample of the pieces you have done previously, include reports that track response, copies of invoices from printers, and additional notes that will help others re-create your successes and avoid repeating your mistakes.

6. **Talk to your colleagues at other literary publications.**
   
   Share with them what has been working for you and find out what has been working for them. Share good resources (printers, list brokers, mailing services, etc.).

7. **Read marketing publications.**
   
   Publications like *Circulation Management* (phone #203-358-9900) are free, and often profile smaller publishers’ success stories. Clip ideas and add them to your idea folders.

### Conclusion

▶ It’s a rare literary journal that has anyone on staff devoted to marketing. That means someone is often pressed into service writing marketing copy at a time when other job duties are competing for limited attention. Rather than go into a panic when that happens, take time now to develop marketing tools that will save you time later.

Good marketing not only helps sell literary magazines, but, if designed creatively and fully, will allow you to develop an overall strategy and have everyone on staff very clear about why someone would want to buy not just any literary magazine, but yours in particular.

Read the following appendices for suggestions to help you with specific marketing situations. And remember: good, effective marketing copy helps you and your readers articulate why your magazine has a unique and important place in your customers’ lives.
Appendix I: Sample Positioning Statements from Publications

Here are the ways some magazines have answered the questions: What does our product do? and Whom is our product for?

Creative Nonfiction

“Between the novel and reportage... between reality and the imagination... between the doing and the telling lives the exciting new form of writing that merges fiction, journalism, poetry, memoir, and the traditional essay—to produce the most rewarding reading of our time: creative nonfiction. A breakthrough magazine brings it to you three times yearly.”

CRICKET

“CRICKET isn’t like most children’s publications. It doesn’t mimic television or classroom worksheets. CRICKET is a quieter, tasteful magazine designed to give your child a different kind of reading experience... one that opens up the whole world to children with great literature and illustrations.”

DoubleTake

“In DoubleTake you’ll find extraordinary portraits of ordinary lives. Tales of quiet decency and substantial accomplishment. All the hopes and struggles, dreams and fears of hardworking, honorable, everyday people. The kind who get too little attention elsewhere in the media.”

Granta

“In England, Granta is read by more than any other literary magazine in the history of the 20th century. But its editors don’t like Literature.”

The Missouri Review

“The magazine that brings you Pulitzer Prize winners, National Book Award winners, and even Nobel Prize winners, BEFORE they win!”

New Moon (to journalists)

“For information on adolescent girls’ opinions, self esteem, education, gender issues: Contact the only international magazine edited entirely by girls aged 8 to 14.”

New Moon (to parents)

“The thinking girl’s magazine.”

Prairie Schooner

“We catch the work bigger places miss. When Ellen Hunnicutt won the Drue Heinz Prize for short fiction, she told the New York Times, ‘My work isn’t very commercial. My stories appear in literary quarterlies like Prairie Schooner—McCall’s just sends me rejections letters.’ ”

The Sun

“Just what is The Sun? It’s a magazine that:
• Carries no advertising.
• Has been an alternative voice since 1974.
• Knows the best questions can’t be answered, and the best answers can’t be verified—that the proof isn’t always in the pudding, or under the microscope, or in your loved one’s eye.
• Chooses as its motto: "What is to give light must endure burning.”
• Has won three Utne Reader Alternative Press Awards, including one for general excellence.
• Doesn’t forget it was once a tree.
• Tries to avoid political cant, spiritual posturing, and literary pretentiousness.
• Honors the broken, glorious human heart, and the mystery in all things.

The Women’s Review of Books

“Here’s where feminists get together to discover, explore, share and argue about women’s writing today.”
Appendix II: Sample Benefit Copy Statements

The following statements from magazines answer the question: Why is this magazine good for my readers?

**CRICKET**

“Stories and pictures from all over the world, historical adventures, biographies, and fascinating science features encourage your child to grow up with many interests.”

**Lingua Franca**

“What other journals do for physicians, lawyers, accountants, and architects, *Lingua Franca* does for academics. We help you manage your professional life—what other professionals refer to as ‘their practice.’

“How can you become more of a presence in your field? Make more of a name for yourself? *How can you avoid specializing yourself into obscurity?*

“Whose courses are packing them in these days? Who’s hot and who’s not on the lecture circuit? How can you get published on the op-ed page? What do you need to know about negotiating with deans about salaries and benefits?”

**Poets & Writers Magazine** *(excerpts from a 6-page direct mail letter)*

“Join nearly 50% of our subscribers—an amazing 16,855 writers—who have found publication through our pages.

Or the thousands more who have found literary agents... workshops where they’ve developed and honed their craft... and profited from professional contacts they might never have made without *POETS & WRITERS MAGAZINE.*

“For less than the cost of 3 pounds of Mocha Java, 5 computer diskettes, or a single modestly priced dinner that is gone in a flash—you can fuel your imagination and help boost your career.”

**Utne Reader**

“Open *UTNE READER* and you’ll discover how to:

- **MASTER THE ART OF EVERYDAY LIVING** *(examples of articles)*
- **DEEPEN SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS**
- **ENJOY HEALTH AND FITNESS**
- **REEVALUATE WORK AND MONEY**
- **REVITALIZE YOUR COMMUNITY**
- **EXPERIENCE OTHER CULTURES**

**The Women’s Review of Books**

“As a subscriber, you’ll keep up to date on what’s just been published... find out what leading feminist movers and shakers think about it all... refresh your own critical powers... and join the debate on the tough challenges facing feminism today.”
Appendix III: Working with a Professional Copywriter

Hiring a professional copywriter is a luxury few literary magazines can afford. However, if you have the resources and the interest, a professional can be very helpful. Here are a few important points to keep in mind:

1. Get references and samples.
   Call the references. Have the reference describe the copywriter’s role in producing the package. Ask about the strengths and weaknesses of the copywriter. Ask if they hired the copywriter again and, if not, why not.

2. If using a direct mail copywriter, find out how many winning packages he or she has written.
   A winning package is one that “beat out” (got more paid responses) another copywriter’s package mailed at the same time to the same lists with the same offer.

3. If the copywriter has no experience in literary magazines, look for his or her handling of a wide variety of publications and/or products.
   Does the copywriter have a sense for each of its products (and the buyers of these products?), or is a generic style used in every piece?

4. Agree on the fee and what it will buy up front.
   Does the fee cover copy only, copy and design, or everything through the mechanicals stage? In these days of computer files as mechanicals for printed prices, find out in what form you will receive copy. Top copywriters can command up to $40,000 for a direct mail package. Writer’s Digest claims that fees for the average package (outer envelope, letter, order form, insert and reply envelope) range from $3,000 to $15,000.

5. Be able to articulate what the benefits of your publication are and how they differ from your competitors.
   If you can’t do this, don’t expect the writer to.

6. Provide lots of tools.
   This includes press clippings, letters from readers, samples of your publication, previous promotions (tell which ones worked and which ones didn’t), samples of other work you like, etc. For direct mail packages, explain which lists you use most successfully.

7. Give the copywriter one decision-maker to deal with.
   If three people are arguing about a word choice, you might as well not hire a professional.

8. Don’t insist the copywriter write as you would if you had the time or desire to do the work yourself.
   After all, you are looking for a new approach, a breakthrough concept—not a rehash of what you’ve always done in the past.

9. If you object to something, offer an alternative.
   Telling the copywriter it isn’t quite right—but not explaining why—will result in yet another round of unsatisfying edits. Once you offer your suggestions, let the copywriter solve the problem. She or he might take your suggestions literally, and might come up with an even better solution.

10. Be reasonable about your schedule.
    If you are planning a direct mail campaign to be mailed at the end of December (peak time for most publications), you had better start researching your options a year in advance. Get a feel for how busy the copywriter is and how much warning is needed to make sure your schedule is met. Often you need to give 1 to 6 months notice. Allow 1 to 2 months for alterations, design, and production. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for printing and mailing.

11. Pay the copywriter when billed.
    If you want to be billed in installments, work that out up front.

12. Send samples of printed pieces to the copywriter.
    Let her or him know how well the project worked.
Appendix IV: What NOT to do in a Direct Mail Letter

Dear Friend,

Since we have now been visited by machines from your planet, it’s time to let you in on a little secret: some of the best literature in the universe is being published on Mars.

We have a special deal: subscribe to our journal for one martian year, and save 50% off our regular price.

As the editors of The Journal of Martian Literature, we bring you: excerpts from new works not yet published by such literary luminaries as E.T. Wharton, Salmon SETI, Gram Greeneguy, and others; newly discovered talents who bring their own unique voices to literature, like Denis Redman, author of Living in the Shadow of No One; and award-winning fiction and poetry.

The Journal of Martian Literature is published four times a year. Each issue is book-length, printed on high-quality paper, with beautiful color covers. Inside, along with the fiction and poetry, you’ll find stunning photos, cartoons and illustrations.

We believe that you’re the kind of person who enjoys the writing I’ve described. Why not join thousands of other readers in the Milky Way who have already discovered the journal that was hailed by The Martian Daily News as “the freshest interplanetary writing of the millennium.”

In every issue, we give equal weight to the new works of old masters and the works of talents whose work we’ve recently uncovered. The subjects may be other-worldly. The language may be raw. But we bring you surprising, talented and fresh new voices.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Auten Spehss
Publisher

Letter is much too short to develop a strong case with the reader. There are too many unanswered questions (how often will I receive an issue, will I like it, etc.).

Offer should not be at beginning of letter. First convince the reader why they should subscribe.

Long sentences with lists like this can easily be broken up into bulleted copy that is easier to scan. Better if the list is benefits, not features.

No benefits. Why should anyone subscribe to this journal? All copy focuses on features, or what’s in the journal. Copy should focus instead on how reading the journal benefits the reader.

Show, don’t tell, the reader the work is “surprising,” “other-worldly,” “raw” or whatever adjectives you use in your copy. Why should they take your word for it?

No P.S., another opportunity to capture the reader’s attention. The P.S. should be strong enough that the reader is enticed to read the rest of the letter or move immediately to order.

No call to action. Yes, it’s apparent the letter-writer wants subscriptions, but the reader never finds out exactly how to subscribe.

No “Johnson box” copy ahead of salutation. It’s a perfect place to lead the reader into the letter.

While this is often done, the use of the word “friend” has the danger of offending someone who knows a direct mail package is NOT from a friend.

Use of “we” is overwhelming. Letter is written from the publisher’s viewpoint. There should be far more mentions of “you” than “we” or “I.”

List of writers can be intimidating, especially if the reader doesn’t recognize the names.

No address or way to contact publisher. If letter becomes separated from rest of mailing piece, potential subscriber has no way of finding publisher.
Following is an example of a successful direct mail appeal. While the visual elements of this package have not been reproduced, the text will hopefully inspire you to come up with some good ideas for your own appeals.

**Ploughshares** (logo)

EMERSON COLLEGE * 100 BEACON STREET * BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  02116

Each issue of *Ploughshares* embarks with a new editor. Why? To make sure every issue of *Ploughshares* is a literary adventure. And as good as our editors are, we prefer to chart our course with a constantly changing helm. Won’t you join us on our next journey?

Dear Reader,

We’re sending you this appeal because you seem like the kind of person who appreciates—perhaps devours—good writing. And even though *Ploughshares* has been around for 26 years, and called a “literary gem” by the *Boston Globe*, there’s a good chance you’ve never had the pleasure of losing yourself in a copy.

In these days of ghost-written celebrity best-sellers, self-help babble, and pre-optioned movie scripts posing as novels, really fine contemporary literature is almost always overlooked by the big publishing houses. It’s now up to literary magazines to bring deserving works into existence and put good writers on the radar screen of the publishing landscape. Literary magazines are characterized by their small circulations, precarious financial positions, dependence on volunteers, and a slavish devotion to a mission to give writers a place for their work. Of the approximately 400 small literary journals published all over the country, *Ploughshares* is one of the best.

If you’ve never subscribed to a literary magazine, *Ploughshares* is one of the best places to start.

Unlike other small journals of the “I-don’t-get-it” variety, the pages of *Ploughshares* are full of works you’ll rush to read and share with friends or members of your book discussion group.

Once you expand your reading to literary journals, you’ll enter a whole new experience, untainted by talk show publicity, or tired old patterns of best-seller successes.

If you’re ready to taste the finer vintages of contemporary literature, *Ploughshares* will educate your palate much more quickly than almost any other publication. Our unique rotation of distinguished writers editing the magazine means you’ll discover more writers and more kinds of writing than anywhere else.

Tim O’Brien, author of *The Things They Carried*, was one of *Ploughshares*’ “discoveries.” He edited a recent issue, and says of other publications: “There’s wonderful stuff there, but you often don’t come up with many surprises. That’s the result of the same people admiring the same things. *Ploughshares*’ freshness comes from different people admiring different things.” When those people are as different and as good as Raymond Carver and Rita Dove, you’ll benefit from a highly honed sense of how to recognize good writing.
If you’ve already discovered literary magazines, 
*Ploughshares* is the best of the crop.

Just about every year, work selected for publication by *Ploughshares* ends up being chosen for anthologies such as *Best American Short Stories*, *The O. Henry Awards* and *The Pushcart Prizes*. *Ploughshares* has had the pleasure in presenting the early work of many writers who have gone on to become this country’s superstars of fiction and poetry—like Scott Turow, Sue Miller, and Tobias Wolff.

The New York Times called *Ploughshares* “the Triton among the minnows” because of its reputation for standing above the rest—by consistently delivering the literary goods. *Ploughshares* is distinguished by careful and compelling editing. It has a knack for racking up as many award-winning stories and poems as *The New Yorker*, with a literary reputation well out of proportion to its size.

*Ploughshares* is as different from a mainstream magazine as a bottle of European beer is from a can of Bud.

The format of our journal is hard to define. Is it a journal? Anthology? Book? Magazine? The answer is yes to all four. Each surprising collection of good writing is what keeps our readers coming back, hungry for more dynamic but hard-to-pigeon-hole works. While each issue can stand on its own like a finely-written book, the combined strength of a series of issues is amazingly satisfying.

*Ploughshares* brings you added bonuses in every issue, too.

Reading *Ploughshares* will certainly whet your appetite for more good reading. So we review the best new books being published today. We also bring you “Postscripts,” a column that dishes up insights about our writers and the literary scene.

Two other fascinating features round out each issue. First, an introduction by the guest editor gives you a behind-the-scenes look at how and why works were chosen for that particular issue. It will add to your enjoyment of the guest editor’s selections, and let you see literary luminaries in a whole new light (as judges, not writers). And second—because our guest editors are too modest to do it themselves—we offer you colorful profiles of their accomplishments, their backgrounds, and even some polite details of their private lives.

Do you want to be engaged? Or do you need to escape?

Why do you read, anyway? And how do you read? Do you sometimes find yourself sitting up straight, concentrating deeply on a story that gives you new insight into something you’ve been trying to understand in your own life? And are there other times when you read to escape from the familiar, and sit back to let the words wash over you in an almost unconscious way?

*Ploughshares* recognizes that good writing can offer both engagement and escape. It can be soothing or disturbing, relaxing or invigorating, familiar or foreign. Our pages are peopled with characters you know and with curious strangers.

It’s hard to articulate what good writing is, and why we are driven to read it. Maybe it’s because we learn new things about ourselves and others and how the world works. Or we get a uniquely human satisfaction from a well-constructed story or poem—the cumulative power of images, dialogue, characters, lyricism, words. Whatever the reason, reading great writing is one of life’s great pleasures.

Bring the pleasure of *Ploughshares* into your life.

Few of life’s pleasures can be had as cheaply as a subscription to *Ploughshares*. For only $16.95, you can receive three book-sized issues of what has been called “a national treasure.” At less than $6 per issue, you’ll be receiving over 200 pages of compelling reading, at a cost half that of a fine trade soft-cover book.
And—if you respond by the deadline printed on the enclosed order form—we’ll send you an extra issue FREE! Your early response allows us to print extra copies and reserve one for you.

We’re small and efficient, and we publish to order. Respond after the deadline, and all of our 6,000 copies will be gone. Like fine, homemade jams, we make only small batches when the fruit is in season. Ploughshares comes out every four months or so—to get your hands on our next wonderful issue means you need to reply before we tell our printer how many copies to print.

The goal of Ploughshares has always been to discover new writers and to promote neglected talent. What that means for you is guaranteed good reading.

Send for your subscription today. Treat yourself to the best.

Sincerely,

[signature]

Don Lee
Editor

P.S. Critic William Pritchard says Ploughshares is “the major organ in the country where new talent—both in fiction and poetry—can be encountered.” But you may not have encountered Ploughshares at your local bookstore or in the usual places where magazines are hawked. Your best bet for getting your hands on this unique but rare journal is to return the enclosed order card. Mail it today and claim your extra issue—FREE.

Sample Pull Quotes

Pull quotes may be set apart from the main text of a direct mail appeal, accompanied by the authors' photos. This is an effective way to catch the reader's attention.

Ann Beattie, author of Chilly Scenes of Winter and other novels and collections of short stories:

“I am drawn to stories that are at once on the page and off it, escaping boundaries just as a good photograph does.”

Marilyn Hacker, award-winning poet and renowned editor:

“...I would read two hundred manuscripts a week. Some of them were wonderful, some were terrible; most were mediocre. It was like the gifts of the good and bad fairies.

Richard Ford, author and winner of Pulitzer Prize and PEN/Faulkner awards for Independence Day:

“Good writing manages at a primary level to acknowledge that a reader is using his brain cells up as he reads, and needs from the writing to be rewarded.”

Robert Boswell, author of three novels and two short story collections:

“...a good story is the best way I know to touch upon the spiritual, to ride the elusive circuitry of the soul.”

Ellen Bryant Voigt, award-winning poet and founder of Goddard’s MFA program:

“Readers will have both the pleasure of discovery with distinctive new makers... and the pleasures of recognition, with poets who have faithfully sent Ploughshares their best work over the years.”

Tim O’Brien, author:

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