

The Direct Mailer's Menu of Emotional Appeals



Beyond the basics of water, food, shelter, clothing, and warmth, virtually everything people buy is based on fulfilling an emotional want.



Buying decisions are not made through reasoning and logic, but through the lens of wants, needs, interests, joys, fears, hopes, expectations, and regrets. Once you touch people emotionally, reasoning and logic are used merely to confirm a buying decision.

So what are the specific wants people have? To start with, people want to acquire things they don't have or want more of. These include:

- Time
- Comfort
- Money
- Popularity
- Praise
- Pride of accomplishment
- Self-confidence
- Security
- Leisure
- Fun
- Prestige
- Enjoyment
- Health
- Better appearance

- Exclusivity
- Envy
- Ego gratification
- Business advancement
- Social advancement

Some of these wants are obvious. Everyone desires health, especially if they are getting older or are not in peak health to begin with. Any appeal that promises greater health, more energy, and the ability to be more active will create a strong emotional reaction.

Other wants are less obvious. Ego gratification isn't something people discuss, and it's not something you can mention directly in advertising copy. However, everyone wants to feel important and special. This is one reason that automobile ads usually show happy, successful people at the wheel.

People not only want to gain things, they also want to avoid the loss of what they already have. The motivation to avoid loss is often stronger than the motivation to acquire something. Some of the things people seek to avoid are:

- Embarrassment
- Offense to others
- Domination by others
- Loss of reputation

- Pain
- Criticism
- Risk
- Work
- Effort
- Discomfort
- Worry
- Doubt
- Guilt
- Boredom

Avoiding embarrassment is an example of a strong emotional appeal that powers much modern advertising. Years ago, people bathed less frequently, often once a week or less. Soap manufacturers used the embarrassment appeal to alter American society's views of proper social etiquette so that most people now bathe or shower once a day.

In addition to seeking to gain and avoid things, people also strive to act, or to be seen by others as acting, in certain ways for emotional reasons. For example, people like to:

- Express a unique personality
- Satisfy curiosity
- Act or appear like a hero figure
- Attract the opposite sex
- Improve themselves physically, mentally, or spiritually
- Gain affection of others important to them
- Be accepted into other social circles
- Create and live up to a

reputation

- Fulfill personal obligations
- Create or accomplish things to be proud of
- Reward themselves
- Protect themselves from harm

Years ago, advertisers sold paint-by-number sets to people who couldn't paint but still wanted the feeling of creating a work of art. This clever product satisfied the need to create something to be proud of. The same emotional appeal is used today to sell gardening products for those who want a beautiful lawn.

People also enjoy feeling that they are special in some way. More specifically, they wish to "be seen" as something special. This is related to some of the previous appeals, such as expressing a unique personality or gaining prestige. It's such a strong motivator, though, that it is used in a variety of ways by savvy advertisers.

People want to be seen as:

- Smart or savvy
- First or best at something
- Unique, one-of-a-kind
- Creative, either generally or in a special area
- Good parents
- Efficient
- Recognized authorities
- Up-to-date, well-educated, or "with it"
- Gregarious and sociable

- Influential, able to get things done
- Independent
- Popular, well-liked
- Part of a group, one of the boys

You can see these appeals in the ads for a variety of products. Language learning programs appeal to the need to be seen as smart. Honorary “Who's Who” publications appeal to the need to be seen as the best or as a recognized

authority. Organizers and daybook-style planners can be legitimately helpful to business people, but they are often marketed as personal accessories to help people “be seen” as efficient and influential.

It is the emotional appeal that makes advertising work, not logical “reasons to buy.”

With this list of emotional appeals, you can craft more powerful headlines, write more relevant copy, and create more appealing photos and graphics.

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