

# GETTING PERSONAL WITH YOUR PLAYERS

By Nicole Barker

## PERSONALIZATION NO-NO'S

TOP TEN ERRORS THAT DESTROY A MAILING



1. Using windowed envelopes
2. Putting threatening teasers on the outside of the envelope like "Open Immediately"
3. Posting a barcode on the outside of the envelope
4. Posting a barcode or club number above the recipient's mailing address
5. Posting the recipient's mailing address above the letter copy
6. Addressing to "John Smith or current resident"
7. Sending offers for things the recipient already has
8. Having the length of your disclaimers be longer than your letter copy
9. Signing your missive with "From the Group/Team/Casino"
10. Using thin paper

## PERSONALIZATION YES-YES'S

TOP TEN SHORTCUTS TO PERSONALIZATION



1. Use thicker paper stock
2. Print letter on monarch stationery
3. Start letter with "Dear (Insert First Name)"
4. Inscribe "From the Desk of (Insert GM's Name)" at the top of the stationery
5. Send e-mail using the GM's name (i.e. jane\_smith@yourcasino.com)
6. Print "Exclusively for (Recipient's Name)" on every offer
7. Include means to call back, e-mail back or write back
8. Include an inquiry asking the recipient to share similar stories
9. Use blue ink for the GM's signature
10. Include a P.S.

In action flicks it takes half the movie for the hero to get mad enough to throw up his fist in retaliation and grumble, "Now it's personal." What does it take for you to get personal with your players?

Unlike *The Bourne Identity*, your players aren't your adversaries. They haven't erased your past, implanted microchips in your body, or asked you to travel the world to perform hits on foreign assets ... or have they? Let's hope not.

You're in a perpetual state of courtship. Even when a player signs up for a club card, they still haven't chosen you. The courtship has only begun. With your players, it's always personal. The challenge is to continue to evolve your relationship with your players faster than your competitors.

### Don't Just Sign It — Live It

One way to get personal with your players is to be very selective about who signs your direct marketing and promotional mailings. We all worry about the Martha Stewart syndrome — name the company after yourself, and you can never relinquish control, sell the company or make a mistake. Incorporating key people into the fabric of your brand is risky. However, even though Martha served time, her brand survived. In the musical chair world of gaming, admittedly, it's also risky to "brand" the signator of your loyalty communications.

Do it anyway.

For Neil Fiske, president and CEO of Eddie Bauer, getting personal drove him up a mountain. Literally. During the holiday season, his marketing department sends subscribers updates about outerwear sales several times a week. Apart from the norm, in early November of last year, an e-mail came through with Fiske's smiling face bundled in a puffy jacket and a helmet on his head. He had just reached the summit of Mt. Rainier, the highest peak in the Cascade Range at over 14,000 feet. Fiske didn't just personally sign a missive about climbers wearing his company's clothing; he risked breathing some of the thinnest air in the United States in order to prove his point. He loves his products and the experiences he can have while wearing them.

The mechanism for direct marketing was still there, but a fluffy “Here’s what I did last summer ...” this was not. The well-worded tale drove readers to connect with the website for further details. Upon completing the story, the reader jumped to a page detailing each item Fiske wore — including its picture, description and ordering details. If the reader couldn’t make a purchase immediately, she could add an item to her wish list by signing up for an online account replete with e-mail reminders. Though I may never climb Mt. Rainier, I liked living vicariously through Fiske’s success. I wanted a slice of his experience. That’s what personalized direct marketing is all about: artfully communicating the exhilaration associated with becoming a part of your selling proposition. Wear Eddie Bauer outerwear, and you can summit Mt. Rainier, too ... or make it far enough into the suburban wilderness to buy your next Starbucks latte.

What does your general manager think about your casino? What does he notice when he crosses the floor? What are his crowning

■ Court your players. Be the best suitor in your neighborhood. A little charm trumps coupon clipping any day. ■

achievements? What inspired him to take the helm of your property? What puts a silly, “I just reached the summit,” look on his face? Is he willing to have a candid picture taken? If you can’t get more than 20 minutes of his time to ask, then make it up. I swear he’ll be anxious to sign your letters if you let slip that he secretly wears lucky green socks to make sure the visiting whale doesn’t rob him blind. Hiring good writers helps the process. They get paid to be creative and can be blamed if the stories they ghostwrite are too farfetched. Don’t forget that marketing is more about storytelling than it is about the sweetest offer. Your players are readers — consumers of stories. Tantalizing them with written pictures will bring them much closer to a return trip than a cold coupon in its lifeless form.

### Caricature is the Sincerest Form of Connectivity

Hiring a cartoonist is probably the last thing on your list of promotional tools. Actually, I’d be surprised if one makes your list at all. But maybe one should.

It pays to cultivate your onsite celebrities. You don’t need to book Celine Dion for your amphitheater to capitalize on characters your players will recognize. Your friendliest cashier, the chef at your fine dining restaurant, and your talkative slot attendant are all onsite celebrities who your players recognize. A well-placed photo or caricature of these folks may be just the incentive your players are looking for in deciding when to return.

Not too long ago, Harrah’s Las Vegas did a novel thing: It concocted gloriously creative special events that were themed through and through. The invitations featured a series of recognizable characters — the hard-working promotions staff that tirelessly organizes, staffs and ultimately cleans up after an event. Frequent players know these captains of fun by name. Director of Special Events & Promotions Dawn Rawle, as always, signed her name, as her crew supplied the cartoon cast. For the Candy & Cashland slot tournament, clever illustrations marked a player’s path from the Welcome Reception to be held at Ginger’s Bread House to taking a dip in Mechil’s Chocolate Marshmallow Lake, and then finally joining in at the Awards Night with Dawn, the Queen of Cash. Players definitely knew who to look for when they arrived on scene for the fun.

Other casino marketing departments have followed the onsite casino celebrity charge. Popular casino hosts serve themselves up to be roasted at their birthday parties with the top VIPs invited. Player

newsletters include pictures of longstanding employees. The point is to let your players get close to your staff. If they feel that your staff is already having fun, they’ll want to join in, too.

### Prepackaged Travel Portfolio

When getting personal, check your tone. Is it forward focused? Does it assume that you and your players have always been friends — friends who share the same interests and who have plans to see each other again?

The Hyatt Vacation Club periodically sends promotions in a unique format. A 5” x 8” envelope announces “Travel Portfolio Enclosed.” Inside, a trifold brochure includes a letter, itinerary and description of additional vacation extras that add to the package. The offer includes a special room rate, reimbursement for booking a flight through Orbitz, and a gift certificate to be redeemed on property. A glossy brochure illustrates the destination resort featured in the promotion.

The components that make the promotion a model to consider replicating are: the letter is addressed to the recipient, is signed by the director of sales and marketing, and includes a postscript (P.S.) to provide a call to action; the language of the brochure is forward focused with phrases like “Vacation Details for the (Insert Last Name) Family” and a callback number that reads “To Confirm These Arrangements Call ...”; where there are places to insert the recipient’s name, that name has been inserted; and where there are places to use the words “you” or “your,” they’re used.

The recipient feels important because of how the invitation is presented. The offer comes alive with a complete itinerary and reservation number at the ready, and Hyatt writes as if the bellman is already waiting for the recipient’s arrival. It’s like having a personal concierge who does the thinking for you. It’s the semblance of customization that makes it personal.

In a modern world that includes impersonal forms of courtship, such as speed dating, matchmaking websites and virtual identities, it’s worth going the extra mile to get as personal as a matchmaker. Court your players. Be the best suitor in your neighborhood. A little charm trumps coupon clipping any day. Look beyond winning the next trip and aim to build enduring long-term relationships. You can achieve this by simply including subtle elements like a signature from the top casino figurehead or photos of your onsite celebrity casino crew, and by paying close attention to the format and the tone of your letter. Proper personalization makes for a match made of Sevens.



### ▲ NICOLE BARKER



Nicole Barker is a marketing consultant and writer. Following a role as Direct Marketing Manager for Harrah’s Las Vegas, Harrah’s Laughlin and the Rio, she started her own company, Barker Enterprises Inc. She can be reached at (702) 579-5825 or [nbarker@barkerenterprisesinc.com](mailto:nbarker@barkerenterprisesinc.com).