

Direct Mail Kingpin's Hateful Connection

by *Bill Berkowitz*

A year after attempting to capitalize on the Terri Schiavo case, Response Unlimited's Philip Zodiates has taken to peddling anti-Semitic mail lists to conservative groups.

Last March, shortly before Terri Schiavo -- the woman who had been in a "persistent vegetative state" since 1990, and whose case was dominating the political/media landscape -- died, her parents, Bob and Mary Schindler, inked a pact with Response Unlimited (website), a Waynesboro, Virginia-based direct mail marketing firm.

Run by longtime conservative activist Philip Zodiates, the deal would have allowed Response Unlimited to market the names and e-mail addresses that the Schindlers had garnered during their campaign to save their daughter's life.

Before the names and addresses of donors could be sold -- the company planned to charge \$150 per thousand names (6,000) or e-mail addresses (4000) of people who responded to an e-mail fundraising appeal from Terri's father -- the New York Times' David Kirkpatrick exposed the arrangement, and the company quickly removed Schindler's list from its catalogue.

At the time, Media Transparency reported that the company had advertised the fund-raising potential that the list represented: On its website, Response Unlimited pointed out that "These compassionate pro-lifers donated toward Bob Schindler's legal battle to keep Terri's estranged husband from removing the feeding tube from Terri." The people on the list "are passionate about the way they value human life, adamantly oppose euthanasia and are pro-life in every sense of the word!"

The huge market for Christian-related mail lists

Response Unlimited brokers hundreds of mail lists from conservative organizations and political campaigns. Fundraisers and organizers can choose from lists representing nearly 3,000 Christian Computer Software Buyers or 40,000 Christian Political Donors "concern[ed] for the protection of the traditional American family and are generous in what they'll dish out for Christian, conservative, GOP and humanitarian fundraising opportunities." A list of the 71,000 active subscribers to the Weekly Standard, "the ground breaking, courageously independent conservative magazine edited by political powerhouses William Kristol and Fred Barnes" as well as one with 15,208 Jewish donors to the Heritage Foundation are also available.

It recently came to light that Response Unlimited (RU) is also peddling the list of readers of The Spotlight, "America's leading anti-Semitic newspaper" and, since about 2001, its successor publication, the American Free Press, the Southern Poverty Law Center's Spring 2006 issue of Intelligence Report pointed out.

Subscribers and former subscribers to the now-defunct Spotlight are listed in the "What's Hot" section of the company's website. RU charges \$100 per thousand, and \$50 per thousand, for 42,408 Subscribers and 79,866 "Expires" respectively.

The Spotlight, founded by the longtime anti-Semite Willis Carto, "carried anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic and wildly conspiracist articles interspersed with ads for Klan, neo-Nazi and related hate groups."

An additional selling point for buyers of The Spotlight list is that it contains the names of "politically active readers [who] are predominately retired men who want the inside stories that only The Spotlight can provide."

After The Spotlight was "shut down amid legal and financial troubles surrounding Carto," the American Free Press -- another Response Unlimited client -- "picked up many of its predecessor paper's propagandists," the Intelligence Report reported.

These days, the American Free Press "carries stories on Zionism, secret 'New World Order' conspiracies, American Jews and Israel. Mixed in are advertisements for outfits like Pete Peter's Scriptures for America and Kingdom Identity Ministries -- practitioners of Christian Identity, a theology that claims that Jews are the literal descendants of Satan."

Response Unlimited is offering American Free Press' 21,824 current subscribers and 37,919 "Expires." The company describes the publication as "a nationally distributed weekly newspaper of a populist and nationalist bent [that] promotes 'Life and Liberty' and staunchly opposes the 'New World Order'... These readers are extremely responsive to alternative and natural health offers, investment opportunities, other subscription offers, book and video offers, pro-America, anti-United Nations, anti-tax and pro-sovereignty fundraising."

Zodhiates "acquired" The Spotlight "lists in the spring of 1998," Todd Blodgett, a Washington operative who specializes in direct mail lists and who once worked for Spotlight founder Willis Carto, told the Intelligence Report. "Blodgett, who says he was in the business to make money and little else, said he approached Zodhiates with Carto's approval. Blodgett said Zodhiates was originally apprehensive because he'd heard that "some Spotlight readers had a reputation for being anti-Semitic."

"But Blodgett managed to convince Zodhiates not to worry, he says now. He says he told Zodhiates that "anti-Zionism is not necessarily anti-Semitism.' He also noted that the attorney for Carto's main anti-Semitic organization, Liberty Lobby, was Mark Lane, who is Jewish. (Lane is also a prominent theorist of a conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy.) That was enough for Zodhiates.

"The list, which Response Unlimited says "works phenomenally well for products of all types, subscription offers, hard-money and other investment offers," was successful right away, Blodgett said. He said the list immediately began earning Carto some \$8,000 to \$9,000 a month. According to Blodgett, Zodhiates got an additional 35 percent in broker and management fees, or some \$3,000 a month."

"Ripoffs Unlimited"

Philip Zodhiates and James Lloyd could be kindred spirits; they both make their living from Christian conservative evangelical politics and culture. While Zodhiates markets the mail lists of hundreds of Christian groups, Lloyd is the man behind an enterprise called Christian Media Research (CMR - website). CMR is a website devoted to providing "informative files, radio programs, and fact-based commentaries, about Christian public figures, ministries and doctrinal positions."

Lloyd's website maintains that it is "part of the larger Christian Media ministry -- encompassing a nationally distributed tabloid style print newspaper, two printed prophecy newsletters, a daily Internet prophecy commentary, an Internet forum/fellowship group, and a 24/7 Internet, Satellite and Shortwave radio network."

In a report by Lloyd bitterly entitled "Ripoffs Unlimited: A Critical Examination Of Response Unlimited -- A Christian Direct Mail Company," he described his experience working with Zodhiates' company:

After many years of working with Christian musicians and creatives in video, radio, and print [and] ... as the publisher of the leading trade directory of all organizations professionally involved in Christian media ... I had accumulated a significant mailing list of Christian singers, songwriters, record producers, video creatives, and others professionally engaged in media. I ran into a rep for Response Unlimited who told me they could market that list and it would help to finance our prophecy materials with a minimal effort. The salesperson was persuasive, as he told me if I signed up with Response Unlimited, a list like mine (which had about 10,000 names) was sure to make Christian Media a minimum of a dollar per name per year -- or about \$10,000 per year just for letting other ministries "rent" the list.

In need of an infusion of cash for his multiple media enterprises, Lloyd signed on. But he was soon to find out that mail list marketers are not necessarily operating on the up and up. "One of the problems in religious direct mail fund-raising is the inability of those that have gotten on a mailing list to actually get their name removed from the original mailing list that is being continuously rented out," Lloyd explained. Most people only receive a single solicitation from the organization that rented a list with their name on it; if they want their name deleted it would have to be deleted by the mail list broker that controls the list, and most people have no idea who that broker might be.

"Cautious" about the use of his list, Lloyd told Response Unlimited that he "would not release the database electronically as Response Unlimited wanted, but would provide any rental customers with the peel off

pressure sensitive labels of the mailing list."

After not receiving any rentals after four months, Lloyd realized that in order "to generate a dollar per name per year as had been represented, the list would have to be rented out around once a month. This was because mailing lists rental fees average about \$100 per one thousand names on a one-time basis. This meant a full rental of 10,000 names was worth about \$1,000 -- or a dime per name."

After a few years where there was little or no contact with the company, Lloyd decided to do some promotion for his own businesses. He found that the main broker of Christian lists was Response Unlimited. In short, after using several lists he found that they contained an overwhelming number of useless names and addresses.

ConservativePetitions.com

Last year, when the New York Times reported on the Schindler mail list deal, it pointed out that the transaction had been negotiated with Phil Sheldon. In 2000, Sheldon, the son of longtime anti-gay activist Lou Sheldon, the founder of the Traditional Values Coalition, co-founded with Philip Zodiates ConservativePetitions.com (website).

According to its website, Conservative Petition.com aims "to offer people the opportunity to harness Internet technology in making a difference on critical issues they care about."