



DIRECT FORUM

VOLUME 5. ISSUE 1

* * * * JANUARY 2009 * * * *

Direct Forum is a free e-mail newsletter containing useful direct marketing tips, news updates and how-to information. It's convenient, informative and I am not trying to sell you anything!

This month's topics include:

- 1. DO YOU MAKE THESE SIMPLE MISTAKES IN YOUR DIRECT MAIL APPEAL?**
- 2. A FEW MORE ESSENTIAL THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN COMPOSING AN EMAIL APPEAL.**
- 3. MAKE SURE THAT YOUR BEST DONORS STAY AND DON'T STRAY.**
- 4. I WELCOME YOUR QUESTIONS.**

DO YOU MAKE THESE SIMPLE MISTAKES IN YOUR DIRECT MAIL APPEAL?

We all know this simple fact: "Benefits sell while features tell."

Yet, every semester when over a hundred students of mine, with my help, analyze direct mail pieces that I receive or collect, including many from charities, we often observe one big common flaw.

Most pieces talk way too much about their features and too little about their benefits.

Possible features listed for a lock on sale:

- (1) Comes in a variety of colours
- (2) Extremely sturdy
- (3) Lightweight new state-of-the-art material
- (4) Extra layer of protective coating to resist corrosion.

But when you go shopping for a lock you're not buying the lock for its features, **you're buying a promise that you will be safe and secure with that lock . . . that thieves cannot get past it. You're paying for peace of mind and the assurance that you and your family will be well protected.**

Similarly, in the case of charities: “Accomplishments sell while activities tell.”

For example when you are writing about a camp the activities could be:

- (1) Camp for children with physical disabilities
- (2) Exceptionally high 2:1 counselor to camper ratio to ensure that every camper is safe and well supervised
- (3) Located in the heart of cottage country on 80 acres of land with a beautiful lake.

But once again donors don't give because of these features, they look for your accomplishments.

- (1) Our camp gives kids with physical disabilities a way of having fun and the opportunity learn self-reliance, ultimately helping them succeed in life.**
- (2) We give them what might possibly be their first opportunity to actively participate in physical recreational activities.**
- (3) We help kids focus on what they can do rather than what they are unable to do.**

This clearly demonstrates how their donations are helping campers.

Donors give you funds because they want to share in your accomplishments, not because of the features of the camp itself.

**Remember, activities are what you do.
Accomplishments are why your charity matters to your donors.**

A FEW MORE ESSENTIAL THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN COMPOSING AN EMAIL APPEAL.

Last month I spoke about the four important things to remember when composing an email appeal.

Here are a few more to consider when using the online medium to solicit donations.

1. Follow-up email – Re-sending the same email offer with slight creative changes or as a reminder can increase sales and profits by 20-40%. This has worked for direct mail so there is no reason why it will not work for e-appeals.

2. Convert benefit-rich response links to call-to-action links – This is the element that links your prospect to the next step in the sales cycle. Rather than “click here,” convert benefit copy into links such as: *“click here for a 5-day free offer.”*

Links early in the e-mail message get the highest response so try and include at least one link in the first screen shot “above the fold” (visible on the screen when the message is first opened).

3. Cut copy way down. Email recipients don’t read they scan for words and phrases of interest. Here’s an effective copy-editing tip: Eliminate 50% of the words from the original copy, then go back and eliminate 50% more. It can be done and usually results in stronger copy with greater impact!

4. Try using a video to capture your viewer’s attention. It engages, entertains and educates your constituents. Online video was the big trend in 2008. It helped attract millions of new and repeat subscribers to **YouTube**, **Facebook**, and **MySpace** and was part of a winning strategy used by Obama in his bid to win the election.

It can be a key technique for online engagement to help attract new viewers and a broader audience, which leads me **to put in a plug for my students.**

Once again my students have performed with flying colours. For those who want to see a great example of using a video to capture the viewer’s attention, email me at: designersinc@sympatico.ca and I will send you a beautiful video that they created for their client: **Save a Child’s Heart.**

MAKE SURE THAT YOUR BEST DONORS STAY AND DON’T STRAY.

Most fundraising is designed on a volume-driven model with little regard for individual donors.

As a consequence charities often find that renewal rates can fall by as much as 50% after a donor's first contribution. Worse still almost 80% of donors gradually drift away in less than five years and end up in the lapsed category.

One of the biggest dangers and a clear wake up call is when high-end donors stop donating yearly.

What should you do when that happens?

I believe that one way to address this problem is to stop mass marketing to them.

I recently did just that for one of my clients, **Integra Foundation**.

We carefully selected fifty high-end donors who had not given for the entire year.

We sent each an individual letter of appreciation in a hand written envelope along with a small thank-you gift. The entire mailing cost less then \$700.

In the first week alone Integra got an 10% response and once again donors responded generously. In fact they gave 350 times the cost of the entire mailing.

In the coming weeks, we will be anxiously waiting to see how the balance of the high-end donors respond

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- To participate, send me an e-mail with your suggestions.
- To post a comment, please include your name, e-mail address and your thoughts.

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