



# DIRECT FORUM

JUNE 2011

VOLUME 7. ISSUE 6

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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. Five tips for getting your envelope opened**
- 2. Words that help improve results**
- 3. Now, that's what I call great feedback**

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## Five tips for getting your envelope opened

If your main job is to ensure recipients open your envelopes, then here are five ways to get that important job done.

**Tip 1: Use Michael Masterson's 4 U's writing formula — urgent, unique, ultra-specific and useful.**

**Urgent. This gives the reader a reason to act now instead of later. You can create a sense of urgency by incorporating a time element.**

The Special Olympics Ontario mailing below generated a 17.6% response; It beat the projection by 60% and got an average gift of \$44 from 57.18% donors.



18 Wynford Drive  
Suite 300  
North York, ON  
M3C 3S2



On February 26, 2008

The National Winter Games start in  
Quebec City.

Please help first time athlete, Rachelle  
Barbeau, get there.



**Unique. Say or show something new or intriguing.**

Coloured envelopes and ornate designs are sometimes enough to get the package opened.

Both the **FoodShare** examples alongside became control packages.

The very crude artwork gave it a down-to-earth, unprofessional look and that appealed to the charity's donors and prospects.

**Ultra-specific. Tease the reader into reading your letter.**

This Special Olympics acquisition mailing with the headline: **SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETE COMPETES DESPITE DEATH OF FATHER.** (See Story Inside).

It resulted in a tremendous response from new prospects.



**Useful. Using a strong benefit oriented headline on the envelope always appeals to the readers' self-interest and tempts them to open it.**



This CIBC envelope did just that. It read: **A 5-minute investment that can save you money every month.**

It generated a 10% response — something unheard of in the financial sector.



Envelope A: Positive spin



Envelope B: Negative spin

## Tip 2: Answers to the eternal question: is it bad to talk about the negative side rather than the positive?

Negative approaches almost always work better. When you add a streak of outrage, it shows that you are passionate about your cause and it often motivates donors to be receptive too.

Two opposing examples and the results that show the effectiveness of a negative approach: Here package B, the negative package – received a 27% higher response; it got 12% higher average gifts and generated 18% higher revenue per thousand.

### Why?

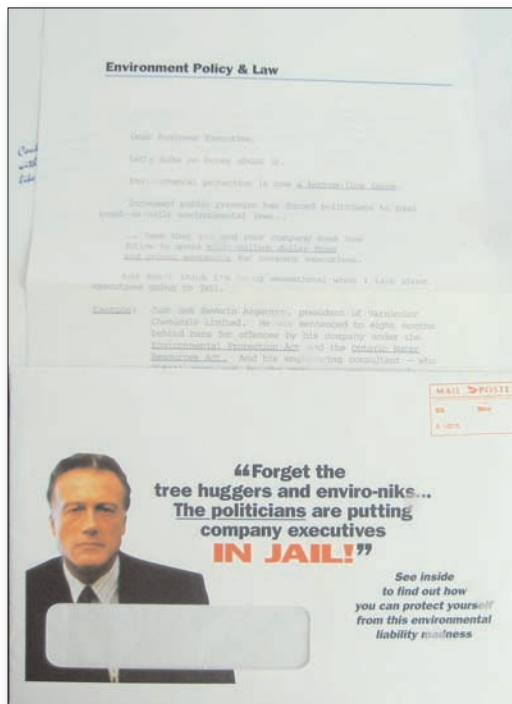
- Anger is a stronger motivator than happiness (which is another reason why negative political ads work.) Case in point: Not only did Steven Harper get his mandate of a majority but he also demolished the Liberal Party.
- Addressing and solving a problem is a smarter way than celebrating a victory

## TIP 3: Reach your prospects or donors on a deeper level.

Make your pitch relevant. Talk about things that may affect them personally.

This **Thomson-Carswell** piece alongside on Environment Policy & Law was mailed to top executives of companies responsible for handling their environmental waste. It spoke about the consequences of not obeying the law on protecting, caring for and safeguarding hazardous materials.

The piece contained a 6-page letter with no graphics except the photo of an executive and a strong statement on the envelope talking about how company executives could go to jail for breaking the law. The result: It outperformed the control package by 233%.

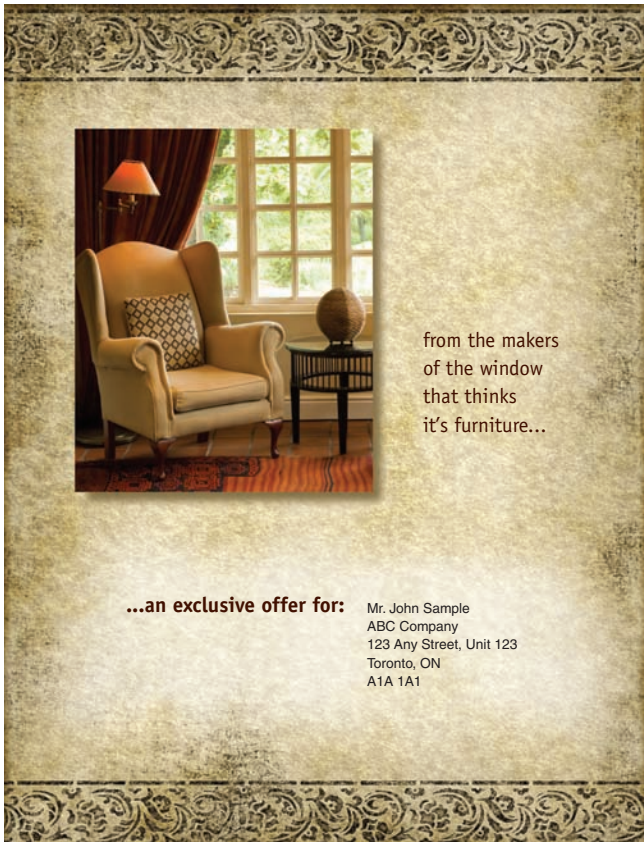


## Tip 4: Start with the prospect, not your product.

If you don't have a better understanding of your prospects before you attempt to sell them something why will they buy?

This **Majestic Windows** mailing was an invitation to Window Dealerships to join the manufacturer in partnership.

It was mailed in a transparent plastic bag and contained just one glove, visible at the back. The copy line in the letter said, *“Because manufacturing windows and installing them go hand in glove, we are sending you one glove with this letter to extend a hand in partnership.”*



Front of package



Back of package with glove visible

Result: Just 500 prospect piece were mailed. By the second week 10 new prospects responded — a 2% response and counting.

**Tip 5: Never miss a chance to send a reminder mailing.**

Reminder mailings are key to lifting your response; most will bump up the response by as much as 2% to 4%.

Reminder mailings not only prompt those donors who set the mailing aside to deal with later but may have forgotten, but it can also allow you to re-tell your readers the urgent



First mailing

need for their gift.

This first **University of St. Michael's College** mailing alongside asked ex-alumni students for \$1.2 million in donations for it's '**Faith, Hope & Charity**' campaign.

When it fell short, the reminder mailing gave donors measurable results as to how much had been collected and how much was still needed. The reminder mailing quickly made up the shortfall.

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## Words that help improve results

Most of the appeals I read do a great job of imparting information. Where they fall short is being persuasive enough to get prospects or donors to respond.

Informational letters do a good job of presenting the problem, be it an environmental, a hunger or a women's issue, as clearly as possible. They often even make a strong case why their organization is the best one that can overcome the problem presented. They are great at expressing the key questions: WHO, WHAT & WHERE.

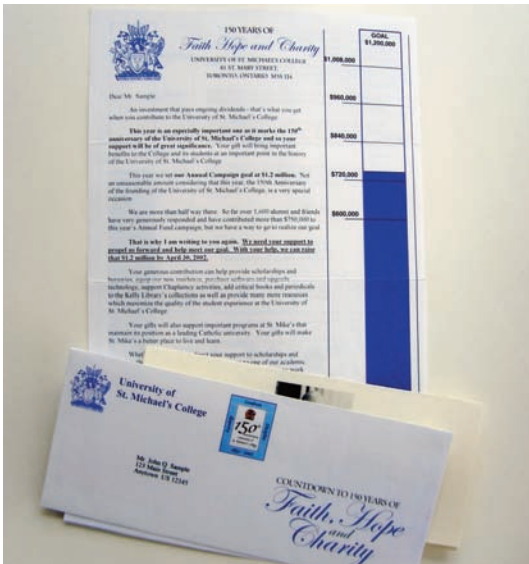
Where they fall short is in making a persuasive argument, The WHY question — Why should I buy your product or give your charity money?

To write powerful copy, you have to go beyond the demographics to understand what really motivates your readers. You must know who they are, what they want, how they feel, and what their biggest problems and concerns are that your product or organization can address to help solve.

There are three levels to every individual — **intellectual, emotional and personal**. To maximize communication you must make sure you try and cover all three levels.

**An intellectual appeal is based on logic.**

So when the copy says: ***“The dyson vacuum cleaner uses Root Cyclone™ technology. Instead of relying on bags and filters to trap the dust, it spins the dirt out of the air. That's one of the reasons why it doesn't lose suction, picks up more dirt from your home and expels cleaner air.”***



Reminder mailing

**This sentence is really appealing to logic.**

More powerful than the intellectual level is the next level, the **emotional level**. Emotions can include fear, greed, love, vanity and a host of others. For fundraising it could be benevolence.

Once again using **dyson** as an example. When they claim: ***“Dyson vacuums are certified asthma & allergy friendly™”***

**These words address the emotional issue.**

The most powerful way to reach people is on a **personal level**. Here you must answer the “What’s in it for me?”

Once again **dyson** took into account animal lovers, and they discovered that there are, according to the **AVMA** statistical group, more than 72 million pet dogs and nearly 82 million pet cats in the U.S. alone.

So when **dyson** added these words: ***“Dyson Root Cyclone™ technology removes cat, dog and other pet hair from your home using Hepa filters and centrifugal forces up to 150,000 times the force of gravity.”***

They are now really addressing the personal level needs of a large sub-audience and making sure all three levels have been addressed.

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## **Now, that’s what I call great feedback**

Last month I mentioned that I often feel like a chef busy in the kitchen, who never knows if anyone enjoyed my cooking.

So, I asked you for some feedback. Here are some of the great responses I got:

*Billy,*

*We love your newsletters. Each issue is read through and digested thoroughly in our office. Your case studies are excellent...keep those coming. And, any writing tips are beneficial.*

*David*

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*Thanks Billy, hope all is well. I have read your newsletters and benefited from doing so in the past. This past little while there are things in my in-box that I have put into a 'holding tank' to be read later when I have the time. Sadly I have found that I that time has proven to be elusive to find.*

*There always are gems in your observations and have found them to be very insightful and helpful. Thanks! —  
Andy*

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**Then there were things more specific, like this response not directly addressed to me but forwarded to me:**

*Hi Ann*

*Take a look at Billy's last article on asking Donors for a second donation very quickly. His logic is flawless. It fits with everything I ever did at RD and Yves Rocher and just makes so much sense when applied to the fund-raising business.*

*Wayne*

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**Or this one:**

*Thanks for your latest newsletter Billy, always informative and interesting.*

*Your article re: typography for increased response is so near and dear to my heart. I am a stickler for good typography but I rarely have much company in this arena, so few seem to care these days and I have zero idea what they are teaching the new designers but from what I see, not enough.*

*I was lucky enough to have been able to study typography for a full year under Ron Butler (an amazing, amazing teacher who ate type for breakfast in my opinion), at what was then OCA. I took his basic and advanced typography courses way back in the early 80's and the impact that course made on my design work going forward was incredible. And I fell in love with type, far more than I had in the 4 years of communication arts that I took at Seneca prior. But that love also created frustration, particularly as I moved along in my career with the increased use of the computer in our business, typography was being massacred by young designers that were not properly taught nor cared, combined with computer fonts/kerning*

*that just did not cut it. I admire your patience to take the time to re-craft all the computer fonts, a daunting task indeed but well worth it. Your example in the current newsletter is terrific, I will pass it on to anyone who might care, or should care.*

*All the best Billy, keep em coming, your topics are relevant and I have used some of your ideas and tactics. I will try to comment, less verbosely, lol, in the future so you know how you cookin tastes!!!*

*Cheers,  
Luanne*

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*OK Billy, you wanted feedback so here goes.*

*I read and save every month's contribution - some of the thoughts are quite innovative, others remind me of what I have forgotten or overlooked. I especially liked your \$60/page Quick Scan offer. It should get you some business ... provided the audience takes the time to carefully determine how Quick Scan works (by measuring the placement against the verticals - brilliant). The price is right and should generate a hell of a lot of trial - provided the lazy sods take the time to review and think. As a matter of fact I'm going to forward your email to some of my former associates and an art director or two.*

*Take care Billy and keep 'em coming. BTW, you can use my email as a testimonial.*

*Regards,  
George Whitbread*

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*Billy*

*Your newsletter is great!*

*You do wonder sometimes if the newsletters that you have spent so much time on are being read or just being deleted or thrown out.*

*You did a blurb on Alzheimer's a couple of months ago which got passed along to me and that is why I signed up to receive your newsletters. You did a blurb last month I believe about jingles and how the brain pays attention during pauses which all the staff had lots of good feedback about.*

*Any tips you can give about writing direct mail pieces is*

*greatly appreciated. Being a small charity with an even smaller budget we do the direct mail pieces ourselves. We have learned a few things along the way but are open to any other information we can find. We also like to keep current on trends that are happening.*

*Keep up the good work!*

*Sandra*

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*I'm so glad I flagged your email so that I could look at it when I had a chance.*

*Glad because your Quick Scan service sounds like the Canadian version of Read Smart, a service I tripped across, but is only available in the States. I had thought I might try it for one of our acquisition mailings in an effort to boast response rates. But I'd much rather 'buy Canadian' if I can! So, I will keep this email flagged to remind me to contact you to find out more.*

*And it's funny that you ask for feedback, as one of my other emails that I look forward to reading comes from Lisa Sargent, who writes The Loyalty Letter. She just sent out a survey asking for feedback too. In one of her questions she asks responders to name 3-5 other favoured emails or sources for tips, and I named you among my favourites!*

*I really do enjoy your newsletter. I love the direct mail examples you provide and your tips and resources to improve donor communications. Just keep 'em coming, I say. No need to change anything from my point of view.  
Maura Fitzpatrick*

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*Dear Mr. Sharma,*

*That isn't very nice of us to take your newsletter, share it with colleagues or sales reps and not let you know that it has become a valuable newsletter to share and learn from each month. Many of my sales force are seasoned veterans and some are new. Both old and new reps have found useful information in your newsletters.*

*I enjoy being reminded again of the basics that work well with in each DM piece. My background is on the supplier side, I like to learn from the consumer side the things that make good copy, or help to sell things. A good story, a unique size package, a hand written note, a live stamp, all*

*go alone way in lifting response rates.*

*I am very excited about direct and all the powerful 1:1 that can happen. I enjoy case studies and testimonials as they help to back up and solidify why companies should do direct mail. Any articles that slant from a vendor viewpoint or supplier viewpoint I enjoy reading too.*

*Thanks for sharing and keeping us informed. Your newsletter has become one of our learning tools in our company and look forward to it being a mainstay of our working library. I have referred back and pulled many articles out.*

*Have a great weekend, keep up the great writing.  
Thanks & Regards,  
Debbie Majors*

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**Then there was this enjoyable response:**

*Chef Billy,*

*Believe me, people are enjoying your cooking. Your newsletter is a very good read, insightful and beautifully designed.*

*It's unfortunate, but people read magazine and newspaper articles, books and newsletters, and really enjoy them. But they rarely write the author to tell him or her how much they enjoyed what they've read. I've heard that from a number of top notch newsletter and article writers who have had your exact concern.*

*I wrote the Stupid Direct Marketing Tricks column for Strategy Magazine for six years and didn't get much feedback. But then I'd meet someone and, when they heard my name, they'd go on and on about how much they liked the column. They'd even quote from articles many past issues ago, ones which I'd forgotten about. I can't count how many times that happened.*

*When an elected official receives a letter from a constituent, they multiply it by 200, i.e. They figure if one person wrote about a particular issue, 200 people actually feel that way. If they get 100 letters, they figure that 20,000 people agree with the authors. I'm sure it's the same with newsletter readers.*

*Keep up the good work with your own newsletter and consider silence to be approval from its readers.*

*Bob*

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*Hi Billy, I know I'm not your target audience but yes, I do open it and look at articles of interest.*

*Best,  
John*

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**Finally, two rather constructive ones:**

*Hi Billy,*

*I enjoy your newsletters but would find them easier to scan if they came in a newsletter format with the first few sentences of an article in the body of the email, then linking to the full article on a separate page. This would also provide you with information on opens and click throughs so you could see which articles are being read, and which are not. Constant Contact offers an easy and inexpensive system that has worked well for me in the past. Just a thought – sometimes I'm too busy to even open the attached newsletter.*

*Sincerely,  
Elizabeth*

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*Dear Billy,*

*I didn't open your email when it was forwarded to me, I scanned the email content below the forward. Here's the feedback you requested.*

- 1. Please don't yell in your emails. It turns a reader off.*
- 2. Also, where's the link to an HTML version? If it's about design I want to see pictures too.*
- 3. A PDF is a PITA to open on mobile devices.*

*Yours,  
Sarah (B.Com. Marketing)*

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**In response, to the last two suggestions, I have considered using a provider like Constant Contact in**

the past but rejected it because my newsletter is not a promotional item. I generally do not use it as a sales ploy.

Also, I spend enough time on my newsletters with the hope that I am providing relevant information and to add a cost of \$50 each month does not make economical sense. After all, I cannot pass this on to my subscribers.

And I did learn something new. I looked up the word PITA on-line and found that: PITA = Pain In The Ass (*pronounced: pee-tah*) As in, "What a PITA," it is an acronym, that is also considered a form of online jargon or text message shorthand.

I hope you have noticed that I have stopped yelling. None of my headlines are in caps and I will try not to be a PITA as long as you promise not to try and read them on your teeny tiny mobile devices.

Thank you.  
Billy

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**OPT IN, OPT OUT, OPTIONS:**

- To unsubscribe, send me an e-mail simply saying, "Please, remove".
- To participate, send me an e-mail with your suggestions.
- To post a comment, please include your name, e-mail address and your thoughts.

**Let me remind you again that your name and/or e-mail address will never be shared, sold, circulated, or passed along to anyone else.**

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