



# DIRECT FORUM

VOLUME 5. ISSUE 5

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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. A CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO CONSIDER AFTER YOU'VE DECIDED ON AN INTERESTING APPROACH (NOTES FROM MY RECENT SEMINAR)**
- 2. LET'S TALK ABOUT SOMETHING NO ONE ELSE TALKS ABOUT — OUR FAILURES**

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## **A CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO CONSIDER AFTER YOU'VE DECIDED ON AN INTERESTING APPROACH (NOTES FROM MY RECENT SEMINAR)**

This is part two of my speech at last month's seminar, 'Think Inside The Box' sponsored by Canada Post.

My topic was: **GET CREATIVE**  
**Innovative approaches to increase your direct mail effectiveness**

**An excerpt from the presentation:**

**After I know to whom I am writing and feel that I have taken an interesting enough approach, my checklist going forward includes:**

*I ask myself, "Am I being donor-centric enough?"*

- Have I told my donors what amazing things the charity intends to do (or would do) with their gifts?
- Have I mentioned worthwhile results? Real accomplishments?
- Did I celebrate the donor as a hero? Did I express more than just once that, *"This good work would not have been possible without your help."*

- The word 'You' is Glue. No other word, not 'Us', 'We' or 'Ours' has such power to attract the reader.
- Did I talk about the organization's cost efficiency? (In survey after survey, donors often believe that charities are poorly run.)

**NEXT**

*Am I taking advantage of human psychology?*

- Am I aiming for the heart? Have I included all the emotional triggers that spur people to donate?
- Is my tone conversational rather than formal?

**AND FINALLY**

*Is the piece graphically inviting and pleasing?*

- Is it a quick easy read?
- Are the images helping drive the narration? (Not bland and predictable.)
- Am I making it easy for skimming?
- Have I stressed the important elements that I want them to take away by highlighting, underlining and/or using sub-heads. Have I ensured the readers will stop and interact with the items I want them to?

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**LET'S TALK ABOUT SOMETHING NO ONE ELSE TALKS ABOUT — OUR FAILURES**

**Let's talk about packages that bombed.**

Most creative people, including me, tend to talk only about packages that have done well.

But what about all those that bombed? How come no one ever talks about them?

Today I am going to break the mold and discuss them, because we should learn from our mistakes lest we repeat them.

Failed packages are usually a result of the following eight flaws:

### **FLAW 8: PROPOSING A WEAK OFFER**

Often we pull back on the offer and the results are less successful than the client hoped for. Sure, it costs money to test first, but not testing is a sure step to low responses.

### **FLAW 7: CLUTTERED LETTERS, THOUGHTS AND FOCUS**

Too often our letters try too hard by trying to accomplish too many things and end up doing nothing well.

Simplify. Stick to one thing that needs to be accomplished.

### **FLAW 6: LETTERS THAT LACK THE KIND OF NEWS THAT DONORS REALLY CARE ABOUT**

Too many letters end up as self-absorbed pitches for the organization.

A letter should never be a sales pitch but rather a report to your donors as to how their contributions aid the organization in fulfilling its mission.

When a charity talks about itself and forgets the donor, I call that a 'Brag-n-Boast' package. It is destined to fail because people forget the cardinal rules of fundraising.

Donors are interested in finding out:

- What did you do with the money I gave you in the past?
- What do you need my money for now?

### **FLAW 5: LETTERS THAT FAIL THE 'YOU' TEST**

As I mentioned before, the word 'You' is Glue. 'You' is the most powerful word in letter writing.

Take a red pen, go through your letter and circle every time the word 'You' is used rather than the word 'I' or 'We'.

Next, if needed, see if you can shift the focus from yourself to your donors.

## **FLAW 4: LETTERS THAT SKIMP ON EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS**

Emotions not reason control many of our selection choices. From falling in love to deciding if we want to donate to a charity.

Most people make many decisions from the heart and not from the head.

A great way to use emotions and increase response is through storytelling.

Storytelling has always been the most powerful way to absorb your reader.

A classic example can be found in the biggest selling direct mail package the Wall Street Journal has ever mailed.

The letter opened with this line:

*On a beautiful late spring afternoon, twenty-five years ago, two young men . . .*

Right away readers knew that it was a story and they were hooked and wanted to read on to find out more.

Martin Conroy wrote this letter. Each word was worth over \$1,000,000 and it has been a control package for 29 years. Recently Malcolm Decker, beat it by simply adding two more pages to the original.

## **FLAW 3: LETTERS THAT ARE NOT "DONOR CENTERED"**

If a letter doesn't make a donor feel needed or wanted then it is bound to fail.

Organizations should consistently reinforce the idea to the people they are writing that their participation is essential to the organization's mission. Any letter that fails to communicate this is bound to fall short. Remember the 'What's-In-It-For-Me' rule.

## **FLAW 2: LETTERS THAT WERE NOT DESIGNED OR WRITTEN FOR RAPID SKIMMING AND BROWSING**

Make-A-Wish® Canada  
 4211 Sheppard Avenue East, Suite 224  
 Toronto, ON M2P 2A5  
 Tel: 416-224-9674  
 Toll Free: 1-800-822-9474  
 www.makeawish.ca

**MAKE-A-WISH**  
 Canada

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

A month ago I wrote you about how I truly believe that giving hope and happiness to a child with a life-threatening illness has magical real-life power.

Over the last children that wish helps lift their spirits. It lets them fight their illness with more vigor. It adds a glimmer of hope to their eyes. It puts a smile on their faces that could light up the whole world. Granting a wish provides hope, strength and joy and leaves the children feeling much better.

The latest child who Make-A-Wish® has witnessed the moment of great happiness thousands of times and how I continue to be deeply moved with the stories of each wish we grant.

What the letters did not express loudly enough is how important it means like you really are. You have helped to bring an instant joy to thousands of ill children.

As one of our strongest supporters you have already demonstrated how much you care about children and how important you are to us as a friend. You know that your wishes just can't wait for anybody. So when letters like this holiday season to share joy and happiness with children living with a life-threatening illness.

If you have already responded to my earlier letters then please accept my most sincere thanks as I know you have helped. If however you are it made to deal with later because you know how busy you are the attached donation form today.

The children with a life-threatening illness are sure that their special wish will be granted, as you possibly the best wishes they could receive. Thank you so deeply.

Sincerely,  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 President  
 Make-A-Wish Foundation® of Canada

P.S. This holiday season, help us provide the magical hope which like a miracle medicine, does wonders for children with life-threatening illnesses.

Yes! I want to make the wishes of children come true

Please check up donation by telephone:  
 In the amount of \_\_\_\_\_  or by credit/debit

Cheque (payable to Make-A-Wish® Canada)  
 I wish to use my  VISA  MASTERCARD

People don't read every word they skim. This enables them to get the information as quickly as possible. Designing and writing copy at the 'browser level' is essential.

Here's a checklist of things that readers browse through:

1. A headline or Johnson box
2. The salutation
3. The first sentence (keep it short no more than 10 words)
4. Underlines (use sparingly)
5. Bolded or italic sentences (use sparingly)
6. Bulleted lists
7. The closing
8. Name of sender
9. The P.S.
10. Images (with captions or inserts)
11. Any Free offers

Make your material easy to read

Large blocks of copy are best digested in bite-sized portions. Long copy can be daunting to the reader. Smaller blocks look like less work.

Sections that are visually different are easier to absorb. Having to plow through information that all looks the same can lead to boredom and a bored reader is a lost reader.

**FLAW 1: THE BIGGEST FLAW — LETTERS WITH A WEAK START**

You must get them from the start. The most important part of your message is the first line.

Compare it to flicking across TV channels. Suddenly something catches your attention and you stop to watch.

The first line must act in just the same way. It is your best, and maybe your only chance, to capture your reader's attention.

It must have stopping power. Remember the research that showed mail had only three seconds to capture a reader's attention before it hit the trashcan.

**Leukemia Research Fund of Canada**

Date 2002

Mr. J. Sample,  
 123 Any Street  
 Any City, Prov. A1A 1A1

Dear Mr. Sample,

**This letter is not about us. It's about you.**

In the past we have sent you letters that told of the strength and courage of people who face the devastating effects of leukemia.

Many of them were children who had to endure the disease themselves. But their suffering also woke a sleep still in their parents. After having been forgotten because they gallantly fought back and managed to survive.

Twenty years ago leukemia was considered a death sentence. Today, 70% of affected children are being cured and more than 30% of affected adults reach 10 years remission lasting up to five years and sometimes more.

**The real hero built their successes is you.** Without your generosity in the past, many of those true-life stories we told you in our letters would have had a greatly different ending.

Because of the help of people like you, today leukemia is the only form of cancer where such dramatic advances have been realized.

You loyalty has always been vital to us, but today we need your continued support more than ever. Therefore, once more the time is upon us.

Please help us again with a donation of \$5K, \$2K, \$1K, \$500 or whatever you can comfortably afford. Please make your contribution today.

**Your funds have helped save lives.**

You support has allowed many leukemia survivors to continue to enjoy their family and friends because of advances in the treatment of this disease. Your donations will also allow us to provide support programs and increase public awareness of leukemia. **But most important, your funds will help us find a cure.**

please turn over...

**YES! I WISH TO CONTINUE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

Have I My donation of  \$5K  \$2K  \$1K  \$500

or I prefer to give \$ \_\_\_\_\_

In write your donation by telephone please call:  
 1-800-368-2144

Mr. J. Sample,  
 123 Any Street  
 Any City, Prov. A1A 1A1

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PROVINCE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 POSTAL CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

I have enclosed a cheque payable to "Leukemia Research Fund of Canada"  
 Please charge my  VISA  MASTERCARD  AMEX

I have enclosed the monthly giving program for the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

PS: The Best Mail, Toronto, ON M5H 3S9. Tel: 416-593-2144 • www.leukemia.ca

Donations of less than \$100 will be accepted only with receipt only. Donations of \$100 or more will be accepted with or without receipt. To find out more, call Charlene, our fundraising specialist. Please indicate in the enclosed form how you wish to be contacted.

Once you have their attention, they will read on.

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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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