

12 TIPS, TECHNIQUES AND TRUTHS REGARDING DIRECT RESPONSE FUNDRAISING



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Remember the olden days when direct mail was king in the direct response fundraising world? Then came the advent of new media, social networks and the predictions that Digital would soon dominate all other media, making books, magazines and newspapers obsolete.

And, oh yes, direct mail was on its way out.

Well kids, here we are in 2021 and I still get the Boston Globe daily, still keep putting new books in the bookcase – and still toil over my direct mail strategy and creative every day. So nothing's changed, right? Not quite.

The introduction of new media and technologies has had a significant impact on how we do business. And instead of being the replacement for direct mail, Digital Fundraising has become a powerful partner in most successful direct response fundraising programs.

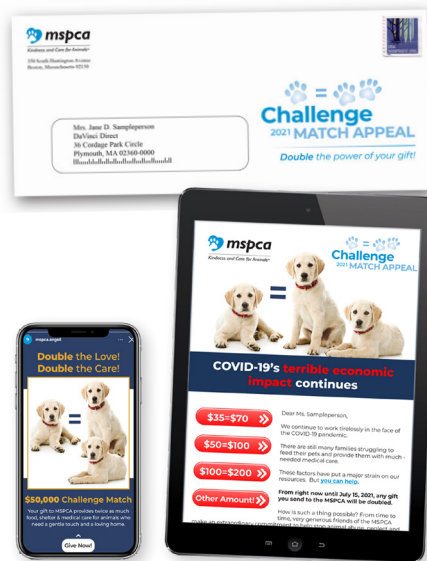
The following are a few ideas for your program ~ some relatively new, some tried and true – all valuable in today's fundraising world and, I hope, relevant to you.

1 GIVE YOUR DONORS A CHOICE ON HOW TO GIVE

Web/mail integration is a great way to give your donors more choice.

Instead of thinking in terms of converting direct mail donor to web donors, or vice-versa, let the donor decide how he or she wants to give.

One way to do this is to add an online giving option to your direct mail letters and reply slips. Tell donors that they can give via the web by going to a unique URL address.



The url directs the donor not to your home page, but to a landing page that is coordinated in its design and messaging with the direct mail package – and enables the donor to make a gift online.

Some donors will give online, some will choose to respond via direct mail, and some will become donors who give via both channels over time. We've learned that these multi-channel donors have a greater long term value to your organization than do single-channel donors. And the building your digital program is a good way for you to bring younger donors into the fold.

Digital has also proven to be an excellent way to build recurring or monthly donor programs, and we typically make the monthly sustainer ask as the first digital ask after acquiring a new donor online.

2 GROW YOUR OWN

Conventional wisdom holds that the best email list for your organization is “organically grown” – or compiled in-house. Ask for your donor's email address in each direct mail appeal. Provide a reason to give you the email address by offering e-newsletters or other “inside information” to be disseminated electronically. Talk to them about how donating online saves money and reduces waste, making your mission more efficient.

The long term goal is to build a relationship with donors via multiple channels, and the web channel must be perceived as adding value to that relationship.

3 KEEP YOUR BRANDING CONSISTENT

Whether you're communicating through the mail, web, telephone or any other medium, make an extra effort to stay consistent with your branding. The definition of “brand” that I prefer these days comes from adman and talk show host Donny Deutsch, who states simply, “a brand is a set of shared values.”

This definition makes perfect sense for us in the nonprofit world. Your donors give because they share your values. They care about the same things that you do... and believe in your mission. Stay true to your core mission in all of your communications to continually highlight those values that you share with your donor base.

It's more than just using the right logo and tagline. It's the essence of your message. The tone must ring true to your donors in each and every message.

4 GIVE DONORS A CHOICE ON WHAT TO SUPPORT

Round out your donors' giving options with special offers such as Memorial/Tribute Gifts, Planned Giving and special events. Create a monthly sustainer offer for donors who give frequently, say 2, 3 or more times per year.

Create mid-level and major donor clubs for those who give single gifts that fit your pre-selected criteria – and invite donors who give slightly less to move up to those “giving club” levels and receive special recognition and other benefits.

5 TEST A MEMBERSHIP OFFER

Even if yours is not a “membership-based” program, you may have

success with a package that provides a “member card.” If you're not comfortable with the term, “member,” call it a “supporter card” or “contributor card.”



Many organizations have been using this technique successfully for years. The membership offer provides donors with a sense of inclusion or affiliation, and provides an annualized offer that may become one of the staples of your program.

6 ISSUE A CHALLENGE

At a recent conference, I heard one of the speakers refer to their “Challenge Match” appeal as a “license to print money.” I can't guarantee that will be your experience, but I must agree that the challenge match appeal seems to work for every organization for whom I've tested it.



It doesn't matter if the Challenge Fund comes from an individual, a foundation or a corporation. If it's an individual, it isn't even necessary to mention the person's name.

Just saying that “a generous benefactor has pledged to donate X dollars to us if we can match that amount from friends like you” is enough.

Donors like the idea of their gift doubling in value, and supporting twice as much work toward your mission. It's kind of like a “2 for 1” sale.

7 VARY THEMES WITHIN YOUR PROGRAM



In addition to the specific types of appeals mentioned above, I like to create “branded appeals” that give each mailing a unique identity while staying consistent with the organization's overall brand. These appeals are like “brands within the brand” and can be as simple as Annual Fund, Winter Appeal, Spring Appeal, etc. The branded appeal can also tie in with your core mission, such as “Fall Research Appeal” for a health charity or “Beds and Blankets Appeal” for a homeless shelter.

8 REMEMBER TO REMIND

Yes, we've been doing them forever, but reminders are still a powerful way to leverage your most effective

appeals. If you do an Annual Fund in January, send out an Annual Fund Follow-up in February – within 2–4 weeks of the original appeal.

The follow-up mailing can employ a smaller, less expensive format than the prior mailing, and may generate up to 70 or 80% – or more – revenue of the original mailing.

9 PERSONALIZE BUT DON'T PATRONIZE

Most organizations have effectively used personalization techniques to use the donor's name, giving history, city and state within the text of a letter. But sometimes we can hit donors over the head with it. Donors have become savvy enough to know that computers, not people, provide this personalization, so don't overdo it.

“Remember to do the things that truly make your mailing sound personal.”

Remember to do the things that truly make your mailing sound personal. Speak in a conversational “me to you” manner, avoid the institutional “we” and tell the donor in specific terms what their gift is helping you do.

10 “KEEP THE LAYOUTS SIMPLE AND THE IDEAS FANCY”

Creative director Steve Cosmopoulous used to say this to make his creative staff focus on the “big idea” instead of the window dressing.

The job of creative is to create revenue – not beauty. Of course, if you can increase revenue and win beauty contest at the same time, more power to you.

11 TO TEASE OR NOT TO TEASE?



Teasers on the outer envelope work best when they contain a benefit, refer directly to the offer or tell the donor about the free gift or member card inside. Teasers that are there just to be clever can be tricky. Your copy must be extremely provocative for this kind of teaser to work, and the best way to prove it is by testing.

I also like to test “blind” outer envelopes – plain ones with no logo, no teaser – especially in acquisition and for organizations that do not have great name recognition. Be wary of postage requirements, however. Historically these have been acceptable as long as you use metered postage, but get postal approval ahead of time.



12 BE CAREFUL WITH INSERTS

Always test your packages with and without that great new insert you're considering. Newspaper articles, brochures, lift notes and the like may provide great additional information about your mission – but they may also depress response. It's counter-intuitive, but it's been all too true for me many, many times.

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