

AbaF

Using direct mail to generate income

There are quite a range of opinions among fundraisers on the value of direct mail. Some see it as a waste of time and money while others see it as the best way to grow your donor base. Most think it has at least a limited place in your fundraising plan for the following reasons:

- help identify new donors
- be used for public relations
- increase visibility
- help identify potential volunteers
- help to publicise new programs

If done well, it can be the source of consistent income. Some advocate using direct mail as a cost effective way to renew your current donors, for special appeals and for capital campaigns. Others believe it is best used for soliciting new donors or prospecting. This can be expensive. It usually takes about two to three years to break even.

Decide if direct mail is right for your organisation

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your organisation well known and well respected in the community where you will solicit?
- Is your organisation unique to your community?
- Is there a clear and critical need that can be explained in the appeal?
- Can you show how their gift will make a difference?
- Do you have enough time and money to test your direct mail?
- Can you afford to invest in direct mail?

Know what goes into a direct mail package

A direct mail package include a:

- personal letter (short or long)
- personalised reply form
- reply-paid envelope

Expand your client database

Review your current client data base and build on that by asking board, volunteers and current donors to give names of those people who wish to be involved in your project or organisation.

Designing a direct mail package

Renewal packages tend to be simply presented. Special appeals and *cultivation mailing* tend to be more graphic using more colour and photos. Capital campaigns tend to be more personalised and dignified in their graphic approach.

Benchmark against the average response rate

For donor acquisition mailings the response rate is between 0.5% and 2.5%. For *re-solicitation mailings* the response rate is between 6% and 12%.

Renewal gift mail outs

It usually takes between 5 and 9 mailings to get a renewal gift. Most donors will set aside the first letter asking them to renew their financial support. The fourth letter may motivate donors to use a reply-paid device. Space the letters between five and eight weeks apart.

Writing the appeal letter

- use board letterhead
- only one person should sign the letter
- use "I" and "you," mostly "you"
- two to four-page letters work better than one-page letters
- use large type, short indented paragraphs (not over seven lines),
- highlight important passages or use bold face type
- use ragged right margins
- write in standard English
- use short punchy sentences
- use words that convey emotion
- avoid using lots of adverbs and adjectives
- avoid the use of abbreviations and acronyms
- include a reply-paid envelope and a personalised response form
- include a meaty postscript - people read them more than the letter
- concentrate on the benefits of supporting or joining your organisation
- avoid focusing on your organisation's needs
- ask for the gift in the 3rd or 4th paragraph and repeat in several times throughout the letter - but don't sound desperate.
- ask for money, not for "support." This should not be an afterthought, tacked on to the bottom of the letter. Repeat it several times and also include it on the response form
- give your readers a reason to respond NOW

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