



Making the Most of Your Mail: Key Considerations for Direct Mail Campaigns

You may be wondering if direct mail is worth the time, money and effort, especially when it seems that it's all about digital nowadays. Well you'll be interested to know that in most charity markets around the world, direct mail is still the number one source of new cash donors for organisations. However, you do need to be strategic.

Check out these eight key considerations for boosting your direct mail performance in 2017.

1. Lead Time

Keeping in mind that your most loyal donors are probably the most promiscuous, (often supporting up to three or four charities at any one time), the timing of your campaign is crucial. Know when makes a good time to campaign (Hint: Christmas and the end of the financial year are good) and plan ahead of time so that your mail arrives at just the right time. Hit mailboxes too late and donors may have already made a donation elsewhere.

Most appeals need 8-12 weeks lead time to develop your strategy, plan your story, obtain appropriate images and get printed and posted. So work backwards from your proposed mail date, and then add in a week's buffer just in case.

2. New Donors

Most charities that solicit funds through direct mail do so at least twice a year; commonly end of financial year and Christmas. This is usually sufficient for regular supporters, but for new supporters, six months between asks can be a very long time.

Up to half of all first-time donors will never donate to that same charity again. So, if you've done an acquisition campaign or have some new donors, it's important that you place concerted effort on obtaining a second and subsequent gift. Generally speaking, the

sooner you can ask a donor for another gift, the more likely they are to donate. A nice welcome pack and a planned approach for new donors as they come on-board, will usually be well worth your effort in the long run.

3. Your List

Up to 25% of the success of your direct mail appeal depends on who you send it to. That's right, your list is a vital ingredient for successful appeals. Whether you're doing an acquisition campaign or a renewal mailing to current donors, who you choose to send it to is the single biggest contributor to success. It's even more important than your design, format and copy itself.

Most of us know that acquisition campaigns need a carefully selected prospect list, but how much importance do you place on your own donor base? Often charities are mailing to lapsed donors when they have a high likelihood of not donating. This creates wastage and reduces your response rates. I'd suggest doing some analysis of your database and identifying who actually responds to your appeals, then perhaps look at ways that you can be more cost-effective.

4. Segmentation

Another way to improve the cost-effectiveness of your appeals is to segment your data. Segmentation can have a really positive impact on your appeal's success, as it allows you to better tailor your content to different groups of donors. Segmentation can be done in many ways, including:

- Type of donor eg. Business, Individual, Service Group.
- Recency, frequency, monetary (RFM) or in other words - the length of time since their last donation, the frequency of their donations and the dollar value of their donations.
- Involvement eg. Board Members, Volunteers, Event Attendees.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it should help with your thinking in this area. Consider which groups might be important to your organisation and why. Consider how you could personalise your mailings to particular donors, as this will help increase their feeling of value and strengthen your relationship with them. At the end of the day, strong relationships are what good fundraising is all about.

5. Your Stories

Storytelling is at the heart of successful fundraising and there is no better place to tell a story than in your direct mail appeal. This communication piece allows the time and space for you to go into some detail about the impact you are having through telling a story about a beneficiary. These stories should have an element of emotive appeal balanced with a level of reason. So while emotive language and striking images are important, so too are a few facts and figures. United Kingdom fundraiser, Ken Burnett says, "Open hearts and minds first, then their wallets".

6. Your Heroes

While the story about your beneficiary is important, you mustn't forget about your donors. Most organisations would not exist without the generosity and commitment of donors, so you need to have this at the forefront of your mind when preparing donor communications. Use less 'we, our, us' and more 'you, your, you're'. Be sure to speak to the donor needs, not just those of your organisation. Small tweaks in your language can really make a difference with how valued you make your donors feel. They are your true heroes, so make them feel like they are.





7. Your Signatory

Direct mail can be one of the best tools to help build strong relationships with your donors. Through this correspondence your donors often feel like a relationship is developing between them and the organisation. With this in mind, it's really important that you use a consistent signatory on your letters. The person who 'sends' the letter is the one that donors are building a relationship with, so it is best if it is the same person. Whether it's your organisation's CEO, Chair or President, it doesn't matter, you just need to be consistent.

8. Your Ask

I often read charity appeal letters and from time to time I'm surprised by the lack of donation requests. Many studies indicate that one of the most prevalent reasons people give is 'because they were asked', so you need to be sure that your direct mail appeals are clear in what you want. You want a donation. Don't be afraid to use that word.

Best practice for fundraising appeal letters will suggest that you ask three times in

every letter. One in the first few paragraphs, one somewhere else in the letter and once again in the P.S. Today, more and more organisations are starting to use tangible ask amounts for their donation tick boxes. This is sometimes tricky, and takes a little more planning, but by asking for a donation that is tied to some sort of tangible item, you can often lift the average donation.

For example, instead of having \$50 on their appeal tick box, a youth organisation may request \$57 and say that it will 'contribute to an hour of phone support for a disadvantaged young person'. This could help inspire some of their donors who may have otherwise given \$50 to donate an extra \$7.

In any area of fundraising, it is important to remember that it's not really about money, it's about relationships. You need to inspire people and encourage them to support your mission, and often building relationships with them is the best way to do this. Direct mail can be a key tool in relationship

building and you need to give it the time and attention it deserves, so you can have truly successful fundraising results.



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