

DIRECT MAIL Tips and Tools for Today's Nonprofits

Let's face it, Direct Mail helps nonprofits to identify new donors and stay in touch with current ones. Over the years, Semple Bixel Associates has seen many great and a few not so great direct mail pieces sent from nonprofits. Given this and our experience with the direct mail industry, we take this opportunity to pass on some basic tips and tools for your office to use next time you get ready to send out a mailing.

Marketing pros know that in order to stay on the agendas of potential and present constituents, organizations must consistently be in front of their audiences. A good direct mail program includes a variety of mailings throughout the year –such as: the visibility mailing, the solicitation mailing, public relation pieces, volunteer mailings, special event invitations, and program expansion announcements. Most experts agree there is NO bad time to mail, with the exception of April tax time –for obvious reasons.

Is your database ready? Database “cleanliness” and correct targeting are key components to success. Eliminate duplicate household addresses. Include address correction endorsements on all mailings, and then follow through by cleaning your database when items are returned to you. Need database cleaning assistance? Try a “once-a-year” outsource to your local mail house – where use of address correction software insures that you are mailing to a true deliverable address. Ask mail house for the corrected database file, it is worth any extra charge you may incur.

Your image and message. General rules to follow for solicitation mailings are:

- Ask for money, not support if that's what you really want
- Use short punchy sentences without a lot of adjectives and adverbs
- Use the words to convey an emotion – which is typically the level that you are appealing to.
- Use short paragraphs, boldface print, and subheadings on longer letters
- Try not to use the “Dear Friend” salutation, instead personalize with the recipient name. The executive director and/or board chair should add personal notes to as many letters as possible.

Postage and labor. This is an area where many nonprofits fall short. The mailing may be a success, but the time and expense involved can eat a large chunk out of the profits.

Avoid this scenario by taking a closer look at the costs. Know that it typically takes a staff person or volunteer 6 hours to fold, stuff and label 1000 envelopes. Include breaks, ringing telephones and this easily turns into two complete days.

Some areas to explore:

- Is it possible to invest in a small folding machine? Automating the folding and envelope stuffing process will reduce your labor costs significantly. Depending on your needs and the features, equipment cost will range from \$300 to \$5,000. For mailings averaging 2,000 pieces+ per month, consider outsourcing – for maximum efficiency.
- Shop around for the best postal rates. Postage often relies on qualifications in order to determine your best rate. Refer to Tip Box, for a quick reference on rates and ask these questions:
 - Are you a nonprofit – have you signed on for the permit to use lower nonprofit postage rates? These rates are up to 30% lower than a first class letter.
 - How many pieces are you mailing? If you are sending over 200 pieces or 50 lbs. in one mailing, try Bulk/Standard mail. This rate case can reduce postage by 50%, but delivery may take up to 10 days.
 - Larger “in-house” mailers would be wise to investigate postal software. Compare savings versus the purchase of these products. As a mailer, you represent revenue to your local post office, advice and customer service come with the territory of being their customer. In all cases, where postal software is used to sort and print the addresses and barcode, costly address labels are eliminated, and postal rates are significantly reduced.
 - The weight of your mail piece – make the most of the postal rate by stuffing as much material as possible for the price. For example, Standard mail is the same price for up to 3.3 ounces. For First Class mail, watch out for added, costly ounces during the design stage when planning paper stock, extra inserts. Extra weight adds 23¢ per ounce. Reply envelopes. Business reply envelope accounts work better for nonprofits than pre-stamping or pre-metering your solicitation mail. (eliminate paying for the non-replies).

With business reply envelopes:

- Cost = 30¢ handling charge + postage for all returns
- Expecting over 1,400 envelopes back annually? Use Advance Business Reply Account – the annual permit is \$300, but the per piece handling charge drops to 8¢

- Tip alert! Include message on reply envelope that requests a stamp as a donation. Save the postage and give donors a quick way to help! You'll be surprised at the response and how the savings add up! (you will need a special endorsement from post office to include this on the envelope).

Final Thoughts: With a little patience and attention to details, your direct mail program can become more efficient. Remember to:

- Start with a clean & correct database
- Write in concise manner, with emotion
- Compare labor costs /discount postage with outsourcing /in-house equipment
- Avoid last minute decisions – spec your mailing piece early in the process.

Sidebar:

Postage Tips:

- For heavier mail in the form of binders, videos, and books, and CDs, check out other services such as: Media Mail, Bound Printed Matter or Parcel Post. First Class Mail does not always have to be your first choice. A comparison of a 5 lb package:

Priority = \$5.85

Media mail/Book Rate = \$3.10

Bound Printed Matter= between \$2-\$4

Parcel Post = \$4.45

- Nonprofit / Standard Mail Rates Permits for these rates are required. A

comparison of a 1 ounce letter:

First Class = 37¢

Standard mail = 26.8¢

Nonprofit = 16.5¢

(ask your local mail house if you can mail through their Bulk Rate permit).

- Reduce the cost of labels and the “look” of Junk Mail by either printing address directly on the outside envelope, or by using window envelopes.