



The Magic of Direct Mail for Not-For-Profit Organizations

Direct mail is a valuable tool for not-for-profit and religious organizations. These organizations typically utilize ongoing direct mail campaigns as key fund-raising efforts. Newsletters play a vital role for not-for-profits, churches and similar organizations to spread their mission and vision.

A majority of not-for-profits use direct mail to solicit funds and to inform donors and gain new donors. These organizations also use direct mail to educate, tell their story, replenish existing donors, elevate existing donors to higher giving levels, promote a special event, recruit volunteers or broaden the pool of planned giving prospects.

What should a not-for-profit direct mail solicitation contain? It must first relate the organization's mission to the needs of the donor or prospect, whether it be a community need, a spiritual need or an emotional need. Although you want to appeal to the reader's emotions, not-for-profits should use facts about the organization too. Use facts to state the case, the need and to tell the story. Then tell the reader how his or her donation helps satisfy the need. Think creatively by including something untraditional with your letter. For example, print a short newsletter on the reverse side of a direct mail letter. This not only informs the reader, but it reemphasizes the mission, the organization's work and the need. Done appropriately, it adds a feel good touch to the piece.

Just like a for-profit company would include a call to action, so should a not-for-profit. Be specific in the call to action ("With your gift of \$100, you will help send four at-risk children to an after school educational program for one year.").

Always include a pledge form or other response vehicle. The pledge form must capture critical donor information, such as address, phone number, payment method and pledge or donation amount. Ensure a return envelope is included so the donor can return his or her donation and personal information in complete confidence. Make it easy for the donor to respond by including a self-addressed postage paid return envelope.

Not-for-profits can send newsletters, postcards and other communications to inform donors and prospects. Many people grow tired of receiving too many direct mail solicitations from one not-for-profit. Receiving a newsletter or an invitation to a special event instead of a letter asking for money can be a welcome relief to a donor. However, when sending other correspondence, even if you are not directly soliciting, always include a pledge card or other way for your reader to give. You will be surprised at how much money may come through the door from a simple newsletter, even when not asked.

A not-for-profit direct mail letter should never take the place of a face-to-face fundraising visit, especially for high-level donors. Direct mail is an appropriate means of contact with a donor who gives a small amount each year, but it is inappropriate to rely on direct mail to receive a large donation. It's simply unlikely to happen. Large donors, just like large customers in a for-profit company, need constant cultivation and personal attention.