

Here are 11 questions every donor asks (or should ask). Kate Rogers reports.

Adapted from  
**The NonProfit Times**  
15 May 2010  
Visit [www.nptimes.com](http://www.nptimes.com)

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## Know the answers

No fundraiser has a crystal ball. Although it would be nice, the reality is that preparing for 'the ask' only goes so far. Everything from a fundraiser's job title to patience and timing all come into play when soliciting a gift of any size.

During the Association of Fundraising Professionals' recent annual conference in Baltimore, Md., Harvey McKinnon, CFRE and president of Harvey McKinnon Associates in Ontario, Canada, gave fundraisers the burning questions donors have when being solicited, and just how to handle them.

### 1. Why Me?

McKinnon said all donors want to understand why they are being pinpointed for giving, and should be made to feel they can inspire others by contributing. 'Your job is to figure out how you can break into their circle of concern,' he said. 'Show you care, make sure you have met. That personal meeting makes an enormous difference with people.'

### 2. Why are you asking me?

The actual person who is doing the ask is extremely important, McKinnon said. Those who are higher up in the organisation will be more successful than their subordinates, or those who have not been with the charity for as long.

'Some organisations will give people titles to make them sound more senior than they are,' McKinnon said. 'Trust is something that is partly earned because they see your passion and your commitment to the cause.'

### 3. Do I respect you?

Donors always want to know about the person who's asking.

If a fundraiser has done volunteering, or has proved they are committed to the cause themselves, it gives them more clout with prospective donors. 'Preparing answers to those types of questions (from donors) is critical,' he said. 'Integrity helps to gain respect, and there is a real pressure.'

### 4. How much do you want?

Many times, a donor will not give what they think they should give, but instead, will give what you ask them to give, McKinnon said. Also, those who are wealthy are often approached by many charities, so seek major gifts from donors who have their priorities straight.

'You want them to give enough that they still feel good,' he said. 'Most donors make their largest gift between the seventh and ninth donation. People have a great giving

capacity, way more than we think. Over time, you learn what is appropriate and what's not.'

### 5. Why your organisation?

Fundraisers have to distinguish their groups from other organisations to show donating will be impactful. This can be done through showing authentic visuals such as videos or photos.

'If you can't define what your unique selling proposition is as an organisation, you have a big problem,' McKinnon said. 'The practical successes of your organisation need to be shown. This is critically important.'

### 6. How will my gift make a difference?

Giving allows the donor the opportunity to feel great joy, and charities should tap into that, McKinnon said. Show the donor they have the chance to make a substantial impact by giving.

### 7. Is there an urgency to make a gift?

Many donors respond well to deadlines, McKinnon said, therefore they should be made and followed. 'People like deadlines. It refocuses the passion and why you are doing what you are doing,' he said.

### 8. How easy it is to give?

A donor will be interested in contributing if you make it easy for them to do so. Catering to the donor audience, and taking out unnecessary steps will bring money in more quickly.

### 9. How will I be treated?

Good copy makes a huge difference in inspiring to give, McKinnon said. Potential donors want to feel appreciated when engaging with an organisation.

'A personal touch from the people at the organisation helps a great deal,' he said. 'Job hopping is really tragic from a donor relations standpoint,' because it does not allow for continued communication.

### 10. How will you measure results?

Honesty with donors is the best policy. A charity must be truthful about where the money is going, and whether or not it was used for something that proved to be successful, McKinnon said. 'One really effective way to do this is to talk about your organisation's successes and failures,' he said, 'and what you have learned from them.'

### 11. Will I have a say in how you use my money?

Allowing a donor to feel included in the process, and giving them time to make the decision is necessary. Give them information about how the money is being used while it is happening, not just the results. ■

# Give donors a reason to stay loyal

Retaining donor loyalty is among the biggest challenges facing nonprofits, reports the NonProfit Times.

**A** national survey for the Philanthropic Giving Index (PGI) released by the Centre on Philanthropy at Indiana University in December 2009 shows 93% of fundraisers surveyed said retaining current donors was a high priority for their organisation, followed by cultivating prospective donors (70%) and re-engaging lapsed donors (56%).

Additionally, 'focus on stewardship and communication with donors' was cited by 84% of fundraisers as the top new activity they implemented during 2009 that increased organisational revenue.

Non-profits, both large and small, lose roughly a third of their donors annually. To make matters worse, this figure refers only to people who have given at least two donations to a favoured charity. The figure for newly recruited supporters is actually a good deal worse.

Data from the Centre on Philanthropy and the Association of Fundraising Professionals' Fundraising Effectiveness Project suggest a significant fall off in donors. Non-profits lose well over than 50% of their cash supporters between their first and second donation and then 30% per year thereafter. Initial attrition rates as high as 70% are common.

This should be a serious concern for all non-profits. Attentiveness to the needs, desires and preferences of donors is an organisation's ethical and fiscal responsibility.

Ethical and effective fundraising means truly listening to donors, learning what really matters to them, understanding their goals for their giving, valuing what they care about and helping them to fulfill their personal missions for their philanthropy.

Retaining current donors is also important because maintaining a robust, loyal donor base is the most cost-effective strategy for non-profits and offers potential for substantial increases in giving. The cost of identifying and cultivating new supporters is far higher than that of taking proper care of current donors and keeping them engaged.

Boosting an organisation's retention rate by even 10% can increase the amount given over time by 50% to 200%. Loyal donors who remain involved with the organisation for the long run are likely to increase their giving levels, give through a variety of means, help recruit other donors, and consider planned gifts.

## Donor loyalty

The single biggest determinant of donor loyalty is the quality of service the donor receives from the fundraising staff. Renewal rates for donors who are very happy with their interactions are double the rates for those who report just being satisfied. Measuring donor satisfaction and adjusting donor relations in response to feedback is essential.

The second ingredient in loyalty is the donor's sense of commitment to the non-profit.

This can be strengthened by developing a greater understanding of the donor's interests and values and demonstrating that the donor and the organisation share key values and a vision of 'what could be'.

Help the donor discover ways to personally identify with the non-profit and its purpose. Strategically and gradually enrich the donor's knowledge and understanding of the organisation. Building the donor's appreciation of the mission and how it is accomplished helps donors to see themselves as part of the fulfillment of your mutual mission and deepens his dedication.

A donor is more likely to remain committed if there is a perception that the consequences of failing to give will be negative than if the donor is left to wonder whether a gift makes a difference.

## Personal preferences

Offering donors numerous interactions and paying close attention to personal preferences also reaps substantial rewards. Although the individual interactions might not seem significant to the fundraising team, over time, the donor develops a stronger connection to the non-profit. Each contact reminds the donor of his relationship to the organisation.

Finally, donor loyalty depends on trust. A donor's trust in the recipient organisation is linked to the share of the individual's total giving that goes to the organisation. There are several ways non-profits can earn donors' trust. One way is by demonstrating 'role competence' – showing donors you are fulfilling your goals.

Exhibiting good judgment also builds donor trust. Help donors understand why you chose your particular approach to the issue. For example, you might explain the multiple ways to tackle this issue and how your non-profit carefully evaluated each before selecting the methods you employ. Additionally, reporting on the organisation's performance and finances and educating donors about the importance and impact of the non-profit's specific financial needs, including those for fundraising and overhead, are also key to increasing trust and retention.

Donor loyalty develops as a result of strategies on the part of an organisation to measure, create and sustain donor satisfaction, commitment, and trust. Set your organisation apart by ensuring that donors are connected, well-served and confident in their decision to donate.

Donors' trust must be earned through hard work and strategic shifts in services and communication, but the results will be rewarding for both the donor and the organisation.

Patrick M. Rooney is executive director of the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. Adrian Sargeant is the Robert F. Hartsook Chair in Fundraising at the Center on Philanthropy. ■

Adapted from  
**The NonProfit Times**  
 15 May 2010  
 Visit [www.nptimes.com](http://www.nptimes.com)

**MILESTONE THINKING**

On-target observations in brief

Holding back on the truth in direct mail and electronic media doesn't serve non-profits because weaker, less emotional copy generally results in fewer responses and lower average gift levels.

With acknowledgement to  
**The NonProfit Times**  
1 May 2010

Sometimes when there's too much detail, it's hard to create a friendly, easy-to-read flow to your letter. So don't forget the fundamentals of direct mail. More than ever, you'll want to keep your paragraphs short – mostly about four lines or less – and vary their length.

Deborah Block and Paul Karp in  
**Mal Warwick's E-newsletter**  
June 2010

The single biggest determinant of donor loyalty is the quality of service the donor receives from the fundraising staff.

With acknowledgement to  
**The NonProfit Times**  
15 May 2010

The brain is a wonderful organ. It starts the moment you get up and doesn't stop until you get into the office.

**Robert Frost**

The chief reason behind ever-improving fundraising success, in my view, is donor-centricity: a profound respect for the act of giving and for the people who make those gifts.

With acknowledgement to  
**Love Thy Reader | About Donor Communications | Ahern 9.8**  
[www.aherncomm.com](http://www.aherncomm.com)

Non-profit organisations that will thrive in the future will shift to entrepreneurial business models focused on more efficient growth, new revenue streams, and better forecasting.

With acknowledgement to  
**The Chronicle of Philanthropy**  
Volume XXII, No. 8, 11 March 2010

The deed is everything, the glory naught.  
**Johann Wolfgang von Goeth**



For the past 88 years Child Welfare Vryheid has been at the forefront of promoting the rights of children, families and communities living in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

# A legacy of caring for Vryheid's children

In areas where unemployment is as high as 85%, and many people live without access to running water and electricity, Child Welfare Vryheid strives to safeguard children's rights by providing a wide range of social services.

From foster care supervision and establishing crèches, to training volunteer care workers and hosting life skills courses for Grade 7's, the organisation adopts a holistic approach to address social problems.

A dedicated team of four social workers and two administrative staff oversees operations in Vryheid, surrounding informal settlements and remote rural villages – a vast area covering hundreds of square kilometres.

Preventing, investigating and dealing with neglect, abuse, poverty and distress to children and women is a primary focus for the social workers.

Child-headed households, neglect and abuse, HIV and Aids, substance abuse, high unemployment and high rates of retrenchments exacerbate the challenges faced by the social workers.

Child Welfare Vryheid also hosts Children's Day in November every year. Aimed at highlighting and promoting children's rights, it's a highlight on the town's annual calendar – with residents coming out in force to support the parade and stalls.

Email: [vhdchildwelfare@telkomsa.net](mailto:vhdchildwelfare@telkomsa.net)

**(Readers are invited to submit photographs, together with a brief overview of their organisation's work, for inclusion in this regular feature.)**

## FUNDRAISING FORUM

**Fundraising Forum** is a regular newsletter dedicated to the enhancement of management, fundraising techniques and the promotion of community service, welfare and not-for-profit organisations of all kinds.

It is published by Downes Murray International and circulated, free of charge, to anyone with an interest in the growth and improvement of the non-profit sector and those served by it. In addition to regular features written by Downes Murray International staff, there are extracts from international fundraising publications which are reprinted with acknowledgement to the publishers.

We welcome submissions for publication from all writers involved in not-for-profit work.

Visit [www.downesmurray.co.za](http://www.downesmurray.co.za)

# The keys to success in fundraising today

In recent months, I've been developing a new perspective on fundraising, born of the increasing frustration I've felt trying to understand today's fundraising environment through the lens of yesterday's truths.  
By Mal Warwick.

**W**hat I'm about to tell you is certainly not news to you – that the world of non profit fundraising has changed in fundamental ways in the past two decades.

You know that. But if you're like most people engaged in the business of raising money, you may not have a handle on what those changes mean from a practical perspective – what the implications are for how we go about our business on a day-to-day basis.

When I began raising money professionally more than 30 years ago, the fundraising field consisted primarily of people who worked on major gifts, foundation grants, corporate giving, special events, and, increasingly, direct mail.

And those people really didn't talk to one another. Fundraising today is vastly more complex – and we can't afford not to understand at least a little about what everyone else is doing.

So I'm going to take you on a tour of this strange new world of fundraising in the 21st Century. This will be a quickie tour, a Big Picture tour.

I'm not going to write about click-through rates or fundraising ratios or data mining. Instead, I'll attempt to give you an overview of the new guiding principles that I believe have to be followed if we're to be successful in fundraising today and tomorrow.

## Roadmaps

You see, I don't believe the roadmaps of the past will help us anymore.

In fact, following the old directions can quickly take us way off course. We can't think about fundraising simplistically as a matter of hiring a collection of specialists in different fundraising techniques.

We have to think about fundraising in a holistic fashion. We can't even cleanly separate donors into institutional and individual donors anymore, because they're often the very same people!

What we're facing is a truly new fundraising environment. Not just a bewildering profusion of new technologies, but new generations of donors ... with new and unfamiliar attitudes ... and new levels of acceptance and rejection of the techniques we use to raise money for the causes we care about.

Maybe things will become simple one day, when all our communications technologies truly converge and we all plug into one big network in the sky. Pundits have been telling us to expect that for the past two decades.

But convergence is a long, long way off.

And as the economist John Maynard Keynes famously told us, 'In the long run we're all dead'.

## Today's route to riches?

So what are the routes to fundraising success in this new, unfamiliar world? Can you get there by doing something simple? 'Telling your story, maybe?' Or being 'creative?'

There are people in the field who seem to think easy answers like that will do the trick.

You know, of course, that life is never that simple. And you probably have a healthy degree of scepticism about the assumptions of the past – the conventional wisdom.

But before we start exploring the central principles of fundraising today, let's take a look at three of the most common bits of conventional wisdom of the past few years.

## Myth 1:

Online fundraising will make direct mail obsolete.

First, let's consider the widely accepted belief that online fundraising will make direct mail obsolete.

Ever since the World Wide Web went public in 1992, pundits and some online practitioners alike have been telling us that direct mail is doomed.

By tomorrow – or the day after tomorrow, at the latest – donors will move online to give, and direct mail will go the way of the wind-up telephone.

Guess again! In the United States, direct mail still accounts for at least 20 and perhaps as much as 40 times the revenue brought in by online fundraising in all its varieties (and that includes email, the Web, and social networks).

Now, some experts will tell you that online revenue already accounts for 5% of all philanthropic gifts in the U.S.

Unfortunately, that's just not true. Their methodology is flawed. It's true that online revenue is rising rapidly – probably 35-40% per year, except for last year – but today online activities really account for no more than 1 or at most 2% of revenue. It will take a very long time for that 1% to grow to even 10% – and that would still be only about one-quarter as much as comes in by mail.

## Myth 2:

Younger people will all go online to give.

Now here's another widely shared misconception: that younger people will only give online. For starters, people under 40 really don't give at anything even approaching the rates of people over 40.

Continued on page 5

# What to put in your donor newsletters

Here's the easiest explanation I've ever come up with. These are the few things you really must remember, to make your donor newsletters succeed at: (1) retaining donors, and (2) increasing gift revenue.

1. Donors should feel something as they read your newsletter. Something. Glad, angry, relieved, hopeful, happy, proud, satisfied . . . something. Judge everything you put in your newsletter by one standard: Is this news item, anecdote, statistic, or photo likely to make the donor feel something?

2. Are you marinated in 'donor love'? Do you make the donor feel like a VIP? Have you switched from the 'donor-negligent' voice ('We did this. We did that. And, oh by the way, if you sent a cheque, thanks!') to the proper 'donor-centric' voice ('With your help, we did this and that. And without your help, we can't.')

You simply cannot flatter a donor too much. In fact, 'flattering donors too much' is right at the top of a fundraiser's job description, in my opinion. Why? Because flattery stimulates more revenue.

And it's not a cynical ploy. Donors are



never really gulled. They know flattery for what it is. But they don't reject it. Truth? They like the feeling.

And, truth, you like the feeling. Fact: We all like the feeling. Flattery reminds us, in case we've forgotten, that we're worth something. That we're important. And that feels really good.

3. They want to trust you. They're just not sure they can. We have something like 1.5 million non-profits in the U.S. but almost no regulatory oversight. Charity fraud is common in the news. You need to reassure your readers repeatedly that your organisation is business-minded and trustworthy.

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## The keys to success in fundraising today

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They may not have any money to give. They're active consumers and use their money to buy stuff. And it may take many years and a lot of life experience for them to accept the importance of sharing through philanthropy.

But that's only half the story. Convio's study this year of 1 500 recent donors turned up some very interesting data.

For example, take people like me who are too old to be Baby Boomers. Seventy-seven percent of us gave via cheques by mail compared to 24% via the Web.

No surprise there. But contrast that with the Millennials or Generation Y. Those are the people who were born from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s. Twenty-six percent gave via mail and just 29% via the Web.

In other words, the youngest people studied responded just about as well to direct mail appeals as they did online!

### Myth 3:

Social networking is the key to success in fundraising.

Maybe you've already discovered for yourself that social networking isn't the route to fundraising riches.

Yes, there have been success stories about raising money via social networks. Recently some non profit organisation reportedly raised a couple of million dollars that way. But stories like that are few and far between.

They're what social scientists call outliers. Social networks aren't even on the radar screen as a route to success in fundraising.

Could this change?

As Facebook becomes ever more strongly embedded in the flow of people's day-to-day lives, as now seems to be the case – well, maybe. Eventually. Not today or tomorrow.

### Where's the yellow-brick road?

What's the route to success in fundraising today? How do you get onto the yellow-brick road and follow it to the riches we all know are out there?

Now, keep my warning in mind: I'm not going to give you any simple answer.

I won't reveal a step-by-step five-point plan to meet all your fundraising challenges. I take you – and myself – more seriously than that.

OK, then. There's no map, and you certainly won't get there in a straight line. But there is a way to get there. And it's all about how well you treat the people who care about the work your organisation is doing. ■

Adapted from  
**Ahern E-Newsletter:  
About Donor  
Communications® 2010**  
Visit  
[www.aherncomm.com](http://www.aherncomm.com)

Adapted from  
**Mal Warwick's  
E-newsletter**  
September 2010  
Visit  
[www.malwarwick.com](http://www.malwarwick.com)

# Release your inner archer: learn to shoot message arrows

Use 'message arrows' to motivate your donors to support your cause. Tom Ahern explains how to pierce hearts, and raise more money.

**W**elcome to the writers' clinic. Today we examine this common problem: 'I want to put ideas in your head. I want to pierce your heart and have it bleed for my cause. How do I do that?'

Answer: shoot 'message arrows'. Lots and lots of message arrows.

And what are your bows, with which to shoot message arrows?

Your bows are all the various media you already use to contact and inform your donors and prospects: direct mail, newsletters, the website, emails, annual reports, brochures, talks, Facebook, pitches, presentations, phone calls, programme books at your events, signage ... and so on.

Can you spot the message arrow in this opening sentence from a direct mail appeal?

I'm writing to ask your help with something important.

Let me highlight the message arrow in bold:

I'm writing to ask **your help with something important**.

Who wants to help with something **unimportant**, after all? Here's a message arrow (bolded) that applies to every charity I know:

These are things (programmes, initiatives, ideas, advances) **that only philanthropy buys**.

## Repetition

Repeat that particular message arrow a thousand times and watch your charitable income start to rise. Your donors want the responsibility for doing something important and unique.

Incidentally, message arrows are not about choosing words or styling. Message arrows are ideas. Using any phrasing you like.

Let me repeat:

## Use. Any. Phrasing. You. Like.

Just say the same message as often as you can. Repetition of one clear message ... as often as possible ... to the right audience ... is the real secret behind advertising success. (You thought the secret

would be more glamorous?) If you repeat the same message enough times to the right audience, it will sink in. Eventually.

Here's the predominant 'message arrow' (i.e., 'theme') of Yale University's \$3+ billion campaign for unrestricted endowment:

'Tomorrow, everything will be different.'

The entire case for support is one big echo chamber for that particular idea. Here's an excerpt from the opening message of Yale President Richard C. Levin. I've bolded his message arrows:

I seek your support **to ensure** that the accomplishment of recent years is **not remembered merely as a bright moment** in Yale's long history, but rather as the foundation for a Yale of permanently greater breadth and strength, a Yale **with the capacity to contribute** – by means of its scholarship and its graduates – not only to the nation but also to the world.

He's telling his prospects that complacency is not a good long-term strategy for maintaining Yale's reputation, that in fact this august institution needs a super-generous infusion of new, unrestricted cash to pull off a massive, future-oriented curriculum reform.

Despite the hallowed tones, it's a pretty audacious pitch. And by the way, the campaign has almost made goal.

Here's the opening of a welcome-to-first-time-donors letter. I've bolded the message arrows:

I'm writing to you today for two **joyful** reasons.

Reason number one: I wish to thank you deeply for making **your first gift** to (XYZ.org). That's **quite an occasion for us**.

And my other reason? It is my special privilege and pleasure to **welcome you** – warmly – **into the (XYZ.org) family**.

Let's review. What are the message arrows in the letter? All the expressions of what I call 'donor love'.

Sometimes the message arrow is merely one adjective: 'joyful'.

Sometimes it's a description: '...quite an occasion for us'.

Sometimes it's an embrace: '...welcome you...into the family'.

So the lesson is to think of every day as Valentine's Day, when you're fundraising. And every chance you get, you want to more-than-just-thank, you want to outright *love* the donor.

Subscribe to Tom Ahern's newsletter at [www.aherncomm.com](http://www.aherncomm.com)



Adapted from  
**Ahern E-News 8.7**  
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# Unsolicited advice for the unsuspecting copywriter

In theory, we all agree what a fundraising message should look like. But in practice, fundraising copy still gets watered down, with emotional language crossed out, Asks made vague and furtive – and the donor, whose eyes are quickly scanning the copy, barely mentioned at all.



I decided to pull a couple of letters from my sample file of new-donor acquisition mailings to see if I could find concrete illustrations how fundraising copy can stray from the ideal.

Because I'm only highlighting a small passage from each letter, I don't mean this as a critique of the letter as a whole – but just the segment of the copy I feel could be sharpened.

## My first unsuspecting victim

My first unwilling victim is a letter from the North Shore Animal League. It told the story of Sugar Plum, a dog rescued from a puppy mill. After the emotional peak of the story came this deflating passage:

*She is recovering nicely and we are helping Sugar Plum learn that she is now safe and will no longer suffer. That there are nice people that will love and care for her. In time she will be ready to go home with the perfect adopter to forget her sad past and live a long, happy and healthy life.*

I see two problems with this passage. First, the odd construction and fragments make the copy awkward.

The rush of relief we should feel from Sugar Plum's rescue is lost in the tortured syntax. You can throw your grammar book away when writing fundraising copy – but, if you break the rules, you need to know how and why you are breaking them.

Second, the victory for Sugar Plum is not positioned in any way that reinforces the need for a gift. In fact, the passive voice that explains 'she is recovering nicely' makes the need for a gift sound less than urgent.

While the letter does mention that Sugar Plum's rescue was made possible by generous donations, it comes several paragraphs and one turn of the page later – much too far away from the emotional story of Sugar Plum's plight.

My next letter is a 2008 UNICEF mailing that begins with this disturbing passage:

*Will you let 26 000 children die every day from preventable causes?* This passage is positioned as the Johnson Box of the letter – the bit of text

above the salutation, making it the first thing that a prospective donor will read after opening the envelope.

A question like this at the top of the letter fails in a number of ways. First, it was not written in good faith to a real person reading the letter –

because no one person can be held responsible for the deaths of 26 000 children every day!

This may seem like an odd point to make, because the question was obviously intended to be provocative, teasing prospects to read further.

But when your copy strays from being a real message from one human to another, you begin to lose trust of your reader.

The passage I quoted is something you'd never say to your friend – it's a message a branding committee would craft for a pool of potential donors.

And second, the scope of the problem presented by the passage is far too great for one person to help alleviate or even to comprehend – especially when the gift amounts in the package are \$25, \$35, \$50, \$75, \$100, or \$500.

Once you read the letter, you get the gist of the problem: UNICEF could stop the needless deaths of 10 million children every year with more support from donors like you and me.

But how many people will read that far . . . with the guilt of so many needless deaths hanging over their head?

## Meat grinder

It's easy to criticise, but hard to create – especially considering the meat grinder so many fundraising letters must go through. But based on these two samples, be sure to ask yourself the following three questions about your copy before you send it out:

1. Is it conversational and easy to read – without sounding awkward?
2. Am I thinking of the prospective donor as a real person – an individual who wants to help, but who needs a good reason to pay attention to my plea?
3. Am I asking for a gift that makes sense – an amount the reader can afford that will help accomplish a real and concrete goal?

If you keep these questions in mind, you'll be far along the way toward creating fundraising copy that isn't awful – but actually pretty good.

*Peter Schoewe is Senior Account Executive and Director of Analytics, Mal Warwick Associates.* ■

Fundraising copy can be awful in a number of ways. It might sound like it was written by a committee. It can spend a lot of time talking about us and them, rather than you and me. Most egregiously, it might even neglect to ask for a gift. Peter Schoewe reports.

Adapted from  
**Mal Warwick's**  
**E-newsletter**  
 November 2009  
 Visit  
[www.malwarwick.com](http://www.malwarwick.com)

# What to put in your donor newsletters

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4. Surprise me. This is mere neuroscience: Our brains tend to pay more attention to anything new. Even the word 'new' excites us. Show me something I haven't seen before. Tell me something I haven't heard before. The rule: Do anything except bore me. The reality: Ninety-nine out of 100 donor newsletters violate that rule religiously. No wonder your newsletters produce so little.

5. Prepare to be skimmed. More science: First, we look at all the bigger, bolder, briefer things in a publication, like headlines and photos, before we dig into the articles.

## Grenade

And we seldom ever dig into the articles: No more than one in five readers will penetrate the first paragraph of any story. Plus, there's the BI vs. AI phenomenon: Before the Internet vs. After the Internet. The Internet tossed a grenade into people's attention spans and blew them all to shreds.

6. If you want response, you need to make offers. It's simple cause and effect. What kinds of offers? Information. Tours. Matching gifts. Special fund drives.

7. Is it easy to give? Inertia is the real enemy in fundraising, I am totally convinced. Simply getting someone to act (write a cheque, go online and donate) is hard.

Convenience is key. Include a reply

envelope. Remind the reader on every page of your newsletter that online donations are fast and safe. And then make sure they are fast and safe. I tried to give \$350 online to a favourite charity the other day and their PayPal mechanism required me to set up an account first. No, thank you.

8. Collect email addresses so you can send e-newsletters. An effective donor communications programme will field both (not either) printed newsletters and e-newsletters. Brief emailed updates let you keep your supporters informed at almost no cost. Yet most charities I know have email addresses for no more than 20% of their donorbase. Boo. hiss.

9. There are key messages you need to repeat over and over and over and over and over and over and over and . . .

Some of those messages will be specific to your charity. Though some are apt for almost all charities, messages like: (1) The success of the mission depends on donors. (2) Your support is vitally important. (3) Nothing feels better than helping your neighbours and your community. (4) The more you give, the more good we can do.

Lesson: A good donor newsletter stirs pleasure in its readers. It reassures them that the mission is still urgent and relevant. And it renews in them the certainty that they are accomplishing something worthwhile by continuing their support. ■

*Fundraising Forum* is edited by Richard Solomon and published by Downes Murray International. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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Downes Murray are fundraising consultants, working with non-profit and non-government organisations of all kinds, to increase their fundraising effectiveness.

We offer feasibility studies, strategic planning workshops, direct mail fundraising, mail/phone, corporate and capital fundraising campaigns, Internet fundraising and website design, church fundraising and bequest promotion programmes.

In addition, Downes Murray has close links with a number of fundraising consultancies across the globe, and represents DVA Navion International Consultancy in Africa, enabling us to keep a finger on the pulse of international trends and techniques. For more information, contact us:

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## Season's Greetings

The editors, contributors and publishers of Fundraising Forum wish all clients and friends a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.



### "Reprinted with acknowledgement to ..."

**Fundraising Forum** prides itself on keeping South African fundraisers right up-to-date with developing attitudes, trends and techniques, both here and overseas. We are grateful to the following international publications, which are regularly quoted and highly recommended:

- **Successful Fund Raising**, PO Box 4528, Sioux City, Iowa, 51104, USA, (12 issues per annum \$159) website: [www.stevensoninc.com](http://www.stevensoninc.com)
- **The NonProfit Times**, 190 Tamarack Circle, Skillman, NJ08558, USA, (\$129 per annum) website: [www.nptimes.com](http://www.nptimes.com)
- **The Chronicle of Philanthropy**, PO Box 1989, Marion, Ohio, 43306, USA, (24 issues – one annum at \$95) website: <http://philanthropy.com>
- **Successful Direct Mail, Telephone and Online Fundraising**. Subscribe for free at [www.malwarwick.com/newsletter](http://www.malwarwick.com/newsletter)
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