

# FUNDRAISING FORUM

## Whatever happened to old-fashioned gratitude?



*There's a disquieting attitude that's crept into nonprofit fundraising. DMI copywriter, Denise Murray, reports.*

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**G**one are the days when organisations were bowled over by the generosity of individuals (and even corporates) who chose to donate to their cause – especially on a regular basis.

The new attitude is much more one of a sense of entitlement, and quick dissatisfaction when the donation figures aren't quite 'what they should be'.

#### Why have attitudes changed?

Yes, nonprofits have long been rightly encouraged to act in a businesslike way when it comes to raising, and running on, donated money. And their programmes have become more and more sophisticated.

But one aspect seems to have dropped off the bottom of everyone's page. Gratitude.

Fundraising income is driven by the spirit of philanthropy. Do people even understand the word, 'philanthropy' any more?

Donors don't give with the mindset of profit and loss, budgets and the bottom line. Donors give because they want to make a difference in the world. They give to feel worthwhile. And if the organisation wants to keep getting their money, then their most important task is to keep their donors feeling worthwhile.

And here's the thing, donors give as they are variably able to do, at any given time.

Times and ability are 'moveable feasts', as has been illustrated by the recent worldwide economic downturn.

The reality is that no donor 'owes' the nonprofit organisation. Rather, the nonprofit organisation 'owes' every donor.

And this is what every organisation, from fundraiser to board member, needs to remember – and give thanks for!

When times are bad and donors are perceived not to be giving enough, or as often, finance board members get restless. They call for cost-cutting, start talking about putting out tenders to get their fundraising done more cheaply by completely unknown and untried suppliers. They even moot dumping the entire fundraising programme!

For them, donors seem to be a faceless money-machine which is not performing to demand, expectation, or past highs.

If they don't understand that their funds are coming from a wide variety of individuals – people with hearts and minds

and emotions – then now is the time to learn that fact.

If in these worst of times your organisation's donors are still giving to the best of their diminished ability, then you are privileged. And it's by the grace of their philanthropic commitment that they continue to share with you, even though it may be a lesser amount, or less frequently.

When income drops for the very obvious reasons that the world is experiencing now, this is not the time to complain. This is the time to show abundant appreciation.

Do you have the courage to bite the financial deficit bullet, and shower your donors with loving thanks? Tell them, even more frequently than usual, how wonderful they are, and how much their donations are continuing to make a wondrous difference.

There's no greater 'turn-on' than personal and genuine acknowledgment and appreciation of people's efforts to keep up their support of your work – especially bearing in mind that they have no obligation to do so.

Instead of considering dumping your fundraising programme (because, right now, the numbers are down and the costs are high) – and leaving your donors with a feeling of total abandonment after all they've invested in you, both financially and emotionally – have the faith, vision, and gratitude to think differently.

#### Lifetime relationship

It's during the tough times that you can cement the donor relationship so that it lasts a lifetime. Your donors are your future . . . now, and right up to the day when you receive their final gift – that bequest in their Will . . . only because your organisation proved itself to be sufficiently special, professional, and personally engaging enough to deserve it.

It's during the tough times that you should think twice about 'counting pencils', because the wheel inevitably turns.

If 'gratitude' has fallen off the bottom of your organisation's page, you may want to retrieve it, and rethink your approach to your donors.

Then, in the long-term future, when you're the NGO that's successfully held onto its donor base, whilst others have lost theirs through their bad times cut-backs, you'll be the one laughing all the way to the bank. ■

# 11 Cardinal rules of copywriting (and how to break them)

*Mal Warwick shares his top 11 copywriting tips.*

**1 Use 'I' and 'you' (but mostly 'you').**  
In fact, 'you' may be the most frequently used word in your direct mail letters.

Your appeal is a letter from one individual to another individual. Abolish the plural 'you' from your vocabulary (as in 'Dear Friends' for example), and try to avoid the royal 'we'.

Rule-breaker: You may write a letter in the first person plural if – but only if – for example, the letter is to be signed by a married couple, or your organisation's two venerable co-founders.

**2. Appeal on the basis of benefits, not needs**

Donors give money because they get something in return (if only good feelings). To tap their generosity, describe what they'll receive in return for their money – such benefits as lives saved, or human dignity gained, or larger causes served.

Don't be shy about emphasising tangible benefits, too. Donors may tell you they give money for nobler reasons, but premiums often make a difference.

Rule-breaker: If you're sending a genuine emergency appeal, you'd be a fool not to write about your organisation's needs – and graphically so!

**3. Ask for money, not for 'support'**

The purpose of a direct mail fundraising letter is to ask for financial help. Be sure you do so – clearly, explicitly and repeatedly.

The 'Ask' should not be an afterthought, tacked onto the end of a letter: it's your reason for writing in the first place.

Repeat the Ask several times in the body of the letter as well as on the reply device.

Rule-breaker: Many direct mail packages are structured not as appeals for funds but as membership invitations. Others feature surveys or other donor involvement devices. In these cases, you might be well-advised to de-emphasise the financial commitment, and highlight membership benefits.

**4. Write a package, not a letter**

Your fundraising letter is arguably the single most important element in the mailing package. But it's only one of several items that must fit smoothly together and work as a whole. At a minimum, your package will probably include an outer envelope, a reply envelope, and a reply device in addition to the letter.

When you sit down to write, think about how each of these components will help persuade donors to send money now.

Make sure the same themes, symbols, colours, and typefaces are used on all elements, so that the package is as accessible as possible to donors. And be certain that every element in the package relates directly to the Big Idea, or marketing concept, that gives the appeal its unity.

Rule-breaker: Sometimes it pays to spend a little extra money on a package

insert that doesn't directly relate to the marketing concept: for example, a premium offer presented on an insert, but mentioned nowhere else in the package.

**5. Write in your audience's own language**

Use compact, powerful words and short, punchy sentences. Favour words that convey emotions over those that communicate thoughts. Avoid foreign phrases or big words. Minimise your use of adjectives and adverbs. Don't use abbreviations or acronyms; spell out names, even if their repetition looks a little silly to you. Repeat (and underline) key words and phrases. Make sure that everyone will understand your marketing concept.

Rule-breaker: A letter that could have been written by a twelve-year-old might not look right over the signature of a university chancellor or a scientist, so follow this rule judiciously. (But don't make the mistake of confusing big words, complex sentences and complicated thoughts with intelligent communication: even a literate fundraising letter needs to be clear and straightforward.)

**6. Format your letter for easy reading**

Be conscious of the white space you're leaving around your copy; the eye needs rest. Indent every paragraph. Avoid paragraphs more than seven lines long, but vary the size of your paragraphs. Use bullets and indented paragraphs. In long letters, try subheads that are centered and underlined. Underline sparingly but consistently throughout your letter: enough to call attention to key words and phrases.

Rule-breaker: Don't mechanically follow the rule above. Some special formats, such as telegrams or handwritten notes, have formatting rules of their own. Don't ignore them.

**7. Give your readers a reason to send money right away**

Creating a sense of urgency is one of your biggest copywriting challenges. Try to find a genuine reason why gifts are needed right away: for example, a deadline for a matching grant or tie your fund request to a budgetary deadline so you can argue why gifts are needed within the next 15 days.

There is always a reason to send a gift now. And the argument for the urgency of your appeal bears repeating – in a P.S. and on the reply device.

Rule-breaker: Be very careful about fixed deadlines. (Instead of citing a date, use a phrase like 'within the next two weeks'). Don't overuse the same arguments for urgency, lest your credibility suffer. And try not to depend on deadlines based on actual dates in your acquisition packages: the value of those packages will be greater if you can continue to use them over time.

## MILESTONE THINKING

On-target observations in brief

You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

**Kahlil Gibran**

People who give to a religious group are almost three times more likely to give to another charity than those who do not give to religion. They will also give to more charities.

With acknowledgement to  
**The NonProfit Times and  
infogroup survey  
in the NonProfit Times**  
1 August 2011

It's not just enough nowadays to have a transactional cause marketing campaign that donates a percentage or Rand amount of a purchase to a nonprofit organisation.

Not only do these types of donations amount to little in terms of long-term growth, but also tremendously difficult to convert these one-time donors into long-time supporters of your organisation.

With acknowledgement to  
**www.nptimes.com**

When nonprofits embed social media throughout their organisation, they will allow the best ambassadors for their causes – their staff members and key volunteers – to talk about the work they know best.

With acknowledgement to  
**The Chronicle of Philanthropy**  
25 August 2011

When you work with professionals who know their trade, you don't second-guess their work. I don't second-guess my master electrician, do I? So why would an untrained nonprofit second-guess a direct mail writer with a good track record?

With acknowledgement to  
**Tom Ahern**  
visit [www.aherncomm.com](http://www.aherncomm.com)

Send a New Year's letter to donors, thanking them again for their support and letting them know how you are using their gift.

With acknowledgement to  
**Successful Fund Raising**  
June 2011, Volume XIX, No.6

I feel the capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest significance.

**Pablo Casals**



For more than 70 years the Mercury Hibberdene Children's Holiday Home has given vulnerable and underprivileged children hours of holiday fun.

## More than 70 years of fun in the sun

**L**ocated on the KwaZulu-Natal Hibiscus Coast, the holiday home's surrounded by indigenous bush, boasting extensive sea views. It first opened its doors in 1935 – during the Great Depression – to give children of unemployed parents the joy of a seaside holiday. And it's continued to provide a seaside retreat since then.

In the mid 1990s, the home received a much needed 'face lift' and has since attracted several organisations to use its facilities at a nominal cost. The funds generated help the home remain committed to its goal of giving to the less fortunate.

Each year hundreds of needy children from homes, hospices and paediatric hospitals are treated to seaside holidays – designed to be educational and fun. For many youngsters, it's their first trip to the sea!

The children are spoilt for choice with an Olympic sized swimming pool, giant water slide, an obstacle course, a jungle gym and ample grounds for ball sports.

And of course, no beach holiday is complete without a braai around the boma and campfire stories!

Thanks to the many businesses and individuals who readily respond to appeals for donations, the home continues to give poor, vulnerable children a chance to experience the joy of going on holiday.

For more information contact Bev Marais on 039 699 2207, e-mail [bev@hibhome.org.za](mailto:bev@hibhome.org.za) or visit [www.hibhome.org.za](http://www.hibhome.org.za)

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

## FUNDRAISING FORUM

**F**undraising 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.dmi.co.za](http://www.dmi.co.za)

# Most charities still do not raise much money via social media



Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn represent a powerful opportunity for many nonprofits, but few big groups are raising much money through them yet. Raymond Flandez reports on a recent survey conducted by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* in the USA.

A growing number of groups surveyed by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* are investing in ways to use social networks for fundraising.

Some 79 of about 150 big charities said they were raising money through social media.

Only one reported raising a substantial sum: the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, which raised more than \$4-million. The next highest was just \$400 000, raised by the Nature Conservancy, which brought in far more – \$650-million – from private sources last year.

Far more groups – 113 – said they were using social networks primarily to spur interest among new supporters.

## Experimental stage

For most charities, social media fundraising is still such a new idea that this is mostly a period of experimentation, says Laura Cobb, manager of e-philanthropy at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Foundation.

'There's no guidebook. We're doing a lot of things and testing – kind of seeing what the results are.'

Among the efforts she has tried: using Twitter to raise more than \$28 000 during a four-week campaign involving the professional golfer Stewart Cink.

Ms Cobb was pleased with the result but said it could have worked better. She says the campaign could have been shorter, and the donation form wasn't ready to take gifts from mobile devices. She had to tweak it so people could send text messages to donate.

'We made this up as we went,' she says.

While many groups are moving slowly, some organisations report that they are putting a lot of effort into networks like Twitter and Facebook.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society, in New York, spent about \$50 000 to hire social media experts to train a corps of staff members who were then encouraged to teach the rest of the organisation's employees how to incorporate social media into their work.

The organisation has a Facebook page that's exclusively available to its staff members so they can share what they have learned and solve problems.

'It was really important for us that our

future work force had social media skills that are going to be required of everyone. This is what this business is all about:

'building powerful relationships with people, people who are going to advocate for change,' says Graham McReynolds, the organisation's executive vice-president for marketing and development.

'These are the tools that our entire work force has to become comfortable with and know how to work in a professional way.'

## Concentrated effort

Along with this investment in training has come a concentrated effort to incorporate social networks into the group's well-established fundraising events, such as Bike MS and Walk MS.

The charity offers participants easy-to-use online tools that allow them to encourage their friends to sponsor them on Facebook or on their personal blogs and spread the word about the charity in networks like Twitter and YouTube.

That effort is paying off not just in donations but also in an expanded pool of online supporters: The organisation now has more than 216 000 people who follow it on social networks.

One reason for the success: 'We really invested in engaging people,' Mr. McReynolds says, and took pains to be sure 'we're not wasting people's time'.

Still, the Multiple Sclerosis Society is unusual in its ability to use social networks for fundraising.

Among big groups, one of the most successful is the United States Fund for UNICEF, which raised more than \$250 000 last year.

It uses social networks to promote its well-known campaigns, such as Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF.

It also set up a project called Haiti 365, which raised money on the first anniversary of the Haiti earthquake, taking in more than \$10 000 through social networks.

## Less ambitious

Other groups are relying on less ambitious efforts.

The anti-poverty group Feed the Children undertook an innovative campaign last year called Take Action 10-10-10. The humanitarian charity told followers and supporters to take 10 minutes to join social networks and follow the charity, to donate \$10, and to tell 10 friends on social networks about Feed the Children.

It grabbed supporters' attention and was easy to remember. Feed the Children raised more than \$25 000.

Noelle Barton and Peter Bolton contributed to this article.

# To grow bigger, charities need to go deep – not wide – in fundraising

**S**ome people believe that successful fundraising is mainly a matter of luck – finding the right board member or the right new government programme.

Others believe that no matter what the track record, if they can just find the right words to make a better case for support, the public will understand the need for their work and tremendous resources will flow.

Neither extreme is true. It's not just luck, but not every cause can attract money from every source of support.

In a study of 144 big nonprofits founded since 1970, for example, we learned that the vast majority grew not by diversifying their sources of support, but by raising most of their money from a single type of donor that was a natural match for their mission.

Moreover, they created organisations that were specifically designed to work with that type of donor, since governments need different types of reporting and accounting than does a wealthy philanthropist.

But how does a nonprofit leader decide what approach to financing its operations makes the most sense? Building on years of primary research and consulting experience with dozens of nonprofits, here are guidelines to consider.

## **Get a sense of where you are**

The way forward starts with a look back. An organisation needs to reflect on the relative strengths and weaknesses of its current and historical approach to attracting support.

To examine donation patterns, organisations should look at sources of revenue for the past five years and get a sense of how reliable each one is. What's more, they should think about what motivated donors to give because that can help predict future giving. The organisation must also understand its own capabilities that provides a starting point to figure out what investments may be necessary to adopt a fundraising approach that builds on strengths and navigates weaknesses.

## **Take inspiration from your peers**

We've seen many nonprofit leaders resist this advice, reasoning that their organisation is unique and thus requires a unique approach to raising money.

While creating a never-seen-before way to seek donations is possible, the truth is that doing so is generally far more difficult and less certain.

Organisations that you may want to study can be similar in terms of mission (such as disease eradication) and revenue size.

Other groups to examine are those that focus on different causes, but cultivate the same type of support or those that serve similar beneficiaries or geography.

Key areas to review are overall sources of support (how many discrete sources the organisation taps, what those sources are, and what tactics it uses to cultivate them) and the differences in programmes, governance, and finance.

## **Weigh revenue potential against associated cost**

Examine the total amount awarded annually through each source the nonprofit wants to go after and the level of competition for those funds.

Obtaining those funds, of course, comes at a cost. When a nonprofit commits to seeking out a certain type of donor, it commits to investments that can be significant and risky, depending on how difficult it is to obtain a certain kind of gift or grant or contract. Investment in four areas may be required; programmes, personnel, information-technology systems, and communications.

## **Pave the road**

New fundraising approaches typically require two to three years to take hold. A good plan will give staff and board members a shared vision of where the organisation is heading. It also will establish clear milestones, making it easier to track progress and make course corrections. When developing a new source of support, a nonprofit should not relinquish donors that don't fit with the new approach.

These proven secondary sources may go a long way toward complementing the primary new source of money and serve as a stabiliser to the ups and downs of the new source.

Developing an approach to seeking money is a long-term investment that requires patience, but it's an investment that's well worth making.

Instead of seeing every possibility as a good lead for donations, savvy nonprofit leaders take a methodical approach to assessing each opportunity.

Instead of wondering how to invest in fundraising capabilities (and generally investing too little in too many), nonprofit leaders should set a careful strategy upon which to build.

*William Foster is a partner at the Bridgespan group; Peter Kim and Gail Perreault are Bridgespan managers. The article is adapted from a piece that appears in the August issue of Stanford Social Innovation Review.* ■



**A recent study has shown that many charities have grown by raising most of their money from a single donor that is a natural match for their mission, not by diversifying their sources of support.**

With acknowledgement to **The Chronicle of Philanthropy** Volume XXIII 25 August 2011

# In direct mail all responses, even complaints, are good

*Hoping you'll offend no-one? That's the wrong star to wish on. Tom Ahern reports.*

It had arrived. And I trembled. In my in-box was an email from a new client. The subject line: 'Responses to the appeal letter'.

Lily was reporting in. I'd written an appeal for her agency. She had taken a big risk on it. And we all had our fingers so tightly crossed that our nails were turning blue.

I closed my eyes ... wrapped my arms around a really deep breath ... and clicked the email 'open'. Where I read.... 'The appeal has had a huge impact!' Lily's email began.

Lily is the manager of annual fund and membership. She is gung-ho star material, ready to scale walls and shoot threads from her wrists, and totally dedicated to the organisation's success. Which is the culture at this place.

My breathing began again. Well, OK then. 'Huge impact.' I can cling to that. I guess I'm not a totally incompetent nincompoop.

But her next statement raised an issue. 'We are starting to get in responses to the appeal – some very positive ... and some very angry.'

## The Verbatim Rule

Let me set some context. I work under something called 'the Verbatim Rule'. I ask my new direct mail clients to agree that they will send out what I write for them exactly as I write it, without fiddling. Verbatim. Not a word changed, unless I made a factual error.

The Verbatim Rule exists for one reason: to sanctify the intensity of professionally crafted direct mail. Direct mail is not a medium that rewards meekness.

Clients who want to tone it down, who judge it 'too sales-y', who second-guess the mechanics (a P.S. is so undignified) will undermine a full and healthy response.

The Verbatim Rule is good for me (less cursing under my breath). And it's good for the client (more income).

## Expect complaints

But there is a footnote to the Verbatim Rule: Expect complaints. Replacing inoffensive direct mail with real direct mail, filled with black arts and emotional triggers, is like replacing ordinary fences with electric fences. Expect reactions.

Strong direct mail will touch nerves. And not every nerve you touch will enjoy the experience. Are complaints a problem? Not really. Unpleasant, maybe.

But, handled properly, I think they're pretty much the definition of an opportunity to have a great conversation with a supporter (first, though, see Jeff Brooks' note on who complainers typically are; end of article).



In direct mail, ALL response is indicative of something worth knowing. Complaints are as good as praise, in that regard. Negative response means your appeal went far enough emotionally.

Complaints mean your appeal was upsetting enough to get noticed. It's a weird measure, I know. But it's accurate to the penny.

Lily was okay with a few complaints, because we'd discussed that phenomenon in advance. Still, she was concerned. What she really wanted to know was this: How many angry responses is too many?

There's no industry measure I'm aware of. Certainly, none is mentioned in 'bibles' like Mal Warwick's *How to Raise Successful Fundraising Letters* or Alan Sharpe's *Mail Superiority*.

## Jeff Brooks on 'complaints metrics'

Jeff Brooks knows a heck of a lot more about this stuff than I do. So I asked his opinion, and he wrote back, 'I've never heard of a standard metric for complaints. Twenty-five per 10 000 does strike me as unusually high'. That was a number I'd suggested. 'But even then, I'd hesitate to worry; that number is statistically equal to zero.'

'And most complainers turn out to be lapsed and/or low-value donors. The paranoid fantasy of some organisations – that our fundraising will cause everybody to up and leave – wouldn't be measured by complaints, but by a serious drop in retention.'

'The only fundraising tactic I've seen do anything like that is rebranding. Strong fundraising, never. It increases response AND retention.'

# Creative ways to use technology to engage and excite your donors

Such classic techniques as thank you letters, phone calls, events and special gifts will never go out of style.

Many of these translate surprisingly well to online or technology-enhanced techniques, providing both new ways to make donors feel appreciated and, in some cases, organisational savings.

Here are 11 ideas ranging from the simple to the high-tech to get started.

## Personalised emails

Most organisations are already sending automatic emails to people who have donated online. A little creativity can increase the impact of those emails. Nonprofits with a small staff can pass around a list of donors and their email addresses and have a couple of different people send personal emails thanking them.

Better yet, organisations that serve a certain populace, such as school children or artists, can line up a few of them to write personalised thank-yous that show people the power their gifts have to change lives. There's no cost other than staff time.

## eNewsletters

Many nonprofits have newsletters. It's easy to turn them into e-newsletters to email to donors, or to create a periodic e-newsletter exclusively for donors offering short articles about special projects they've funded.

Asking celebrities or experts to write a guest article or answer questions can give an electronic newsletter a bit of appeal, and compelling stories and interviews can be of real interest to donors.

## Online profiles

Organisations can use their newsletters, blogs or websites to profile donors on an ongoing basis.

To appeal to the widest possible audience, they can profile 'typical' donors – not necessarily the most generous or the ones who have been giving the most years running – as a powerful thank you.

A profile of someone who gives a small amount despite their limited income because a nonprofit's mission is near and dear to them or who has a great personal story as to why they support an organisation, can inspire other donors to give more.

## Online gifts

Many nonprofits offer incentives such as T-shirts or coffee mugs to those who make a certain level of donation. What about online gifts of appreciation instead of, or in addition to, these real-world gifts?

Offering donors access to a mission-related webinar provided by experts, or to an online Q&A with a 'celebrity', can be a rewarding thank you. Organisations can mine their networks for potential candidates – people are often

grateful for the opportunity to contribute if given the chance.

Other ideas include a mobile app related to the organisation or mission, or an online game. As opposed to physical gifts, many online gifts cost nearly the same whether they're given to one person or to hundreds of thousands.

## Social media shout-outs

It's a good idea to thank people publicly, say in a list-wide email, because there's a certain momentum to donations – they can gather speed along with mass – and because some people like the credit. But there's a lot to be said for the perception of intimacy a personal contact can create, which is why the best campaigns incorporate both.

Using multiple channels to give donors rolling shout-outs during an ongoing campaign can include Facebook, Twitter, email and a blog.

For example, a 'Donors of the Week' post on Facebook, or a thank you can be tweeted every time someone gives more than a certain dollar amount, like bartenders ringing the bell for a big tip. Linking to donors' own sites or blogs, if they have them, is another subtle means of thanking them.

## Highlight early donors

Approaching a set of major donors early in the campaign to seed a matching fund that would then be promoted to other prospects through emails and the website can work particularly well for corporate donors. It allows them to essentially 'sponsor' the email and online fundraising campaign, and gives them publicity for their gifts.

## Website leader board

For friend-to-friend fundraising campaigns, in which supporters raise money from their own networks on behalf of an organisation, it's possible to create an online leader board where fundraisers 'compete' good-naturedly against each other's campaigns. These public rankings can be a powerful way to thank high-performing teams and to motivate others to do even more.

## Real time giving updates

For live events where people are encouraged to give, with little technical know-how it's easy to project the gifts onto a screen as they're received. This can be as simple as typing the gifts into a document that's projected from a laptop, to posting them in real time on



*Organisations use technology to engage donors, manage them in databases and even accept their donations online. With a little creative thinking you can save time on this important step and increase the likelihood that donors will give again.*

With acknowledgement to **The NonProfit Times** [www.nptimes.com](http://www.nptimes.com)  
1 August 2011  
By Andrea Berry and Chris Bernard

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# 11 Cardinal rules of copywriting (and how to break them)

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## 8. Write as long a letter as you need to make the case for your offer

Though everyone won't read every word you write, some recipients will do so, and others will scan your copy for the information that most interests them.

To be certain you push their hot buttons, use every strong argument you can devise for your readers to send you money now.

To spell out every argument may mean writing a long letter; it may also mean repeating what you've written to the same donors many times in the past. Don't worry about boring your readers by restating your case: studies show that even the most active donors remember very little about the organisations they support.

Rule-breaker: Not every organisation – and not every appeal – calls for a long

letter. Not by a long shot! A well-known organisation might be able to make its case with only a sentence or two.

And remember these three additional rules of copywriting - rules that are NOT to be broken:

## 9. Know yourself

You – the signer – are an individual human being, with hopes, fears, convictions, and experiences. Write about them.

## 10. Know your audience

You are writing to one person – the addressee – who has hopes, fears, convictions, and experiences. Write about them.

## 11. Know your organisation

Your organisation addresses human needs on many levels, intangible as well as concrete, emotional as well as practical. Write about them too. ■

# Creative ways to use technology to engage and excite your donors

Continued from page 7

Twitter and projecting the organisation's Twitter stream.

Twitter also allows community members who aren't there in person to vicariously experience the excitement – and be inspired to give online.

## Videos and photos

More and more organisations are harnessing the power of video to capture and convey emotion often lost in email, and with video capabilities now included in nearly every camera and phone, it's never been easier.

From a staff sing-along to a classroom full of children thanking donors for their gifts, the ideas are seemingly limitless. Videos can be fun, or they can be serious. It's up to the nonprofit to set the tone.

Photos can be used in a similar way, for example, as a slide-show set to music that shows constituents or events or the beneficiaries of funding. These can be posted on the website and sent to donors as links in their thank you emails.

## Interactive thank you pages

When donors click a button to donate online, they typically see a thank you web page. Enhancing this page with something more compelling, like a Flash fireworks display or a thank you video or slideshow, can provide a more exciting option.

Since the donor's name and

information is already in the system, it's possible to personalise the video, for example, by superimposing the donor's name onto a 'Thank You' sign held by a child served by the organisation.

## QR codes

Growing in popularity, QR codes are the black-and-white graphics that look like bar codes that link people to a website when they scan them with their smartphone cameras.

Including a QR code in a thank-you mailing or email is an innovative way to send donors to a web page or video. It also provides tech-savvy donors an easy way to follow a link, and doesn't require anything but the space in the letter.

Most of these ideas can be executed for free by someone with a firm grasp of computers. Some might require an investment, some specialised knowledge, or the help of a programmer, writer or consultant.

But donors are the lifeblood of your organisation, making them feel appreciated is a good way to show gratitude and keep them donating.

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