Compelling Appeals and Meaningful Thank You Notes

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Objectives

• Unpack what drives “compelling” and “meaningful”
• Identify best practices and examples
• Apply, in discussion
The Scariest Thing Ever...
Direct Mail Campaign Effectiveness – Success Factors

- Creative: 20%
- Mailing List: 40%
- Offer or Incentive: 40%
A Great Offer...
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Give £ 100 and be one of 30 Leeds graduates to offer a scholarship
What Is a Great Offer?

A great fundraising offer puts your entire appeal across succinctly and memorably, and shows the donor a clear benefit to them from giving.

Until you have defined your offer, you can’t devise the rest of your creative.

And a great offer is rooted in....
Donor Needs
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- **Body Needs**: food, shelter, warmth, sleep, etc.
- **Security Needs**: protection, security, order, stability, etc.
- **Social Needs**: belongingness, love, family, relationships, etc.
- **Ego Needs**: achievement, status, reputation, etc.
- **Self Actualization**: personal growth and fulfilment
Help Me To Grow

• Elevate status
• Not macro marketing
• Emphasis on special treatment
• Respect and honesty
• Wanted information
• It’s about the donor, not the institution
The Nine Moral Adjectives

• Research: what motivates people to give?
• These words “describe a core sense of who people actually are, as well as a core sense of who people would ideally like to be.”

Dr. Jennifer Shang,
Professor of Philanthropic Psychology
Plymouth University,
United Kingdom

The Nine Moral Adjectives

- Fair
- Kind
- Compassionate
- Helpful
- Caring
- Friendly
- Generous
- Honest
- Hard-working
Example: Public Radio Station

• Thanking those who contributed to a public radio station for being “kind and compassionate” increased giving among female donors by 10 percent.

Example: Letter Opening

*Dear Reader,*

*You came to our hospital as a patient, in need of help. Thank you for that profound act of trust.*

*Now we come to you, humbly, to ask for your help in turn. The cause for excellent health care, here in our community, needs you. Will you consider becoming its champion...by making a gift?*

Example: Letter Closing

We cannot do great medicine without your help. So please consider Sharp Chula Vista in your decisions about charitable giving.

I know there are many good charities that will seek your help. Please know how honored we are when you choose to make a gift to Sharp HealthCare Foundation.

The Nine Moral Adjectives – A Caveat

“Randomly injecting these words into the same communication that donors would not otherwise read anyway does not help anybody. It is about allowing the donors the opportunity to reflect on who they think they are”

– Dr. Jennifer Shang

Thank You Letters

• A strong “thank you letter” allows just that opportunity
• Guidelines:
  • Timely
  • Human touch
  • Demonstrate impact
Thank You Letters: Timely

“It’s extremely, extremely, extremely important for nonprofits to thank people properly. It’s done immediately, the first opportunity they get to thank people.“ – Dr. Shang

Thank a new donor within 48 hours – Tom Ahern

Thank You Letters: Human Touch

• Control: Thank you note signed by Executive Director Michael Leventhal, with a profile of a blind person who has been helped by a service dog.

• Test: Handwritten outer envelope, and personalized handwritten thank you note (via Thankster); return address with two names (beneficiary, and guide dog); send one month before solicitation.

• Results:
  • Donor retention has increased more than 8 percent over three years
  • 440 one-time donors gave again after receiving one of the notes
  • Revenue from repeat donors jumped $657,398 in one year

Thank You Letters: Demonstrate Impact

“Make sure that with first-time donors they are really taking a donor on a journey that this person will travel with the nonprofit to achieve some social goal. Thanking needs to serve the purpose of holding the donor’s hand on this exciting journey.”

- Dr. Shang

Example: “Thank A Donor Day” (video)
Case Study: University of Leeds

Background

• 8th Largest University in UK, 31 K students, founded 1903
• Russell Group member; Top 100 World University
• Only £156 K of £2 M raised from 2004 – 2011 came from Direct Mail
• DM below breakeven; appeals raised £30 K but cost £80 K to target 80,000 – 100,000 alumni
• Response rates less than 0.4%

Source: CASE Currents, “Direct to the Heart,” by Adrian Salmon, Jan/Feb 2015
Case Study: University of Leeds

Strategies:
- Target alumni 50+ years old
- Build relevance: segment and apply emotional appeals based upon nostalgia
- Use multi-channel approach
- Focused DM offer on scholarship support

Source: CASE Currents, “Direct to the Heart,” by Adrian Salmon, Jan/Feb 2015
Case Study: University of Leeds

Appeals

• Expanded DM from greeting card with decade-related photo, to “scrapbook” that showed alumni a fuller glimpse of former lives
• Reverse side of scrapbook showed current university and explained need for alumni support
• Alumni received email informing letter was on the way
• Donation form included URL of dedicated landing page

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Incorporating the “thank you”

• Two-page letter from Vice Chancellor offered alumni a pin as a thank you gift
• Copy was taken almost verbatim from a thank you letter a student wrote to anonymous donor
• Alumni referred to thank you note in several responses, some including gift cards. Example:
  • “Every time I hear about present-day students and their financial problems, I am grateful that things were so different when I was at Leeds from 1948-51. I’m only sorry I can’t donate more. I was charmed by Amy Broadbent’s letter.”

Source: CASE Currents, “Direct to the Heart,” by Adrian Salmon, Jan/Feb 2015
Case Study: University of Leeds

To thank you for your gift, we would be delighted to send this further little reminder of your time at the University of Leeds.

Source: CASE Currents, “Direct to the Heart,” by Adrian Salmon, Jan/Feb 2015
Case Study: University of Leeds

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Case Study: University of Leeds

Results

• Appeal raised £188 K – 6 x the previous best
• Response rate of 1.7% - 4 x previous average
• One Australian donor gave AU$5 K and set up a trust to give AU$25 K / year in perpetuity
• Raised £64 K in online giving in a single year – matching the total online giving of previous four years

Key takeaways

• Targeted appeal to current donors and alumni over 50
• Focused appeal – on scholarships
• Leveraged multichannel approach

Source: CASE Currents, “Direct to the Heart,” by Adrian Salmon, Jan/Feb 2015
Case Study: University of Iowa “Phil Day”
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Photos: University of Iowa Foundation
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Photos: University of Iowa Foundation
Concluding thoughts

• “Compelling” and “meaningful” start with the donor, not the university

• Philanthropy connects the donor and the university by fulfilling high-level donor needs
  • Maslow’s hierarchy of needs
  • Nine moral adjectives

• Compelling and meaningful appeals and thank you letters start with the writing, but don’t end there
  • Multichannel approach
  • Student-focused campus events
Thank You!

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