

Donor Dynamics™

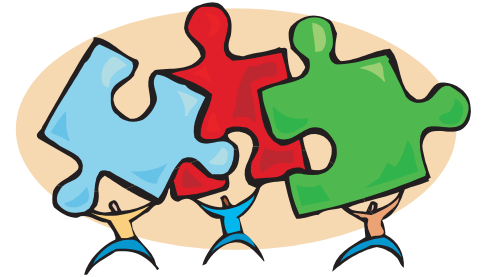
Selected article

Putting the Pieces Together

Liz Brown
Vice President, Creative Services

With all the tools at your disposal – from direct mail to e-mail, phone campaigns to blogs – how do you develop an integrated fundraising strategy that works for YOUR organization?

The professional fundraiser's toolbox is full to overflowing these days. With options that run the gamut from traditional direct mail to highly personalized online appeals, how do you put together the strategy that's right for your organization? The answer's got nothing to do with the latest trends, and it probably doesn't involve choosing one method exclusively over another. It's really all about common sense, basic fundraising knowledge, and trying out different combinations of methods until you find the mix that works best for you. Here are some things to consider as you develop a strategy:



•**Who are we?** Understanding your own organization is essential to determining the best ways to communicate with current and potential donors. Fundraising is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, so an e-mail campaign that works miracles for an advocacy group or a political campaign may be exactly the **WRONG** approach for a hospital or university. Think about the best way to tell your story and carry your message, then look for the most practical and affordable executions.

•**Who are my donors?** This question is every bit as important. Are your donors daily – or even weekly – e-mail users? Are they likely to be more comfortable hearing from you through the mail? Or will they appreciate the convenience of making an online donation? It's the cornerstone of donor-centric fundraising: "Be where the donor is."

•**What can online fundraising do for me?** As a primary campaign element or as an adjunct to a mail campaign, e-mail fundraising appeals have proven successful for many non-profits. They are comparatively inexpensive, can easily be personalized, and can reach an unlimited number of current and potential donors – if you have the e-mail addresses to work with. On the other hand, some donors may consider an e-mailed solicitation less legitimate. Worse yet,, some e-mail "spam" filters can even prevent your message from reaching the potential donor. And although e-mailing is cheap, it isn't free: costs such as address acquisition, gift processing, web hosting and technical support need to be taken into consideration.

•**What are the strengths of direct mail?** There's no arguing with the track record of direct mail fundraising. Plus, it gives you the flexibility to tell your story at length, and to use design elements and photos in ways that may not reliably reproduce in everyone's e-mail inbox. And without question, a piece of mail that you can hold in your hand feels more substantial, more "real" to some donors than an e-mail message flashing across their screen. So though direct mail is more expensive, it remains an important component of a balanced development strategy.

•**Test, Test, Test!** Fundraising campaigns, whether they are done via cyberspace or by good old-fashioned snail mail, have the advantage of being highly measurable. You can gauge success by the proportion of recipients who respond, and by the size of the gifts they give. This provides you with a great way to continually hone your strategy by testing one approach over another – not simply by pitting e-mail against the post office, but by varying your approach, your graphics or the "ask" itself. The data you get will go a long way toward aiding you in determining your best next step.

continued

•**Keep the conversation going.** Though the means of communication may vary, in this information-saturated world it is more important than ever to maintain an on-going conversation with your donors. Talk to them and let them talk to you. Learn about them and from them. It's simple market research. And if you talk to them and not at them, they feel appreciated and informed, they have a better understanding of what you do and your requests for support are a logical outgrowth of an on-going interaction.

•**Ask! Ask! Ask!** Much more important than how you ask, is that you ask. There's good, reliable data that indicates that organizations that ask more often, receive more in gifts from their donors. This is no longer the age of the annual appeal – communicating with your donor community regularly keeps them engaged and active, and that means they'll give more frequently. Many organizations are encouraging their most active members to become monthly donors – a strategy that increases donations while strengthening relationships.

•**The clearer the goal, the better the result.** Regardless of what media mix you settle on, starting out with clear fundraising goals is the best way to know if you're really succeeding. Those goals may be based on previous giving levels, actual financial needs, or whatever other factors are significant for your organization. Whatever their basis, the most important things about goals is that they are specific, measurable, realistic and aggressive. Set a high bar, but not one that's unreachable. And involve everyone – within the organization and in the donor community – in your goal. The more people working toward the same goal, the likelier you are to reach it.

Weighing the Options

When it comes to deciding on a mix of e-mail and direct mail appeals, it's important to keep the specific pro's and con's of each method in mind.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Direct Mail	Substantial Easy to brand Space and graphic flexibility High delivery rate (most pieces reach recipients) Substantial track record Easy to keep list up to date	Expensive Less convenient for recipients Takes time to prepare
E-Mail	Inexpensive Easily personalized Easy for recipients to respond and give (just provide a link to click on) Immediate – can respond to current events and happenings in your organization	Recipients expect brevity – can't take a lot of space to tell your story May be interpreted as "spam" May be undelivered or go to "spam" folder More difficult to maintain list accuracy

Direct Response Solutions

672 Crescent St.

Brockton, MA 02302

508/313-1000 · www.drsol.org

DRS builds and invigorates direct response fundraising programs. Strategies are built from performance-based analytics, engaged by imaginative branding, design, and copy writing; and fulfilled with superior data and mail processing.

Liz Brown

508/313-1007

lbrown@drsol.org

Marcia Scowcroft

508/313-1056

mscowcroft@drsol.org



Copyright 2008 | Direct Response Solutions | All Rights Reserved

All articles are protected by United States copyright and other intellectual property laws and may not be reproduced, rewritten, distributed, re-disseminated, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast, directly or indirectly, in any medium without the prior written permission of Direct Response Solutions.