

# Truth-telling

OK, I admit it. I'm sure you've noticed, anyway.

This is the part of the newsletter where an in-depth Special Report, usually four pages long, runs in each issue. Not this time, though.

The reason? We just didn't have anything good enough ready to print—and we didn't want to cobble together something on the run just to plug the hole.

I was briefly tempted to leave these four pages blank, as editors sometimes do in countries where press censorship prevails. That might've been cute—it would certainly have gotten a lot of attention—but it wouldn't have been fair to you (or, for that matter, to us). So, instead, we've used the space to cram in more stuff—good stuff we really want to share with you.

Enjoy!  
—M.W.

Your stamp helps us save you more money.

# The pound-foolish little message

**H**OW OFTEN have you seen this message on a Business Reply Envelope (BRE)? “You can help more by placing a stamp here.”

Executive directors, board members, even development directors love that little message. Trouble is, in my experience, it doesn't work. It's a case of being penny-wise, wishing to save 40, 50, or 60 cents that every returned BRE costs, and being pound-foolish, losing response percentage and average donation amount.

If you test types of reply envelopes, I bet you'll find, as I have, that a BRE with a message will net you less than any of the alternatives. Well, with one exception. No return envelope whatsoever is an alternative, but to follow that route is suicidal. A few years back, when a major Canadian mailer didn't use a return envelope for its first renewal reminder, its usual response fell by three-quarters!

The best response will almost always be from a return envelope with a live stamp on it. But—and it's a big but—this won't be cost-effective for any but your highest donors. Adding 43 cents (in Canada)—or 33 cents (in the States)—to every package is just too costly.

In the past, a BRE would always beat a plain return envelope (“put your stamp here”), but this isn't al-

ways the case today. I suggest a BRE as standard, but be sure to test a plain envelope against it. And the BRE with a message, however stated, always finishes last in response and return.

Why? Well, remember that ours is an applied, not pure, science. This is just one of those things I don't know how to explain. It just works out that way.

By all means, test it yourself. Be sure to let me know if you get different results. (I don't think you will.)

Copying something you see over and over again in direct response usually makes sense, on the assumption that “it must be working.” But it doesn't here. Forget the little message.

—Stephen Thomas

*This article is adapted and reprinted with permission from the May 22, 1995 issue of Canadian Fundraiser. Stephen Thomas is President, Stephen Thomas Associates, 2383 Queen Street East, Toronto ON M4E 1H5, phone (416) 690-8801, fax (416) 690-7256.*

Your first-class stamp will save us funds we can use on research.



# Direct mail comes out on top

**M**AJOR DONOR GIVING. Planned giving. Corporate and foundation giving. Sometimes a direct mail fundraiser can feel a bit like the poor cousin. But here's a finding sure to boost your self esteem: A survey of non-

profit executives by Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy—and recounted on the Website of *Philanthropy Journal*—ranked directmail as the most effective fundraising method. Three cheers!