



## *The Appealing Appeal*

November 2010

The holidays are upon us, and with them come a mailbox filled with fundraising appeals. No doubt one of them will be from your organization.

Whatever you call it -- the holiday appeal, the annual appeal, the annual fund -- it is essentially a means of capturing unrestricted income that helps you move into the new year stronger financially. It is also an important tool to acquire and cultivate donors, bring lapsed donors back to your fold, identify major gift prospects, and build donor loyalty. Don't make it a routine annual occurrence; make it a crucial part of your fundraising strategy.

Since your appeal mailing is looming, we decided to give you a few tips, some of which incorporate topics from previous E-News issues, to help you on the road to success.

Tip No. 1: Target your appeals to the various sectors in your audience. A recent donor might just get a thanks, a lapsed a "we miss you" note, or one who gives the same time each year, a reminder.

Tip No. 2: Tell Stories. Starting a letter off with dry statistics means the letter will make its way to the recycling bin mostly unread. Use a story that starts off with a great line and makes the reader want to find out more. As we said in the last E-News, use the stories of those who are involved in your organization. Make it personal. Pictures are another great addition to illustrate what you've accomplished in the last year.

Tip No. 3: Convey impact. While it is important to let the donor know there is an urgent need, you'll make a stronger case if you explain specifically how their donation will make a difference in a manner the donor can relate to.

Tip No. 4: Suggest a specific gift size. Don't just ask them to renew last year's gift or increase its size. Instead, tell them how much they gave last year and ask if they would consider a specific (and higher) gift amount this year. Your expenses are going up; you need to raise more money. The only way you'll get it is to ask for it!

Tip No. 7: Make it possible to donate to the appeal on your website. We realize this is probably obvious, but remember that 35-42% of online giving happens in November and December and 65% of donors will look at your site before they give. Take a look at your site and make sure that while they are visiting, they can donate then and there!

Tip No. 5: Don't worry about sending donors too many letters. The holidays give you a great deal of flexibility in your communications - and ways of grabbing your donor's attention. During the season they are also more willing to hear from you multiple times - so send away!

And in the same vein.....

Tip No. 8: Don't just send one communication, send many. Don't feel the need to tell your donors everything at once - feed them information over several letters. You can start the season with a "Thanksgiving" note, giving the donor a summary of what their support has made possible during the year. This can be followed with the actual request just before Thanksgiving. Over the course of December, send additional stewardship notes, possibly telling a success story or project impact. Or, if you are offering "gifts" with a donation, you may want to consider a mailing on the morning of Cyber Monday, when most folks are doing their online ordering. And don't forget the "last chance" reminder that should be sent on December 29. Forty to sixty percent of appeal donations are made on December 30 and 31 so get that last reminder to them before the tax year is over!

And finally, remember the holiday appeal doesn't end in December. Think about creative ways to communicate with your constituency - both those who did and did not give to the appeal - in January.

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