

Chapter 9

Direct Mail

Short words are best and old words when short are best of all.

—Sir Winston Churchill

Often described as the least personal way to raise funds, direct mail is the most personal way to raise funds after face-to-face solicitation and telephone contact. Direct mail fundraising—the mailing of appeal letters to individuals for financial support—differs from other forms of fundraising from individuals in that you are soliciting large numbers of people for reasonably small donations—usually less than \$100. Mailings can range from a few handwritten pleas sent out to friends, to a word-processed or personalized form letter sent to a few dozen or hundred



supporters, to a highly designed, multifaceted printed packet mailed to thousands or hundreds of thousands of people.

Although its success is largely based on getting out a high enough volume of letters to the right people that even a small response rate still generates donors and cash, direct mail is also one of the few fundraising strategies that allows you to get your message into the hands—literally—of anyone for whom you have an address. Unlike interviews or news reports, you control the message; and at a fraction of the cost of advertising, direct mail remains a staple in the fundraiser's toolkit.

Large international and national nonprofit organizations such as Amnesty International, Oxfam, Greenpeace, Save the Children, CARE, Smithsonian Institution, National Audubon Society, National Organization for Women, and Planned Parenthood have utilized direct mail for a long time. Since the early 1980s, local nonprofits of all sizes have been systematically using direct mail to seek out contributors as well.

Depending on the initial investment of funds to cover your start-up direct mail costs (such as printing, postage, and purchase of lists of potential donors), you may realize anywhere from several hundred to tens of thousands of dollars from a direct mail effort.

A cautionary note: direct mail is really an investment in your financial future. The first-year costs of establishing a direct mail program may exceed the actual dollars that you will raise. However, carefully planned direct mail efforts in subsequent years will produce greater profits and thus justify the initial investment.

What Are the Advantages of Raising Money by Direct Mail?

1. *It's effective.* Direct mail is the most effective way to get your message across to new people with something they can hold in their hands and read at their leisure. E-mail is the only other means of sending prospects a "letter" that arrives at their home, where it can be read in private. Although many people claim to hate direct mail, most do respond to mailings some of the time, and in many surveys, 71 percent of people polled say their favorite part of their day is opening their mail.
2. *It's efficient.* Direct mail is an efficient use of your organization's time and money because successful mail appeals bring in new supporters as well as identify prospective larger donors. People who contribute \$100 or more might well respond to other forms of solicitation. If someone responds to your organization's first mail solicitation by sending a check, that person is likely to contribute again.
3. *It produces measurable results.* You can count the number of letters mailed out and the exact costs of a particular appeal, and also determine the number of responses, the total dollars received, and the names and addresses of the contributors. As a result, you can measure whether your direct mail efforts have been profitable.
4. *It generates a donor profile.* For organizations that purchase mailing lists, direct mail solicitations can build the profile of a "typical" donor. By measuring and

analyzing responses from lists with different characteristics, an organization can identify the traits shared by those who contribute.

5. *It educates others.* Direct mail can educate new and old constituents. Newcomers—your prospects—might read just the message on the outside of your envelope, or they may scan the contents within. Even if people don't respond immediately with a contribution, they may become more sensitive to your issue. In the same sense, your existing constituents can become better informed about issues of mutual concern and be moved to give again and/or to give more, and can be enlisted for other types of activities, such as advocacy work and volunteering.

What Are the Disadvantages of Raising Money by Direct Mail?

1. *It requires an investment.* With direct mail you have to spend money to make money. Approaching individuals for contributions via mail for the first time is a potentially costly process. Choosing unlikely lists of contributors initially will cost you money that you may not recoup until a second or third mailing. A response of between 0.5 and 1 percent (fifty to one hundred people from a mailing of ten thousand) is considered good for first-time mailings to people who haven't given before.
2. *It's expensive.* Although cheap on a per-unit basis, significant direct mail campaigns can be expensive because of the volume required to make them worthwhile. Finding those vital names and addresses requires time and, more important, money. Direct costs are incurred through printing, postage, and, perhaps, the rental of prospective donor lists. Indirect costs include the time it takes your salaried staff to prepare and coordinate the mailings and, possibly, to organize volunteers to stuff your appeal envelopes.
3. *It's risky.* You can estimate only roughly how much money you might net, based on your previous experiences. If you're approaching individuals for the first time, you are even more in the dark about their potential.

More than any other fundraising strategy, direct mail demonstrates the importance of thinking in terms of an overall plan. For example, once you attract donors by mail, if you want to relate to them only by mail, you will raise far less money than if you are willing to meet some of them in person, invite them to events, and begin to build a relationship. A basic premise of direct mail is that if you are not willing to get into fundraising all the way, don't get into it at all. Direct mail in and of itself is too expensive and risky, but when combined with other strategies and seen as a means to build relationships, it is a wonderful strategy.

Understanding Key Direct Mail Concepts

Response Rate and Donor Profile

The number of letters mailed relative to the number of contributions received is called the response rate. For example, if you mail an appeal to a purchased list of one thousand names and receive ten contributions, you have achieved a response rate of 1 percent—the typical rate for a quality mailing to a purchased list. The response rate is the most important variable in direct mail fundraising; it tells you how well a list of prospective givers is working. By comparing the response rates of lists of people with different traits, an organization can, over time, build a profile of the type of people most likely to respond to mail appeals from your group.

Response Cost

In determining the effectiveness of a mailing, it is important to know how much it cost to generate each response. This cost is determined by dividing the total cost of the mailing by the number of positive responses received. If mailing one thousand letters costs \$500 and generates 10 responses, the cost per response is \$50 ($\$500/10$). If each donor contributed \$50, the total received is \$500 ($10 \times \50); the organization will have created 10 new donors at zero cost and zero profit. If each donor contributes \$35, which is more likely, then the organization has created 10 new donors at a cost of \$150 ($\$50 \text{ cost per donor minus } \$35 \text{ income} = \$15 \text{ net cost per donor} \times 10 \text{ donors} = \150).

Direct Mail as an Investment

While spending \$500 on a mailing that nets \$0 (or even loses \$150, as in the case where each of the 10 donors gave \$35) may seem to be a failure, it is in reality a successful investment in an organization's future. Why? Because the organization now has 10 new people to ask for extra gifts, to invite to special events, and to become renewable donors. In addition, some of those new donors may eventually give large gifts and become more involved in the organization.

Let's contrast this with another example: suppose that the mailing produced not 10 responses, but only 3—a response rate of 0.3 percent instead of 1 percent—but one of those gifts was \$1,000. If you look at the total raised, the second appeal would appear to be the more successful one. But while it is wonderful to have found a \$1,000 donor using a mail appeal, the second appeal must be termed a failure because the organization's donor base was increased by only 3 and not 10; and because the lower response rate failed to help build the donor profile that is so critical to the success of direct mail fundraising.

Worksheet

Estimating the Potential Income of First-Time Prospect Mail Appeals

1. Set a range of gifts for the solicitations. Estimate roughly the average dollar response that mailings to these individuals have netted for other organizations. You can sometimes obtain this data by asking the organization whose list you are utilizing. Look at past direct mail appeals of that organization and see what the range of gifts requested is. The lowest category often represents the gift the group expects to receive most often. For example, if an organization is asking for contributions in the range of:

____ \$25 ____ \$50 ____ \$100 \$____ (other)

then \$25 represents the gift received most often.

Your Anticipated Average Gift = \$ ____.

2. Now, set the top possible gift, which is frequently \$100. The "Other" category is for those who wish to give less than \$25, more than \$100, or some unlisted amount in between.

Your Top Average Anticipated Gift = \$100.

3. Fill in the rest of your range of gift sizes. Usually you give your potential supporters four to five possible options, including "Other" as the last option listed.

a. \$ ____

b. \$ ____

c. \$ ____

d. \$ ____

e. \$ ____

f. Other: ____

4. Using the accepted reference of 0.5 to 1 percent return on initial mailings, calculate the potential range of income. For example, if you mail out 10,000 pieces asking for \$25 as the lowest gift,

0.5 percent x 10,000 = 50 people

50 people x \$25 = \$1,250

1 percent x 10,000 = 100 people

100 people x \$25 = \$2,500

Your gross potential range of income for this mailing is \$1,250 to \$2,500.

Comparing Projected Income Against Projected Expenses

Total Expenses	-	\$ ____
Minus Potential Range of Income:		\$ ____ to \$ ____
Net:		\$ ____ to \$ ____

If your income exceeds your expenses, your direct mail effort is likely to be profitable.

If your income equals your expenses, you have not wasted your time, for you have acquired up to one hundred potential new donors who can be approached a second and a third time for support.

If your income is substantially or alarmingly less than your expenses, you need to find a less expensive way to reach those ten thousand prospects. You might cut your production costs by seeking out donated printing or artwork, use volunteer labor, or swap prospect lists rather than buy them. You might also start your gift table at a higher level to raise your anticipated income

Deciding Whether To Use Direct Mail Solicitation for Your Organization

Practically every kind and size of nonprofit organization can use direct mail. Almost all nonprofits use the mail to communicate with stakeholders, including donors, anyway. However, the potential to net contributions varies considerably depending upon a number of factors, such as start-up funds to cover initial costs, the appeal of your issues to individuals, and the persuasiveness of your case.

It is not easy to determine whether direct mail solicitations will prove worth your effort in time and money, but let's examine some of the considerations involved.

1. *Cost.* Every group can afford a low-cost direct mail effort, as described below. Of course, if you have an existing list of supporters to whom you are already mailing newsletters or literature, the cost of adding an appeal for funds to any of these mailings would be minimal. You certainly can and should be asking your existing contacts or readers for money. If, on the other hand, that list is relatively small and does not really encompass your universe of potentially interested individuals, it is really not your best source of income. It is obviously more expensive to approach "untested" groups of individuals for contributions, since you have no prior first-hand experience with these prospects. If you are approaching totally new prospects and/or will have to cover all the costs of a pilot mailing, you will need to gauge in advance your relative costs versus your potential income. The worksheet below can serve as a guide for this computation.
2. *Availability of prospects.* Does your organization already have mailing lists of supporters that might be used for direct mail purposes? Do you collect names and addresses of people who attend your special events or who call or write your group for information or request your newsletter? Have you a list, too, of individuals to whom you may have provided services?

Any of these lists can be used for direct mail purposes. In fact, these lists contribute to what is known in direct mail circles as an organization's "house list." A house list is made up of individuals who have some previously established relationship with your organization; the strongest element of a house list is people who have

given money before. Generally speaking, two-thirds of donors who have given before will, if asked, renew their support over the course of a year. People on your house list who are not donors but have some other kind of relationship to your group—vendors, volunteers, alumni, and so on—should be asked to give at least once a year. An organization can generally convert at least 25 percent of its house list into donors. Of course, there is no guarantee that you will receive X number of positive responses from such a mailing; a list of that sort, however, does say you've got some names of people who have already expressed an interest in your work, and they are your most likely supporters.

If you have no lists of your own, do you have access to the mailing lists of similar organizations? People who are attracted to such organizations might also respond affirmatively to yours. Simply contact these organizations directly and ask if you can do a mailing on their list.

You may find that some organizations are unwilling to give you their list for a mailing. Others may make their lists available only for a fee or in exchange for your own list. If you are approaching a national organization but your work has only local appeal, you will want to request only the names of people who live nearby. You can also rent mailing lists of potential sympathizers from direct mail list brokers (check for listings in your local telephone directory). And don't forget how to be a smart shopper; call other nonprofits that have used a specific list broker and find out what their experiences were.

3. *Precedents.* Are there other organizations similar to your own that have been successful in raising money through direct mail appeals? If so, they have already determined for you that direct mail can be effective in eliciting contributions from potential supporters.

If you have responded affirmatively to any of the above items, you certainly should consider direct mail as part of your overall fundraising effort. Check the summary worksheet at the end of the chapter.

How To Organize a Direct Mail Effort?

Direct mail should not be a single event but rather a sustained effort throughout the year to present your organization to potential supporters on a regular basis. In many cases, the more times you mail out to a list of supporters (particularly your house list), the more money you will ultimately raise. Some well-established organizations successfully mail once a month to their regular contributors, and others may mail two or three times each year with equal success. There is no fixed number of times an organization "should" mail, but don't be afraid to mail more than once a year.

Direct mail can fit very nicely into your overall fundraising program, your advocacy work, and your public education efforts. For example, the donors you acquire through direct mail ("prospecting") become possible candidates for major contributions, or participants in special

events, or volunteers, or lobbyists, or consumers of any products that you might market (such as calendars, gift cards, or posters). The following steps outline the procedures for organizing a direct mail campaign.

Step 1. Create Your List, Identify Prospective Supporters

Refer back to the concentric circles exercise in Chapter 7. Select the people with whom you have already established some contact through the mail as candidates for your first mail appeal. Of course, include anyone who has already given you unsolicited contributions of any size. If the list of those individuals is modest in size (fewer than five hundred names), you might consider augmenting it with other names. Even if your initial list is a good size, you may still consider getting additional names and undertaking an expanded mailing.

Step 2. Augment Your Initial Mailing List

You can expand your initial list in a number of ways.

1. Swap your current list with groups that have similar constituencies. Exchanging names and addresses with another organization expands your potential list without incurring any costs. Of course, some groups may be protective of their mailing lists and refuse to exchange or even sell their lists.
2. Compile a list of the friends, relatives, colleagues, co-workers, business associates, vendors and neighbors. If each of your principal supporters gives you ten new names and addresses, you have increased the size of your list tenfold.
3. Beg or borrow lists from organizations. Convince them of the value of your work and ask for a one-time loan of their list.
4. Rent existing lists of donors from groups with similar constituencies. The average contributors list available for rental ranges in price from \$45 to \$150 per thousand names, with a usual minimum rental of two thousand names. Sometimes you can rent directly from the organization, but more likely you will have to rent from a professional list broker. Once you know to whom you are mailing, you can then determine what you are mailing.
5. Make use of free publicity outlets in your community, such as notices in local newsletters, public service announcements on radio, Web sites, and other ways to spread the word about your work and to encourage inquiries. Once you get the name and address of an interested individual, you have a candidate for your direct mail efforts. Your initial investment in labor may consist of only a press release mailing to local media.

Step 3. Develop the Mailing Piece or Package

Direct mail packages traditionally include the following:

- Outside envelope which can include a "teaser" (a slogan or quotation to compel people to open the envelope)

- Letter, which can range from one to six pages (most frequently one or two 8½-by-11-inch sheet printed on both sides)
- Reply device (a card restating the request for money), which fits into the reply envelope
- Return envelope, with or without a postage imprint

Mailings, however, can also consist of a self-mailer—a flyer with a coupon or even a postcard, depending on the circumstances and funds available. You can also include other items in a mailing, such as a photograph, a newsletter, a cover note from your president or a local celebrity, or a calendar of events.

Within certain postal guidelines, you can mail anything you want. However, it's best to limit your enclosures to items pertaining to the request for a contribution. Concentrate on your written copy for the letter, envelope, reply device, and, possibly, the return envelope. Also, be sure to pay attention to the artwork, color, typeface, and overall design. The presentation of your message does influence your chances of success.

Step 4. Write Copy for the Mailing

Through your copy you need to establish in the most definitive terms the reason(s) recipients should support your work. You might present only one reason. Stress why your cause or program is unique. Describe your mission and how the money will be used without being too wordy. Highlight key points. Make your letter easy to read. If possible, build a story around your central idea, or recount the history of your issue or cause. Set a tone for your writing. It can be whimsical, dramatic, serious, emotional, or otherwise, but whatever tone you choose has to be conveyed consistently throughout the mailing package.

Pay close attention to the concept of segmentation. For instance, the letter mailed to cold prospects from a purchased list should not be the same as the one sent to current donors. Likewise, different letters should be sent to donors making smaller donations and those making larger ones. Be careful not to include top donors in your direct mail solicitation; they may be offended that you are treating them like everyone else. Send them the solicitation package, and handwrite across the top, "I thought you'd like to see what our mail solicitation looks like." Do the same with members of the board and advisory committee, and other individuals who play an important part in the life of your organization.

Computer technology has made it easier than ever to keep good records and make mailings as personal as possible. It's wonderful to be able to thank a donor for his past gift(s) and state the amount of the gift, when the gift was made, and, if appropriate, the purpose. Describing in the letter what that person's contribution, together with the gifts of others, has made possible can make the donor feel that he or she has made a difference regardless of the size of the gift.

Here are some openings for good direct mail appeals, followed by brief comments on why they work:

From the Christian Appalachian Project, Lancaster, Kentucky, a 50-year-old organization that provides a wide variety of self-help programs in central Appalachia, is this opening to a letter to someone who has not given before:

Dear Friend,

Did you ever feel that life had placed a mountain in front of you that was too steep to climb?

Comment: A one-sentence opening paragraph is easy to read. Furthermore, the question posed is one that almost any person would answer, and piques the reader's curiosity to find out what mountain is being referred to. This kind of opening is designed to draw people into the letter.

From the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), Los Angeles, California, which challenges homophobic images in the media and applauds positive representations of gay and lesbian life:

Dear Friend,

Last fall, our Executive Director, Joan Garry, wrote to ask you to renew your GLAAD membership and to update you about our activities. Since then, we haven't heard from you, but as Co-Chairs of the Board of Directors, we hope that you will take this opportunity to renew your financial commitment to GLAAD by returning the coupon at the bottom of this page along with your contribution.

Comment: Addressed to an insider, the letter simply states what GLAAD thinks has recently happened. It gives the impression that the lapsed member is so important that now the board chairs are taking the time to write. Informing people of their importance to your organization and the importance of their gift is a key element in successful direct mail fundraising.

From the Siskiyou Project in Cave Junction, Oregon, which seeks to protect wilderness from exploitation and to educate people on the critical importance of the region they work in, is this letter to a current member:

Dear Friend,

It's official. A proposed gold mine on the banks of the Chetco River in the heart of the rugged Kalmiopsis Wilderness will never happen, and 2,000 acres of additional mining claims in the Wilderness will be terminated!

Comment: This is a short, easy-to-read paragraph celebrating a victory. The member can feel good that his or her donation helped save this wilderness, and can be confident that future donations will be as effective.

The copy should always offer something to the reader, even if that something is intangible, such as an offer to protect his or her constitutional rights with the money that's contributed. The donor might also derive some sense of protection or well-being from the gift, as well as a feeling of satisfaction in participating in a cause. Membership in an arts organization, for example, might provide both social cachet and new contacts. Material rewards might include a newsletter, a schedule of events, a magazine, or even "membership" with or without specific benefits. In any case, the reader should be aware that there is something to be gained in exchange for a contribution.

All the components of the mailing piece should mention one of the offers. For example, the reply card can start off with a statement like, "Dear Ira, You can count on me to help the American Civil Liberties Union resist this historic swing against individual liberties." (Note the fact that the reply is personalized—"Dear Ira"—and uses the pronoun "you.")

It is usually recommended that the minimum gift amount be mentioned somewhere in the letter to encourage at least that level of gift. In addition, your reply card should list four or five categories of giving levels, including "other." You can set an overall financial goal in the letter itself; for example, "We need to raise an additional \$2,500 to open the doors of our second shelter. If 100 readers of this appeal each give us \$25, we will meet our goal."

You want to at least cover the costs of the mailing itself so that you don't lose money. You hope to net more. Generally, people who give will contribute the amount you have requested. Also, identifying levels of giving with appropriate names, such as patron or benefactor for your highest category, helps stimulate higher giving. Listing categories also encourages donors to aspire to higher levels of giving in the future.

It can be very effective to tell the reader exactly what a certain amount makes possible; for instance, \$25 feeds a hungry infant for a month. The more a donor can visualize the connection between writing a check and helping someone, the more likely that that person will write a check; or, if the recipient is already a supporter, that he or she will increase the size of their gift. Regarding this last scenario: there is nothing wrong with asking for more, but be sure to justify your request.

Finally, your copy must inform the reader how to mail in a contribution; for example, "Use the enclosed reply card and envelope to let me hear from you today."

No matter how good the letter is, the recipient must first be enticed to open the envelope. A "teaser" on the envelope will encourage a prospective donor to read on. The Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, for example, included a photograph in its package. On the envelope was a bright yellow sticker that said "Photo Enclosed, Please Do Not Bend." In a direct mail solicitation for members, the California State Parks Foundation used this teaser: "Your FREE Hiking Guide to California." Both of these methods are very effective.

Step 5. Design the Mailing

Once you have a rough copy of your appeal, you can proceed to the design stage. Some kind of artwork is always desirable, no matter how limited your budget. One approach is to use the same type style in each piece of the mailing; all the pieces in the package should support the letter, which is heavily weighted with copy. You might simply use your organization's letterhead and a uniform type style to produce a standard 8½-by-11-inch two-sided letter. Using parts of your letterhead as artwork for other pieces of the mailing helps give the package a uniform graphic look. High-quality photographs that support the copy can be a boost to a mailing. Photos of anonymous people standing in a line and smiling are not useful. On the other hand, photos of actions, of demonstrations, of children performing or reading, of wilderness that has been saved can be quite effective. Photographs are often used on the reply card or even on the outside envelope to encourage people to open the mailing. Use parts of your letterhead for the artwork of other pieces of the mailing, since you do want the mailing to present a uniform graphic image.

A Note about Brochures. The evidence is now very clear that brochures do not help appeals and may in fact lower the rate of response. Brochures are for distributing at forums, for giving to potential major donors before soliciting them, for sending to friends with a personal note, and so on.

Step 6. Arrange Printing and Mailing

Before deciding how many pieces to include in your mailing—letter, return envelope, reply card, photos and other possible enclosures, and the outside envelope (the “carrier”)—and their respective sizes, check postal regulations about maximum and minimum size and weight for bulk and first-class mailings. This will help you decide the size and total number of your own enclosures. The most common approach is to use a No. 10-sized envelope. Next, investigate local offset printing concerns. Obtain at least three bids before you select a company. Make sure that your three contacts are bidding on the basis of the same specifications and that they give you a detailed bid, including a paper sample. If a printer is a member of your board or your family, your printing might be donated. (Unless you have a really strong personal relationship with a printer, this is unlikely.) Ascertain whether the price of the printing includes delivery. Be sure that the bid includes such factors as perforations, if any. With more and more people expressing concern for the state of the environment, you can increase your response by printing on recycled papers; organizations working on environmental issues will wish to explore the cost of “tree-free” paper such as hemp, cotton, or kenaf. (For more information on tree-free or recycled options, contact Coop America in Washington, D.C. and ask for their publication *Woodwise*. Their phone number is 202-872-5307; their Web site is www.coopamerica.org.)

Typically, you will want your printer to fold your letters. You can plan a volunteer night to stuff your mailing and to bundle it appropriately for the post office. If you have more than five thousand outgoing pieces, you should consider engaging a letter shop to affix labels, to stuff envelopes, and to bundle for mailing. If you have a large volunteer force, you might want to do these jobs yourself.

After affixing labels on a bulk-rate mailing, you need to organize the mailing by zip code. Check the bulk-rate office of your main post office, or check with your local postmaster for details on bulk-rate mailing. There are nonprofit mailing houses and sheltered workshops that also do business by stuffing nonprofit mailings.

Step 7. Monitor Daily Returns to Your Mailing

Plan on the necessary people power to open your mail, starting two to three weeks after a third-class bulk mailing and about one week after a first-class mailing.

All contributions should be acknowledged with a personalized thank-you note within seventy-two hours, or as soon as possible. The acknowledgment builds goodwill and provides a receipt for a donation. Some organizations include a small envelope for an additional contribution. Your thank-you note can be very brief, and should specify the amount of the donation. (IRS regulations require you to acknowledge any contribution over \$250, and to specify if any goods or services were received for the gift.)

For example,

Dear Ms. Jones,

Thank you so much for your gift of \$50 to Wetlands Protection League. Your gift will go a long way to educating the public about the importance of wetlands and in protecting the habitat of the many birds that live in them. No goods or services were provided for your gift.

Sincerely, Joe Director

Tabulate the number of responses and the dollar amounts so that the response rate and the average gift can be calculated. And to help you predict cash flow in response to future mailings, note the number of responses received each day and gauge the trend of the responses.

Step 8. Assess the Results

In evaluating your results, you will be looking perhaps at weekly report summaries. You will be appraising the success or failure of the campaign in terms of total responses, total dollars earned, average gift, and dollars earned versus dollars spent.

Remember, if this was your first mailing to a list of names and your income roughly equals your expenses, you can think of yourself as fairly successful, since you have gained a number of donors who will respond again to your requests for support. If your expenses exceeded your income by a wide margin (more than 30 percent), then you may want to reassess the suitability of direct mail for you altogether, unless you can isolate the exact reasons that the mailing failed and correct them in your next attempt. A mailing might fail because of bad timing, high costs, or wrongly targeted lists.

Step 9. Schedule Future Mailings

Nearing breakeven or profitability in your first mailing should inspire you to repeat the campaign. Although you should definitely schedule another mailing on the anniversary of your initial effort, you will not want to wait a year until your next mailing. Deciding when to mail again is your next task. Many organizations mail successfully at the following times:

- September 1 to October 15: Post-Labor Day Season
- November 7 to November 21: Year-End Holiday Period (Appeals at this time of the year reach people during a season of generosity and also, for Americans itemizing their taxes, afford them a tax write-off just before the end of the year. Appeals sent after November 21 run into too much competition for attention. Unless you are a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, or some kind of agency serving a lot of people in December, your appeal will not do as well that month.)
- January 1 to February 1: Post-Holiday Appeal (People are looking for opportunities to make themselves feel better.)
- March: Spring Appeal

There are almost as many potential times for mailings as there are weeks in the year. A significant factor is your own seasonality, that is, when your own programs occur or when you experience a particular emergency. You usually plan a fixed mailing schedule of three to four mailings a year, with the opportunity for additional emergency appeals as the situation warrants. After engaging in direct mail for one year, you will be able to gauge what times of the year engender the best responses to your requests. Calculations based on average gift, response rate, and profitability (as measured by costs versus revenues) provide you with the data necessary to decide when to schedule your mailings. For example, you may reserve your mailings to new lists for the time of the year when you received the most responses previously. You can continue to mail out to your regular list at the other scheduled times.

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Summary Worksheet

for _____
(name of your organization)

Approaching Individuals for Support: Direct Mail

Building on Direct Mail Efforts to Date

1. Are you already using direct mail to raise funds?
____ yes ____ no

If yes, during which months have you been sending out appeals? Or, how many times each year, if your timing varies?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

2. What is the net income and number of donors responding for each of these appeals?

- a. \$ _____; _____ # of donors: new _____ renewing _____
- b. \$ _____; _____ # of donors: new _____ renewing _____
- c. \$ _____; _____ # of donors: new _____ renewing _____
- d. \$ _____; _____ # of donors: new _____ renewing _____
- e. \$ _____; _____ # of donors: new _____ renewing _____

3. How can you enhance the income potential for any of these appeals?
Additional Actions Needed:

- a. (e.g., Fall Appeal) _____

- b. (e.g., Holiday Appeal) _____

- c. (e.g., Spring Appeal) _____

d. _____

e. _____

4. Which of those special appeals are "proven" traditions (i.e., more people respond, more funds are raised each time, etc.)?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. Which appeals should be discarded (due to declining numbers of responses or lower receipts) or vastly overhauled?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Assessing Your Organization's Direct Mail Readiness

6. Have you identified the particular constituencies that you can approach for support by direct mail?

____ yes ____ no

They are:

a. "house list"

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

7. Does your organization already have mailing lists of these constituencies?

____ yes ____ no

8. If not, do you have access to such mailing lists (through friends and colleagues, other organizations, etc.)?

____ yes ____ no ____ untested

9. Have you determined the fixed costs versus potential revenues of a direct mail effort to gauge your potential net income?

____ yes ____ no

Projected Costs \$ _____

Projected Income \$ _____

10. Does the anticipated return in dollars and new donors justify the time expended?
___ yes ___ no

Finding Assistance and Counsel

11. Name three or more individuals who can advise you on starting or enhancing your direct mail effort.
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

Rating Your Direct Mail Potential

12. On the basis of what you have determined, how would you rank your chances of securing individuals' support through direct mail?
- ___ Very Good ___ Possible ___ Unlikely ___ Still Unknown

Additional Resources

Publications

Barnes, Roscoe. "What Daytime Soaps Can Teach Us about Writing Good Copy." *Fund Raising Management* 30 (April 2000): 36–37.

Suggests how to "hook" readers by using effective last sentences or paragraphs on each page of fundraising letters or brochures.

Bazerman, Charles. "Green Giving: Engagement, Values, Activism, and Community Life." *New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising* 22 (Winter 1998): 7–21.

Analysis of fundraising appeals, with emphasis on the efforts of the Community Environmental Council in Santa Barbara, California. Their fundraising documents stressed maintaining the community's way of life, and were very successful. With bibliographic references.

Christ, Rick. "Put Your Direct Mail to the Test." *Currents* 24 (May 1998): 20–26.

Explains the need for testing of direct mail campaigns and suggests strategies on what to test, how to test, and what to expect from testing.

Clark, Connie. "Designing Your Outer Envelope: To Tease or Not To Tease?" *FRI Monthly Portfolio* 35 (August 1996): 3–4.

Lists several proven techniques for getting a potential donor to open a fundraising letter.

De Vries, Dan. "Building a Donor Base with Personal Letters." *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* 18 (August 1999): 3–6.

Offers ideas for personalizing direct mail solicitations.

Dickey, Marilyn. "Give a Little, Get a Lot?" *Chronicle of Philanthropy* 10 (11 December 1997): 32–36.

Nonprofit groups are becoming creative when it comes to using small gifts, also known as premiums, to attract direct mail donors.

Hall, Holly. "Fund Raisers Put Their Direct-Mail Solicitations to the Test." *Chronicle of Philanthropy* 10 (8 October 1998): 34–37.

Highlights changes that several nonprofit groups made to their direct mail campaigns that improved their fundraising results.

Huntsinger, Jerry. "Beating Your Control: What Are You Going To Test This Time?" *NonProfit Times* 13 (January 1999): 26–27.

Provides a list of direct mail techniques, their advantage or disadvantage, unseen traps, and any possible percent increases or decreases in their use.

Jardine, Fred, and Don Schoenleber. "And the Winner Is." *Fund Raising Management* 29 (April 1998): 20-22.

Examines what works and fails when using premiums and incentives in fundraising.

Kauper, Laura. "Reaching Out Regionally with FSIs." *Fund Raising Management* 27 (January 1997): 14-17.

Describes how United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New Jersey successfully used freestanding inserts, which are coupon-type ads in Sunday newspapers, to foster greater awareness of their cause and build a more extensive database of prospective donors.

Klein, Kim, and Stephanie Roth. "Choosing the Right Fundraising Strategy." *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* 18 (June 1999): 3-6.

Describes several common fundraising strategies, what each one is best used for, and the expected response from each.

Lewis, Herschell Gordon. "Direct Mail Fund Raising Tactics." *Fund Raising Management* 28 (July 1997): 17-19.

Direct mail campaigning is a classical means to raise funds. The author posits that in order to use this technique effectively into the next century, fundraisers ought to abandon tired cliches and adapt their pitches to a changing world.

Lewis, Herschell Gordon. "Open Me: Does Your Envelope Plead, Scream or Demand?" *Fund Raising Management* 25 (January 1995): 17-19.

Recommends fundraisers test their envelope treatments to be sure they are not inadvertently alienating prospects instead of attracting them.

Munoz, Pat, and Amy O'Connor. "Testing and Tracking Your Results." *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* 17 (June 1998): 5-8.

Discusses direct mail testing of lists and elements of a direct mail package. Also provides a discussion on how to track and analyze test results.

NonProfit Times Direct Marketing Edition (ISSN 0896-5048) is published six times a year by NPT Information Services, Inc. 240 Cedar Knolls Road, Suite 318, Cedar Knolls, NJ 07927. To subscribe call 973-734-1700 or e mail: circmngr@nptimes.com

Rieck, Dean. "Powerful Fund-Raising Letters from A to Z: Part One of Three." *Fund Raising Management* 29 (April 1998): 25-28.

Rieck, Dean. "Powerful Fund-Raising Letters from A to Z: Part Two of Three." *Fund Raising Management* 29 (May 1998): 30-33.

Rieck, Dean. "Powerful Fund-Raising Letters from A to Z: Part Three of Three." *Fund Raising Management* 29 (June 1998): 28-31.

Rieck, Dean. "Using an Emotional Appeal To Boost Your Direct Mail Response." *Fund Raising Management* 30 (May 2000): 24-25.

Ritzenhein, Donald N. "Content Analysis of Fundraising Letters." *New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising* 22 (Winter 1998): 23-36.

The author analyzed 21 examples of direct mail letters from the book *Direct Mail Fundraising: Letters that Work* (Plenum, 1988) by Torre and Bendixen. Letters were coded according to four categories: reason for the appeal, proof offered of the need, basis of proof (emotional or logical), and suggested reward to the donor. Within each category, percentages of variations were tabulated and are presented here—with conclusions about what fundraisers think persuades donors. With bibliographic references.

Robinson, Andy, and Amy O'Connor. "The Direct Mail Debate." *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* 17 (December 1998): 8-13.

Presents two viewpoints on the use of direct mail as a mechanism for acquiring new members by small grassroots organizations. The first author, Andy Robinson, presents "The case against direct mail for small grassroots groups"; while author Amy O'Connor weighs in with "There's still life in direct mail." Includes suggestions by Mr. Robinson on alternatives to direct mail.

Sinclair, Townes & Company. *Writing for Dollars*. Atlanta, GA: Sinclair, Townes & Company, 1999. 77 looseleaf pages.

Advice about writing for direct solicitation and for foundation grants. Includes numerous samples.

Squires, Conrad. "Snatching Victory from the Jaws of Defeat." *Fund Raising Management* 27 (January 1997): 32-33.

Gives suggestions for improving the success rate of a direct mail campaign.

Torre, Robert L., and Mary Anne Bendixen. *Direct Mail Fund Raising: Letters that Work*. New York: Plenum, 1988. xi, 314 p.

Comprehensive but concise text to aid fundraisers create a direct mail program or improve an existing one. Briefly discusses effective direct mail strategies, writing principles that increase contributions, and criteria needed to develop the best fundraising letter possible. Examines 100 successful direct mail appeals from across the United States, chosen because they provide a good match between effective copy and the intended audience, make it easy for prospects to do whatever it is the mailing asks them to do, clearly define a specific reason and objective for the mailing, and avoid incorrect assumptions and condescension. The appeals are divided into sections for hospitals, health care, and education/social services. Appendixes include selected packages and a calendar of events listing all holidays as well as designated periods of special recognition.

Warwick, Mal, Deborah Block, Stephen Hitchcock, Ivan Levinson, and Joseph H. White, Jr. *999 Tips, Trends and Guidelines for Successful Direct Mail and Telephone Fundraising*. Berkeley, CA: Strathmoor Press, 1993. 316 p.

Watt, Charles V. "Acknowledging the Gift: The Most Important Aspect of Fund Raising." *Fund Raising Management*, 30 (February 2000): 36, 40-42.

Detailed discussion of the process of sending acknowledgments for contributions received by nonprofit organizations.

Weinstein, Stanley. *The Complete Guide to Fund-Raising Management*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999. xii, 307 p.

A comprehensive treatment of fundraising principles and practices, including information about creating case statements, record-keeping, prospect research, cultivating donors, major gifts, grants, direct mail, telemarketing, special events, planned giving, and capital campaigns. Covers management and human resources issues, planning, budgeting, ethics, and evaluation of a fundraising program. Includes disk. Indexed.

Internet Resources

Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers (www.nonprofitmailers.org)

Maintained by the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers in Washington, D.C., a coalition of nonprofit organizations, this Web site provides information on nonprofit postal rates and regulations as well as updates on postal issues that are pending before Congress and the Postal Rate Commission.

Direct Mail Response Rate Calculator

(www.moore.com/solutions/integratedsvcs/dirmailcalc.html)

Developed by Moore Corporation Limited, a communications company in Lincolnshire, Illinois, this Web site includes forms that helps fundraisers determine how large a test mailing is necessary to test a new direct mail fundraising appeal, calculate how many recipients must make a gift for a mailing to cover its costs, and test whether the results are statistically significant. The site also allows fundraisers to calculate how large the full-scale mailing should be to match the response rate to the test mailing, and to figure out how large a variance to expect between the results of the test mailing and the full-scale mailing.

Internet Prospector (www.internet-prospector.org/index.html)

This Web site provides the current and back issues of the *Internet Prospector*, an on-line newsletter that offers news, advice, and links to Web sites that help fundraisers use the Internet to gather information about foundations, corporations, and individuals in the United States and abroad. To receive the monthly newsletter via e-mail, send a blank e-mail message to chlowe@uci.edu. In the subject field, type "Subscribe Internet Prospector."

Mal Warwick & Associates, Inc. (www.malwarwick.com)

Maintained by Mal Warwick & Associates, Inc., a fundraising consulting company in Berkeley, California, this site provides articles on direct mail and Internet fundraising. Topics include how to start a direct mail program, choose the right mailing lists, write effective fundraising letters, build monthly donor programs, attract visitors to a charity's Web site, and use e-mail to raise money.

The following Web sites contain information about direct mail fundraising software, as well as a wide range of other fundraising-related software and sites:

www.fundraiser-software.com/donormgt.html

www.nonprofit-info.org/npofaq/05/

www.npo.net/nponet/computer/fundacct.htm

www.coyotecom.com/tips.html