

NON-PROFIT *Know-How*

TWO FUNDRAISERS ARGUE SEVEN DIRECT-MAIL “MYTHS”

Denny Hatch’s marketing newsletter rightly insists that direct-response advertising lets you measure an appeal’s success or failure with gnat’s-eyebrow accuracy. But that does not mean that its numbers are not subject to interpretation — and argument. Look at how two respected experts, Bob Knight and Mal Warwick, agree and disagree with seven fundraising “myths.”

1. “Your list is everything.”

Knight writes that your choice of mailing lists matters less and less, compared to your message and creative punch. **Warwick** counters that his 30 years in fundraising show that lists contribute 50% of a mailing’s success, followed by the message, then by format and graphics, then by copy.

2. “The more you tell, the more you sell.”

Knight says that a two-page fundraising letter is more likely to work than a four-pager, because most existing donors and acquisition prospects are unwilling to plow through page after page of copy. **Warwick** reports that he has conducted “countless” tests of four-page versus two-page letters, and the two-pager has almost never won.

3. “Positives work better than negatives.”

Knight thinks that to impel people to give “you have to tell them at least a few not-so-positive things.” **Warwick** warns that ugly facts can dominate your message, when “donors yearn for hope.”

4. “The tighter the copy, the better the copy.”

Knight cautions, “Be too diligent about editing, and your copy will be bled of its emotion and its power.” **Warwick** almost agrees. He insists that “Repetition is essential in all direct marketing.”

5. “Four-color packages don’t work in fundraising.”

Knight opines that mailing recipients today are less skeptical than they once were about nonprofits that send them costly color mailings, instead of using the money to help people in need. **Warwick** observes that more nonprofits are now mailing four-color packages, but that he doubts their utility in most fundraising appeals.

6. “It worked for them; it will work for us.”

Knight decries copy cats. He reminds clients that a strategy that works for other nonprofits may not work for them. **Warwick** agrees. “I have never heard anyone seriously advance this point of view in fundraising. Not in mixed company, anyway.”

7. “Don’t repeat an approach that failed for you before.”

Piffle, **Knight** sniffs. “Even though an approach might not have worked for you in the past, it could perform well in the future, because of timing or what the competition has been sending out.” **Warwick** stresses that if an approach fails dramatically, it is not wise to retest it.” Test only marginal failures again, he writes.

Are they right or wrong? And will their results work for you. Only your own testing will tell. So — test!

*“Every strikeout brings me
closer to the next home run.”*

— Babe Ruth



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