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Mal Warwick prescribes **6 ways to make fundraising mail work better**

Nationally respected California marketing expert Mal Warwick advises, "For more than three decades ... direct-mail fundraising was a cash cow for a great many nonprofits." Those past easy times, he says, today have "brought the field of direct-mail fundraising to an impasse."

Since the 1970s, Warwick estimates, costs per fundraising mailing package have tripled — from an average of 15¢ each to 45¢ each today. In the same period, returns per package have averaged about 20¢, and the cost of acquiring a new donor — negligible in the 1970s — has mushroomed to \$15. And the tab for raising \$1 has zoomed from about \$0 to \$2.20.

Fundraisers' shortsighted practices have played a major part in this disastrous trend, Warwick observes:

"We have mailed and mailed and mailed some more," ignoring donor complaints that we are mailing too much, Warwick states.

■ **Rx:** Listen to donors.

"We have insisted on upgraded gifts in every mailing, ... despite the fact that no more than about 1/3 of direct-mail donors ever upgrade their contributions."

■ **Dr. Warwick's advice:** Get real.

"We have tossed aside those pleading ... notes from donors, asking us to stop sending that newsletter that never gets read."

■ **Prescription:** Publish interesting newsletters. Or, if you can't, respect the wishes of your contributors.

All too many of us, for far too many years, have treated direct-mail donors like dirt.

— Mal Warwick

"We have cut costs on caging, cashiering, and list maintenance ... in the belief that those donors whose names and addresses are mangled don't really make much of a financial difference."

■ **Recommendation:** Sloppy mailing programs are not confidence-builders. So get your act together.

"We have taught donors to expect free goodies in exchange for their 'gifts.'"

■ **Rx:** Cut back on offering costly bribes.

We have ignored small donors.

■ **Health Hint:** Major bequests, averaging \$35,000 a pop, "typically come from donors whose lifetime giving was modest indeed, no more than \$10 or \$20 at a time," Warwick notes.

■ He stresses "the central importance of acknowledging donors' gifts and keeping them informed about how we've used their money."

Warwick concludes that "fundraisers who are at the forefront of direct-mail practice today have come to understand that the best fundraising, and the strongest long-term results, are based on a donor-centered approach."

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