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5 steps to writing successful fundraising mailers

Mal Warwick, the widely — and deservedly — esteemed Berkeley, California, fundraiser, suggests that productive fundraising mailers usually involve five steps:

■ **Written concept statement**

Writing a concept statement before you start to work will help you determine the potential donor to whom you are appealing, how much money to ask, involvement devices, even who will sign your letter.

Example:

“Two of the trustees of this organization — whose work you have supported so generously in the past — have promised to match up to \$10,000 of the donations resulting from this appeal by January 15. Thus your \$50 contribution will do \$100 of good in providing warm, safe shelter for 30 homeless families.”

■ **Planned mailer contents**

Jot down the dimensions, paper stock, ink colors, envelope characteristics, and all other specifications for every element of your mailing.

If you are writing to acquire new donors, you probably will need a long letter, a full listing of member benefits, a folder about your activities, and, perhaps, a premium. You most likely will find that a personalized letter is not cost-effective.

On the other hand, a shorter, personalized letter, with a personalized response device but with no folder or premium may work with a long-standing supporter.

■ **Carefully design your reply device**

A request for a gift of \$500 sets off quite a different decision process from an appeal for \$25. The more complicated the process, the more specific your reply copy should be. Ask established donors for their last gifts plus 50%, last gift plus 25%, and \$_____. Stress your double-dollar offer and deadline.

■ **Write your lead and P.S.**

Tell a human-interest story. Connect your lead to your P.S. and punch home the need a donation will help fill, your offer, and your deadline.

■ **Write your copy in short words, short sentences, and short, subheaded paragraphs**

Use underlining for emphasis, but sparingly. Keep your paragraphs to four lines or fewer. Your subheads should cite the results of a generous contribution — which motivates the reader to give. Short, Anglo-Saxon words pack more power than longer, Latin-based ones.

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