



# Make Holiday Magic with Your Direct Mail



Use these tips for the holiday season and throughout the year

By Ted Gaillard

It's the season for holiday direct mail as nonprofits target donors with their annual appeals. This is an important time of year, and most nonprofits understand the impact well-timed campaigns can have on their annual fundraising efforts. Although donors and prospective donors are often in a giving mood during this season, nonprofits still have to think of clever ways to stand out in the mailbox. Here are a few tips.

## Get Creative

First and foremost, be creative, and always try to create a relationship between your cause and the prospective donor. Share a story with them, and make it as personal as possible. Use a real person who has been positively affected by your services and can articulate why making a donation will have an impact on a larger population. During the holidays in particular, people tend to reflect on their families and other reasons why they're grateful. Perhaps this is why children and animal themed appeals tend to resonate with donors, prompting them to make

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larger contributions during this time than they normally would.

## Wrap It Up

By using oversized, highly personalized, engaging graphics and multiple colors, you'll increase the number of recipients who will open and read your mailing. Pieces should look like they're worth reading and setting aside to take action.

Consider using envelopes that promote enclosures like name stickers or gift tags. Incorporate handwritten fonts printed in various colors and placed in the margins of the mailing for a personalized look.

Also, be inventive with special giveaways. Include premiums such as advent calendars, pop-ups, and paper tree ornaments to give donors something they can use, which also serves as a reminder to

donate. Die-cut shapes that evoke the holidays — like candles, gift boxes, and trees — are especially effective to generate interest in your request and play up the holiday connection.

## Tease Them

Once you've decided on the packaging, use colorful teasers that are appropriate for the season. Envelope teasers such as "Your holiday gift is enclosed" or "You'll find your new calendar inside" are very effective in getting recipients to open mailings. Gift inserts have proven to elicit successful donation responses from recipients. Try sending pumpkin seeds around Thanksgiving or mistletoe in December.

## Timing is Everything

For holiday themed campaigns, timing is all-important. The best time to drop name sticker mailings is in September. For gift tags, gift wrap, and ornaments, the optimal time is October to early November. The cost of postage will be greater than production costs, so make sure you're mailing the best

## CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

### Hold an Ornament Auction

Put a holiday twist on the silent auction idea. Ask local artists to donate their time and talents to create ornaments. Display the pieces on a tree for a few weeks to gather silent bids, with the ornaments going to the highest bidders. For more ideas, see [www.stevensoninc.com](http://www.stevensoninc.com).

### Light a Virtual Christmas Tree

Tell people that, for a donation, they can illuminate a virtual Christmas-tree light on your Web site in memory of someone. Trinity of Hope Dog Rescue (Richmond, Ontario) used the idea as a successful fundraiser. "The blinking lights and rollovers that showed the names of loved ones was not only informative but entertaining as well," says co-founder Kryss Prichard.

### Replicate the North Pole

Transform your office (or other space) into the North Pole, and invite area children to have their pictures taken with Santa. Find volunteer photographers and Santas to donate their services. Put photos on a CD, and sell it for an additional charge so that people can e-mail the photos to friends or use them to create screen savers or Web pages.

message to the people most likely to donate. Take time to refine your distribution list.

### More Direct-Mail Magic

To delve deeper into successful direct-mail practices, check out these *Nonprofit World* articles at [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org):

- **The Key to Direct-Mail Fundraising: Market Segmentation** (Vol. 10, No. 1)
- **How to Send Less Mail and Increase Results** (Vol. 23, No. 4)
- **Fundraising for 44 Cents** (Vol. 23, No. 3)
- **55 Direct-Mail Secrets** (Vol. 25, No. 1)
- **Tips for Testing & Analysis of Acquisition Mailings** (Vol. 3, No. 4)
- **Beyond Common Sense: Proven Tactics for Direct-Mail Fundraising** (Vol. 25, No. 5)
- **How to Start a Giving Club** (Vol. 10, No. 3)
- **The Dirty Dozen: 12 Questions Nonprofit Leaders Ask about Direct-Mail Fundraising** (Vol. 19, No. 3)
- **How Big a Gift Should You Ask For?** (Vol. 17, No. 2)

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development ([www.snpo.org/li](http://www.snpo.org/li)).

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### Select the Right Partner

It's important to choose the right partner to develop your marketing program. Partner with a service provider who can assist with creative concepts and advise you on high impact formats, messaging, data management, and the most advanced technologies available.

For instance, many people are unaware that the four-color inline printing process delivers the highest quality, flexibility, efficiency, and speed. A package with a simple involvement device can be printed in one pass, providing dramatic cost savings while resulting in a necessary lift. This process allows for customization, unique fonts, eye-catching graphics at various angles, and local chapter personalization. Premiums, such as pop-ups, 3-D devices, stickers, and CD inserts can be done quickly and efficiently.

### Think Beyond the Year-End Ask

Keep in mind that these strategies can extend beyond the traditional year-end ask. Consider using them for other holidays. An Easter mailing by the Omaha Home for Boys,

for example, contained a bunny cutout and a four-color photo of a boy, along with his heart-wrenching story. Donor renewal increased 53% following the mailing.

Use the same thinking for campaigns in conjunction with patriotic holidays such as Memorial Day, Veterans' Day, and Independence Day. Campaigns using uplifting stories will generate results around these days as well.

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Creative direct-mail campaigns that are appropriately timed and contain the right message can have a great impact on your appeals not only during the holidays but throughout the year. By planning ahead and thinking of ways to integrate these tips into your direct mail campaigns on an ongoing basis, you'll connect with your donors, build affinity to your cause, and maximize contributions. ■

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*Ted Gaillard (tgaillard@vertisinc.com) is Senior Vice President, National Sales for Vertis Communications, a premier provider of targeted marketing services for nonprofit organizations. Its comprehensive services range from member recruitment, retention, education, and foundation fundraising programs to full service direct marketing.*

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