



Using Volunteers To Beat Telemarketing Rip-offs

Don't let unscrupulous telemarketers take advantage of you and your donors. Take charge of your own telemarketing campaign!

BY DIRK REMLEY

Every year professional solicitors contact charities and offer to raise funds for them. At first glance, the offer may sound tempting. But don't leap in until you've thought it through. You'll find that there are much better alternatives.

THE PROBLEM WITH PROFESSIONAL TELEMARKETERS

No laws govern the percentage telemarketers must give to nonprofits for which they raise funds. According to a recent study by the office of Ohio Attorney General Betty Montgomery, charitable organizations received, on average, only 24 cents of every dollar raised on their behalf. Only 10% of charities that used professional telemarketers received as much as half the funds raised. And 10 of the 374 charities in the study wound up *losing* money after all the "expenses" were totaled. In effect, professional telemarketers become an inefficient operating unit of the organization that hires them.¹

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According to 1994 records, the highest percent a telemarketer gave to a charity for which it raised funds was 93%, while the lowest percentage was 7%. While many telemarketing contracts don't state a specific percentage to be given to the charity, imagine your reaction if I told you that I could "help" raise some money for your organization if I could keep 75% of the total amount raised!

During a campaign, telemarketers usually tell prospects that they are calling "on behalf of XYZ Foundation." Prospects understand this to mean that the caller actually works for XYZ Foundation and that the foundation will receive 100% of the funds.

In fact, professional solicitors are *not* required to state that the charitable organization for which they are raising funds will get only a percentage of the contribution. The only time they must make this statement is if the prospect specifically asks, and this question rarely comes to the average person's mind when being solicited for charity. Consequently, non-

profits must take it upon themselves to overcome the misconceptions inherent in using professional telemarketers.

A BETTER CHOICE: USE VOLUNTEERS

For all the above reasons, you're much better off using volunteers than professionals for your telemarketing campaign. You may already have volunteers, or you may need to solicit them specifically for your campaign, as many public TV and radio stations do. Before its campaign, for example, Cleveland's PBS station WVIZ announces in its member journal, *Avenues*, that it needs volunteers for its campaign week. It also draws volunteers from its list of past and current contributors.

Other organizations use board and committee members to perform telemarketing campaigns. These committees develop a message to read over the

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CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Ask “What If?”

You can come up with your own creative fundraising ideas if you try the “what if?” exercise. Ask yourself questions such as these: “What if our organization had enough money for all our programs?” “What if we had one large donor we could count on for multi-year funding?” “What if the social cause for which our organization exists was no longer a problem?” Take a challenge you are currently facing and ask yourself some “what if?” questions about it. Explore the answers as stepping stones to real solutions.

Say an Affirmation

Every time you think a thought, you are stating an affirmation. Negative thoughts may keep you from earning money for your organization. Replace pessimistic thoughts with positive affirmations such as: “We always have enough for our organization’s needs,” “I am grateful for the abundance that my organization enjoys now,” “Our organization is proactive. We are masters of our destiny.” These and other creative ideas are explored in *How to Make Money without Waiting*, available from Donna M. Himot & Associates, 2000 No. Court, Suite 9-C, Fairfield, Iowa 52556 (515-472-5420).

Try the Streetfighter Technique

Also called neighborhood marketing or community networking, the streetfighter technique is one of the most effective, least costly fundraising strategies. Example: A bookstore owner learns that a restaurant owner is holding a mental-health fundraiser. On the day of his event, she sets up a mental-health book display in his lobby and donates 25% of her sales to his fund. Everyone wins, and the project generates good will, visibility, money, and clients.

phone, and volunteers have the materials necessary to accept a contribution. They assemble in a room for a few hours each night in a single week (covering the campaign’s period). The volunteers use an existing mailing list or membership list, making as many calls as possible during the allotted period. The orga-

nization receives 100% of the amount contributed to such efforts.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A TELEMARKETING CAMPAIGN

If your organization has a list of supporters for volunteers to call, you

can run a successful telemarketing campaign. All you need is a phone bank (10–15 phones) and a plan.

Here are the steps to take:

Pre-Campaign:

1. Choose Incentives to Offer.

Several months before your cam-

THE SEVEN MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO TELL YOUR TELEMARKETING VOLUNTEERS

1. Put a smile in your voice.
2. Always be tactful and patient, no matter how rude the prospect may be.
3. Stay in control of the conversation. Don’t ask open-ended questions that give control to the prospect.
4. Never read from the script. Use the script only as a guide.
5. Listen. Only if you hear prospects’ concerns can you give thoughtful answers.
6. Offer flexible payment options. Such flexibility will often increase the size of the donation.
7. Thank the donor like you mean it.

For more ideas on what to tell your telemarketing volunteers, see *999 Tips, Trends & Guidelines for Successful Direct Mail & Telephone Fundraising* by Mal Warwick (see “Selected References”).



paign, decide how you will motivate your telemarketing volunteers. Use as many different types of incentives as possible. A few motivational ideas:

- Emphasize your organization’s mission and how volunteers will enrich the world through their calls.
- Offer discounts or gifts related to your organization’s services. If you’re a theater group, for example, give volunteers half off the price of your tickets.
- Give gifts that others have contributed. Ask businesses and restaurants to donate coupons or gifts for you to use as rewards.² Or have board and staff members

Have board and staff members donate their skills as prizes.

donate their skills and resources as prizes. A board member who likes to cook could provide a coupon for “dinner for two at my home,” for example.

- Use a party environment to inspire your volunteers. After they make a certain number of calls, for instance, offer a pizza break.
 - Spur them on with friendly competition. Give a special prize for the first volunteer to reach a goal. Give the biggest prizes to those who raise the most money.
 - The most important thing is to create a sense of togetherness—of working as a team toward an important goal.
- 2. Make an Announcement.** A month before your campaign, announce that you need volunteers to solicit phone

TELEMARKETING FACTS & TIPS

- When you use a telephone campaign properly with selected lists, the pledge rate can be as much as 10 to 12 times that of direct mail.
- Not everyone who pledges money over the phone delivers. You can expect that up to 20% of people making pledges won’t pay them.
- Be sure volunteers get thank-you notes out promptly with a stamped return envelope. Prompt follow-up is essential if you expect to collect the money people have pledged.
- The most successful telemarketing campaigns combine advertising and direct mail appeals with telemarketing. Use market tests to discover the best combination for your organization.
- You can increase your results dramatically if you can get people of stature in your community or industry to volunteer to make your calls.
- The key to successful telemarketing is to use it as just one piece of a total fundraising strategy.

For more telemarketing and fundraising tips, see *Are You Sitting On a Gold Mine? Fundraising Self-Assessment Guide* by Jill Muehrcke (see “Selected References”).

contributions. You can make this announcement in your newsletter, in your local newspaper, or on a handy bulletin board. In your announcement, be sure to stress the rewards—both tangible and intangible—that volunteers will reap.

- 3. Write a Script.** Next, develop a solicitation statement for volunteers to use as a guide when they call. Include responses to questions, concerns, and objections that the prospect may raise.
- 4. Secure Facilities.** Arrange for a room with a bank of 10 to 15 phones. Schedule any catering needed.
- 5. Set Goals.** Establish realistic financial or membership goals for the campaign.

During Campaign:

1. Set up the Volunteer Schedule.

For example, have a group of 10 volunteers call for two hours. Then have another 10-person group take over.

2. Provide Materials and Training.

Prepare volunteers by telling them about your organization and

Stress the rewards—both tangible and intangible—that volunteers will reap.



explaining the importance of being patient and pleasant when calling. Give them the script you've prepared, and have them role-play until they feel comfortable with it. Be sure they have an up-to-date mailing list with phone numbers to call and the necessary materials to complete contributions. Arrange for refreshment breaks and treats to keep volunteers energized.

3. Supervise Volunteers. Monitor volunteers' performance and their progress toward the goals you have set.

4. Reward Volunteers. When the campaign is over, give out prizes. Thank each volunteer with a handshake and follow-up letter.

You may need to run a few telemarketing campaigns before you find the plan that works best for your organization. Once you do, why not make it an annual event? ■

Footnotes

¹See Benjamin Marrison's *Cleveland Plain Dealer* articles, "Solicitors' Cut Leaves Little Left for Charity," May 26, 1996, and "Solicitors Can Take Big Cut of Donations," January 15, 1996.

²For ways to solicit corporate donations, see Weisman and Gingold in "Selected References."

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