



Fundraising forum

Fundraising for

44¢

Here's an easy, inexpensive, and surefire fundraising tactic every nonprofit should try.

By Nick Levinson

The personal touch works on donors. One convent used it with great results, and it'll cost you 44¢ to try it.

For every donation, even when it was only one dollar, a sister at the convent sent a handwritten note of thanks.

More than that, the note described what the convent did with the gift, even a single dollar. (Even a dollar was likely part of a larger purchase; describe that. Explain what service the purchase helped you deliver. How did someone benefit?)

And the convent's note went a step further. The thank you announced what the sisters aspired to next.

When the convent was planning a new home, the sisters described it in a thank-you note to a donor. They noted that the bill for the terra cotta flooring was going to be \$40,000.

Right after they sent out that letter, a bank called them. The donor had instructed the bank to give the sisters whatever they needed, starting with the \$40,000.

The cost of a note like that is postage (37¢), an envelope (1¢), a piece of paper (1¢), and your file copy (5¢).

Finding Time

Your time, of course, is precious. If you're busy with more profitable fundraising and that's why you don't have time for personalized thanks to dollar donors, that's wonderful. And that's exactly why you should welcome volunteers.

Volunteers familiar with your organization can write these letters. You don't have to cement every comma yourself. Many volunteers are highly capable of writing well, offering their signature or yours, as you wish.

You can write the high-dollar letters yourself and delegate the low-dollar, low-risk letters. You can review

Squeeze in as much humanity as you can.

them in a stack. As each volunteer gets the hang of it, you can spot-check selections of letters, saving time while pushing the personal touch.

When donors send notes with their gifts, let the volunteers answer them. Mix the thank-you tasks with other jobs, so letter-writers stay informed and fresh.

Brevity is fine. Quick notes work well. Mail fast.

Special for Major Donors

Large donors can benefit from this system, too.

One university had a rule of sevens for their largest donors. The usual letters of praise from the chancellor and the development director were complemented with five more, so the donor soon received seven different letters.

In their case, that meant a letter from a dean, another from a professor, another from a student, and more from perhaps a service manager (such as a librarian or nurse) and a service consumer. Each wrote something personal about how that one donation had benefitted each writer.

Midsized donors can get a midsized response — say, three letters. Small organizations overwhelmed by sevens can scale down to fit and still send more than one letter.

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CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Put a New Spin on the Benefit Auction

Intiman Theatre in Seattle has created a new kind of auction called the IntiGames. Auction items are procured and auctioned off in the usual way. But after bidding on an item, the high bidder spins a wheel. The number on which the dial lands determines if the bidder pays 10, 50, 75, or 100% of the bid. For more creative takes on the auction idea, see *Benefit Auctions*, published by Pineapple Press (www.pineapple.com).

Be Alert to Restaurant Openings

New restaurants want extra publicity. You want extra gift revenue. Those are two good reasons to create a partnership. When you learn a new restaurant is coming to town (realtors, developers, and Chamber of Commerce staff make good contacts for this insider information), be the first to make contact and explore a mutually beneficial fundraiser for your organization. As you plan the event, keep the benefits to the restaurant in mind to help solidify a long-term relationship. For more creative fundraising ideas, see "Special Events Galore!," published monthly for \$79 per year by Stevenson, Inc., www.stevensoninc.com.

Make Your Mail Stand Out

Easing of postal standards now lets you create nonstandard-sized mailing pieces, providing options for your piece to stand out in a sea of direct mail. You can, for example, mail postcards, videos, CDs, DVDs, or boxes that will invite opening by the prospective donor. Consider folding various communication options into your marketing mix. Thus, if one communication performs poorly, another may boost your results. Evaluate outcomes to see which ideas work best for you. See www.drcharity.com.

Dusty Donors of Yore

Lapsed large donors might like a surprise in the mail. If their gift left a legacy (and it always does), you can write to tell them what it means today.

One school had named a concert hall after a donor. Years later, the school's chief executive sent a short note to the donor, saying he had just attended a concert in the hall named after the donor, and had enjoyed the performance.

One million dollars came in the return mail.

If They Gave Nothing

A political campaign sent a "nice to see you" letter whenever the candidate ran across someone who gave her a business card. She'd scribble some background on the card. A volunteer would convert her notes into letters, and she'd sign a pile.

A major newspaper article quoted a leading politician extolling the candidate's letters. The publicity resulted in both funds and votes for the candidate.

You don't have to cement every comma yourself.

Letter Style

Donors are never too sophisticated for the personal touch. Make the letters informal, using these tips:

- **Tighten** the writing. Snip "I want to write to you about..." and just tell them.
- **Be liberal** with "you," "I," and "we."
- Use people's names.
- **Doublecheck** spelling and grammar.
- **Tailor** your opening to your donor's needs.
- **Write** or type readably. If you type, handwrite a postscript.
- **Shorten** sentences and paragraphs. Shorten the letter. This isn't your annual report.
- **Don't** apologize if you didn't goof. Don't say "I'm sorry to take your time" when it's a perfectly fine use of their minutes.

Frankly

Not every letter will splash cash.

It'll take a bunch. That's true of direct mail as well, but the nice news is that thank-you's go to a warm list of receptive recipients. Send a bevy, and some will produce results.

If you're choosing between human thanks and computerized thanks, squeeze in as much humanity as you can. ■

Editor's References

Block, Jean, "Don't Let the Gotchas Getcha When Asking for Money," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 5.

Remley, Dirk, "Relationship Marketing: Guaranteeing the Future," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 14, No. 5.

Robinson, Andy, "Twelve Ways to Say Thank You," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 6.

These resources are available free on-line at www.snpo.org/members.

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