



## A New Look at Fundraising Letters

*Don't just write a letter. Forge a relationship with your donors.*

BY TERENCE FERNSLER

### ***How to Write Successful Fundraising Letters***

*By Mal Warwick. 251 pages. Hardcover. Available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center, 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (see Resource Center Catalog included in this issue, or call 800-424-7367).*

**M**al Warwick is a prolific writer. He writes fundraising letters for a living, and this is his fifth book. Since you've probably read his other works, you might be tempted to skip this one.

Resist the temptation. Even the ideas he has presented before read well in this book. His rules for writing fundraising letters are classic and powerful. Writers ought to refer to these guidelines constantly when working to make a good product.

The book's style bears many similarities to Warwick's fundraising letters. Short, single-thought sentences, which sometimes are not complete sentences.

Headings. A smooth flow from subject to subject.

You may find yourself reading the book the same way you would read his letters. Although there is no postscript to read first, as there are in fundraising letters, you will want to start by reading two chapters near the end of the book. These are the chapters that provide tips for overcoming writer's block (extremely useful) and lists of envelope teasers. Then, just like a fundraising letter, you skip to the lead—the introduction—and skim the subjects, going back to read those that interest you most. This format makes the book particularly user-friendly for veteran writers of fundraising letters.

Warwick begins his lesson at the very beginning, with the elements of

### **Strong Leads for Fundraising Letters**

1. Thank you . . .!
2. I'm writing you today . . .
3. You are among the first . . .
4. You may be surprised to learn . . .
5. Did you know that . . .?
6. Don't you wish . . .
7. It's no secret that . . .
8. You've probably said to yourself . . .
9. Think about it for a moment.
10. Let's face it.
11. You won't believe it.
12. I know you'll be interested to know that . . .
13. Let's be frank.
14. Have you ever wondered . . .?

*From How to Write Successful Fundraising Letters by Mal Warwick.*

writing. To him, crafting words into lucid ideas is the essence of writing, of getting results, and of raising funds. He then narrows the focus a little by discussing how to write to get results.

Successful fundraising letters depend on building relationships, Warwick emphasizes. This is really the key to his skill as a fundraiser—the recognition that a dialogue between an organization's supporters and its administrators is critical, and the ability to cultivate that dialogue. Expertly, he shows how to accomplish this feat using nothing but the written word.

In detail, Warwick reviews one direct-mail package. He deftly keeps subjectivity to a minimum, relying on results and focus group comments.

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## Crafting words into lucid ideas is the essence of writing, of getting results, and of raising funds.

When he is subjective, he makes it clear that he is.

Warwick is comprehensive, covering every facet of direct-mail fundraising. He even reminds us, in no uncertain terms, of the importance of sending

thank-you letters to donors. He shows how an organization's entire mailing effort is jeopardized when prompt acknowledgments are not sent.

One shortcoming is Warwick's failure to note that the best way to get

"high-dollar" contributions (\$1,000 and up) is face to face. However, if the ask is going to be made by letter, then his examples are impressive.

Novice direct-mail writers could use this book best by immersing themselves in one section at a time. For veterans, there is little here that Warwick has not told us before, but it serves as an excellent review of information every fundraiser should know. ■

**CALL TO ACTION** FAX YOUR RESPONSE TO: 608-274-9978  
OR CALL: 800-424-7367 • OR e-mail [snpo@danenet.wicipo.org](mailto:snpo@danenet.wicipo.org)



### Add value and ownership to your Society membership by submitting feedback and ideas!

*Nonprofit World* is one of many ways the Society for Nonprofit Organizations furthers its motto "Advancement through Sharing." The Society aims to advance all nonprofit organizations through information-sharing and open communication.

"Call to Action" is a place for you to communicate with the Society and other nonprofit organizations. Fax, mail, or call in your answers. Also, pose your own questions you'd like others in the nonprofit sector to answer.

This issue's question, "How do you advertise?" was sent in by one of our readers, who (in answer to an earlier "Call to Action" question) identified "gaining public recognition" as the greatest challenge facing his organization.

## What do you think?

- How do you advertise your organization and its services?  
(Check all that apply)
    - public service announcements (PSAs)
    - TV contracts
    - contracts at newspapers
    - press releases sent to the media
    - press releases sent directly to your constituents
    - direct mail
    - ads in high-visibility publications
    - your own newsletter
    - selling merchandise imprinted with organization's name
    - special events
    - other: \_\_\_\_\_
    - We don't advertise or market our organization in any organized way.
  - Which forms of advertising have worked best for you? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What services could the Society provide to help your advertise your organization? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - What question(s) would you like to have nonprofits answer in a future "Call to Action"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Your name & phone number (optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

