

# How To Achieve Great Fundraising Results Using Direct Marketing

The first and possibly most important lesson I ever learnt about direct marketing turned my face red with embarrassment.

Several years ago, I went for my first job in fundraising. At that time, I was new to direct marketing and I had little experience in the charity sector. As the interview for the job was progressing, I was handed a simple test. This was the test I was given:

Two direct-mail fundraising packs were put in front of me. One was an A4 letter with an unbranded envelope, no gimmicks, no extras – it was a simple mailing about the charity and an ask for help. The second pack was a letter containing a questionnaire and a branded pen. The envelope had a bold headline and carried the charity's branding throughout.

The second pack, I told the interviewers, looked like 'junk mail' and so that would probably be thrown straight in the bin. The first pack seemed to me more appealing.

I told them I'd choose the first pack. Well, isn't that what any person like me would respond to?

And that was where I went wrong. Completely, red-faced wrong.

The first pack was the loser. The second pack I had judged to be 'a bit naff' turned out to be the charity's most successful fundraising pack of ALL time!

I had fallen in to the trap of thinking I knew what OTHER people liked.

That day I learnt something that totally changed the way I would think about advertising, marketing and direct marketing: **Never trust your own opinion!**

## Did you know?

- The average Briton spends 16 hours a week listening to radio.
- On Christmas day 2005, Eastenders was the most popular British TV show<sup>1</sup>
- The top Google search in February 2006 was 'National Lottery'.
- One in four British adult smokes.<sup>2</sup>

I don't listen to the radio, watch Eastenders, play the National Lottery or

smoke. So according to national statistics, I'm not very average at all.

Are you average?

### **Testing, testing, 1, 2, 3.**

In direct marketing, not trusting your own opinion is called 'Testing'. It seems obvious when you say it, but Testing means being humble enough to realise you don't know what everyone else thinks!

Testing is where direct marketing has the advantage over traditional advertising techniques. It gives you the opportunity to adjust different elements of a campaign and compare the results.

Many of the best direct marketing campaigns come out of hard work, research and years and years of testing.

Derek Davies, principal Lecturer in direct marketing at Kingston University, proposed a list of six items that can be tested in your direct marketing campaigns.<sup>3</sup> They are listed here in order with my comments added:

1. **List** (the database of contacts). Where have they come from? How are they grouped or 'segmented'? What kind of people are they?
2. **Offer**. What's the 'big idea' we're trying to communicate?
3. **Format**. What kind of media are we using?
4. **Creative**. Can we make better use of our copywriting and design?
5. **Response Mechanism**. Is it easy for people to respond to us? What options are we giving them?
6. **Timing**. Is there a better time to communicate our message?

Testing can become pretty complicated, particularly if you start comparing several elements at the same time. But have no fear; even a little testing is better than no testing at all. How else will you ever know if your marketing could be better?

### **Stay in control**

Many charities and organisations that heavily rely upon direct mail have 'control' packs. (The term can also apply to other media such as Direct Response TV or Internet banners.) These 'controls' are tried and tested creative elements that have proved successful over the years. Most testing will include a control of some sort.

### **Where do I start?**

It's never wasted time researching direct marketing campaigns that have proved successful for other organisations. Over time, many direct

marketing agencies have, through trial and error, created successful selling ‘techniques’. In most cases you’ll save yourself a lot of time and trouble with just a little research into these campaigns.

One example is in the area of copywriting. A number of copywriting techniques have been tested over the years and it’s a good field to investigate when writing your first marketing campaign.

Here are ten popular copywriting tips to get you going.

1. Give priority to the headline
2. Make the first paragraph fantastic
3. Keep sentences short and leave plenty of white space
4. Use quotations where possible
5. Make the copy “you” focused
6. Include testimonials
7. Be specific rather than vague
8. Emphasise key words
9. Re-write your work as many times as you can
10. Get others to feedback

For a more detailed explanation of these ten copywriting techniques please [read this tutorial](#).

Modern technology is making direct marketing more cost effective and more feasible than ever. Sophisticated databases, new media and new printing technologies are all making a difference. According to the UK’s leading marketing magazine, direct marketing spend has **tripled** over the last ten years. <sup>4</sup>

Are you using direct marketing to the fullest?

**In answer to the question...**

What makes for successful fundraising? Every charity is different. Size and type of charity will make a big difference to your approach and creative style. You may not find a one-box-fits-all solution, but using direct marketing techniques, old and new, you will find something that works for you and your charity. Just keep on testing!

1. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4560594.stm> 2. The Indypedia, Facts and figures of Modern Life, 2006 3. Derek Davies, November 2002 IDM Lecture on ‘Testing’ 4. ‘Marketing’ magazine – 14 July 2004

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