

Wow! Doesn't that sound ominous?

All kidding aside, Thanksgiving is now in our rearview mirror and that means the end of 2017 is just around the corner.

If you don't already have your end-of-year appeal ready, you're probably feeling pressure to get something (anything!) out the door. Most people feeling that pressure will probably relieve it by doing pretty much the same thing as they did last year. But, unless your materials have already been printed, it is absolutely *not* too late to make some adjustments that could improve your 2017 fundraising results.

See below for a few things that I think that many organizations could realistically still implement this year. Starting with the outer envelope, those changes include:

- 1. Make your outer envelope stand out.** The average American household receives dozens of gift appeals every holiday season. Most arrive in #10 envelopes with tasteful messaging and art printed in relatively muted colors. Forget that. Go with bigger and bolder art. Use more vibrant colors. Make a more direct, perhaps even blunt, "ask".
- 2. Renovate your mailing's interior.** Continue your more compelling art and bolder colors into your mailing's interior. Make sure that there are things creating visual interest on the front of your letter as well as on any collateral piece (brochure, palm card, etc.).
- 3. Strengthen your copy.** Whether you communicate by US Mail or Email, more forcefully stress your organization's need for the reader's timely financial support.
- 4. Scale your work.** Help readers to see the importance of their financial support by "scaling" your work. Mention costs associated with specific aspects of your work ("For \$250, we can provide the bus needed to bring a group of school children to the Museum..." etc.) Ideally, the items you mention will align with the "ladder" of suggested amounts on your reply instrument (See #6 below).
- 5. Remind your supporters that future tax benefits for giving might NOT be as good as those available today** (as long as Republicans in Congress remain committed to major tax cuts, this is likely to be true whether the House bill, the Senate bill or some future bill ultimately passes). Put the reminder in your letter text or, better, make it a "call out" appearing in the margins of your letter or reply instrument.
- 6. Use a more aggressive "ladder" of gift amounts.** Make this year's ladder a little bit more aggressive; move every rung up a little. Set your lowest rung at an amount that will stretch, but not offend, your smaller givers.

6a. For the truly adventuresome ... If you are comfortable making a big change under pretty severe time pressure, segment your list so that readers can receive variable letter content and see different gift ladders based upon their giving history.

7. Include a monthly giving option on your reply instrument. If you are not already doing so, give recipients of your appeals the option of making monthly gifts by credit card.

8. Ask for email addresses (and permission to contact them by email). Everyone knows they should do this but not everyone always remembers to do this.

9. Give donors a “check off” box to receive information about Planned Giving. Of course, you should only do this if your organization is prepared to actually provide that information and facilitate Planned Giving.

10. Support your US Mail solicitation with Email. If you have a significant number of email addresses for supporters, you should include an email component in your end of year appeal. If you have a large group for whom you have ONLY email addresses, this group should get their own appeal while those also getting the direct mail piece should receive more of a “reminder.” Alternatively, you could blur this distinction and send all supporters an email that could be read as either a reminder or as a self-contained appeal.

11. Improve your thank you letter. End-of-year appeals should always have their own unique thank you letter. These should thank donors for their gift and also offer your Best Wishes for the Holiday Season and New Year. Thank you letters are also a great place to plant ideas with donors -- such as that they should consider becoming monthly or planned givers in 2018. *You could even plant one of those ideas with donors in your letter’s main text while putting the other into a “PS.”*

Not every organization can make all of the changes listed above. Some should probably make *no* changes at this late date. Still, most organizations that have not already gone to press are likely to find at least one thing that they could successfully implement in these waning days of 2017.

About the Author:

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