

# **CATHOLIC DEVELOPMENT + QUARTERLY +**

An informational DIGEST to guide development personnel in the emerging field of development.

Volume VIII, Edition 1

## **DIRECT MAIL**

Within the consulting division of our company, we have an expression, "The mailman isn't the development director!" On the other hand, a Catholic institution can never have enough information in front of people or in their hands.

Major gift calls on major gift prospects are at the heart of any successful development program. But direct mail and supporting printed materials communicate and hold together the overall donor infrastructure, network and information systems.

Direct Mail (also know as "direct marketing" by people in the profession) is a component of the development program much like public relations: public relations or direct mail never generate major gifts, but you can't generate major gifts without public relations or direct mail.

Direct mail can best be defined as informational and marketing materials delivered "direct" to individuals or businesses. The "goal" of direct mail is to elicit immediate response from the recipient.

### **DIRECT MAIL IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

In a Catholic school development program, direct mail would have the same ultimate goal as stated above -- but in a general sense. Direct mail in a development program can also support the program by building greater donor awareness and enhancing overall donor education.

Here are some objectives and benefits of an effective direct mail program:

- Provides institutional information and donor education.
- Builds and advances the case for continued and future financial support.
- Reporting system to current and previous donors regarding their gifts' impact.
- Stimulates giving: Annual Fund or pre-phonathon mailing.
- Donor research through responses.
- Donor recognition.
- Planned giving information.

Remember, Direct Mail encourages a response from the recipient. That response may be a cash gift, but it also may be a response in the form of requests for information (planned giving, special events, giving clubs, personal contact, etc.).

## **PLANNING A DIRECT MAIL PROJECT**

Sometimes, the most difficult aspect of the Direct Mail program is receiving approval or support from administration or volunteer committees or boards. Disapproval may come in the form of comments such as "another junk mailing" or "nobody reads that stuff."

That same person may be wearing a tie or using a purse or bag that they bought from a "Wonderful catalogue we received in the mail..." Direct Mail is junk mail only to those who are not interested in its contents at that particular point in time. To those who are interested, it is a valuable information system. So assume that you will get resistance on Direct Mail.

But a distinct advantage that you have over another type of "for profit business" is the fact that your mailing list is not a "cold list." Your list are familiar "publics", not strangers from a cold list. They are alumni/alumnae, parishioners, friends, current parents, alumni parents, etc.

In preparation for a Direct Mail project, look to the following as a checklist as you proceed:

- Specific goal of the Direct Mail project.
- Target audience (list).
- Intended response.
- Timeliness.
- "Design" or concept.
- Budget.

## **CONTENTS**

The concept and contents of your Direct Mail project is most important. Your Direct Mail is competing with other business-oriented direct mail, magazines, first class mail, bills, personal correspondence and other mail for the attention, time and eyes of your target audience. The typical direct mail piece will usually contain the following:

- Outside envelope.
- Cover letter.
- Brochure.
- Response form/pledge card.
- Return envelope.

(Some institutions will use a combination response form/return envelope.) Additional contents may be appropriate based upon the particular purpose of the mailing.

**OUTSIDE ENVELOPE** -- perhaps, the most important part of the printed package from an attention getting standpoint. It must get attention without being too cute or too commercial

(remember that your audience already is familiar with your mission). The outside envelope should also be consistent with your mission and message. Print a brief, attention getting message on the outside envelope (usually printed in the lower left corner).

**COVER LETTER** -- the most important part of the inside contents of the Direct Mail piece. It provides a personal message to the reader/recipient from the institution's leader. The cover letter "makes the case" for the appeal and demonstrates what impact the donor's gift will make to the Catholic school. It will also document and remind the donor of the "good works" of the institution and the donor's previous generosity. It may include a personal anecdote that provides supporting evidence of those "good works."

The cover letter should also have "bold" and indented copy to break up the page flow for the reader. No paragraph should contain more than 3-4 sentences. The cover letter should always have a "P.S." when direct mailing. The letter itself can be longer than one page. Some Direct Mail cover letters are three to four pages in length. Two pages, at most, should be sufficient.

**BROCHURE** -- the brochure will probably be the most impressive part of your mailing. It will provide the "impression" and level of professionalism you want. It should be an attractive, printed document which has a strong message and is visually appealing (see samples of our brochures enclosed or call 1-800-426-8198 to receive free samples).

**RESPONSE FORM/PLEDGE CARD** -- another visually appealing enclosure that enables the donor to fill out the information (unless already pre-labeled by computer showing through a window in the outside envelope). Information lines might include items such as amount of gift, pledge and "send reminder" information, matching gift information or planned giving information.

**RETURN ENVELOPE** -- will have a pre-printed address and the name of the chief administrator. You may choose to use "business reply" envelopes whereby your institution would pay the cost of the postage (.69 each). Business reply envelopes also need a computerized "bar code" on the outside of the envelope. Your local post office will assist you to make sure your printer uses the correct bar code. Space is usually provided in the upper left corner for the donor to write his/her name, address and a "checkbox" if it is a new address.

## **POSTAL REQUIREMENTS**

Direct Mail is shipped via the U.S. Post Office. The post office has many requirements for what is called "Third Class" or "Bulk Mail" -- which is the type of mailing for Direct Mail. The Outside Envelope must have an indicia (pre-printed stamp) with a permit number of a non-profit institution in the upper right corner of the envelope (this would replace a stamp in a regular first class letter). It would also say "non-profit organization". In most cases, your institution already has a permit. Or, the envelope could be "metered" or postmarked. This would be a preferred approach because it gives the letter a first class letter "look" when the donor receives it. Many people can distinguish third class mail right away when received and therefore may not open it right away. Thus, the benefit of a "metered" look.

Third Class Mail must have at least 200 pieces of mail to qualify for the third class rate which is substantially lower than First Class Mail. A first class stamp, as you know, is .29. Third Class, non-profit mail is .083 for local mail and .113 for out of town mail. All of these requirements apply to a regular business size (No. 10) envelope. The larger or heavier the "carrier" the more the cost. A visit to your local post office, if you are unfamiliar with the process, would be beneficial. If you have any mistakes in your Direct Mailing process, the post office will hold up your mailing and ask you to come to the post office and "rework" the job until it is correct. Sometimes the best way to complete a correct direct mailing is to use mailing service companies in your community and pay them to do the job.

## **THE LONG VIEW**

Don't be discouraged if the immediate results aren't what you expect. Just because your "ready to sell," doesn't mean everyone is "ready to buy" at that specific moment. Direct Marketing experts say that a 2% response rate is very good. You should hope for a higher rate since your audience isn't a "cold list." This information may be tied to long term goals or even be part of your Annual Fund, followed up by a phonathon. Personal calls are always the key to sound development.

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