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How to Write a Fundraising Letter

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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How to Write a Fundraising Letter

(c) 2002 By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

The key to a successful fundraising campaign is writing a good letter. This may sound intimidating at first, but fundraising letters contain many of the same elements as any good sales letter.

First, know your donors: Beginning with an updated list of past donors is key -- they will likely give again and may even increase their donations over time. Make sure to have a good, well-targeted, updated mailing list for new prospects as well.

In order to get people to read your letter, they must first open the envelope. Include teaser copy on the outside of the envelope. This can be as simple as a printed line saying, "We need your help."

Early in the letter, make your case -- quickly. Don't beat around the bush. Tell about your organization or project at the top of the letter and get to the point

right away. What problem will this project solve?
What need will it fill?

Appeal to your donors' hearts first with descriptions and anecdotes, then their heads with facts and figures.

If you are writing to previous donors, be sure to thank them first before you ask for more money. "Thanks for being such an important influence on our program in the past. Last year's fundraiser was such a success, we're inviting you to help again ..."

Also, lose the hype. Don't exaggerate or over-extend yourself. Nothing will destroy your credibility faster than sounding like a used-car salesperson when raising funds for a good cause.

As with other sales letters, longer copy pulls better in fundraising letters. I know, I know, "Nobody reads long letters." While most people won't read every word, the more you can tell the reader about the benefits of giving, the better response you will receive.

Another reason for long copy is with a good fundraising letter, you should be able to start reading at any point in the letter and still know what it is about.

It's much harder with a one or two page letter to state your case in a number of different ways than it is with a four page letter. With a longer letter, you have much more room to convince the reader to give.

Don't forget to ask for the money! Don't just tell them about your program, ask directly for their help. Also, tell them how much to give so they have an idea of what is needed. "Our education program needs 25 computers, at \$2,000 each. If you can't afford a whole computer, a donation of only \$200 will buy a printer."

You will get donations of at least \$200.

Appeal to readers' sense of urgency by providing a deadline. "We need these funds by January 1 in order to carry out our spring awards event." If you don't get them to act right away, they probably won't act at all.

For the maximum reply, include a return envelope. Make it easy for people to donate by telling them how! "Just check the box on the reply card and mail it with your check in the enclosed, postage paid reply envelope." It may sound silly to you, but people respond to clear instructions.

Remember to include a PS at the bottom. The bulk of your letter will go unread by most of your readers. A post script is a last-chance effort to summarize your whole letter and get your readers to act on it.

As with any direct mail piece, it's good to make follow up phone calls one or two weeks after you mail the letter. Ask if the letter was received and if you can answer any questions. Of course, you won't always reach the right person, but if you follow up you greatly increase your chances of getting a donation.

Writing successful fundraising letters isn't rocket science. These tips are based on years of trial and error; if you follow them wisely your campaign will be successful. Plan early, be organized, and the letter writing will take care of itself!

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Linda Elizabeth Alexander writes marketing copy for nonprofits. When a deadline looms and you're overworked and understaffed, contact her to come to your rescue.
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Some Important Fundraising Tips To Remember

By D. David Dugan

Fundraising doesn't have to be a challenge if you have a good product, are well organized, and have a good attitude. Try to put yourself in your customers' shoes, treat them how you would like to be treated. And always remember you are representing your team so be on your best behavior. Keeping all this in mind, here are some great tips to help you have a successful fundraiser.

Organizational Tips

- Identify your organizational needs and fundraising goals · Motivate your organization and members · Relay the organizational goals to the parents and participants · Begin planning the logistics of distributing the products to the participants, and eventually, to the supporters

Helpful Hints

- Set a daily goal based on how much time is available · Practice your sales presentation with your participants · Show customers the Order Form so they can see the various team options · Be helpful if the customer is indecisive, and be prepared to offer a suggestion · Keep a copy of your customers' name and purchases for next year's fundraising drive

When selling be sure to follow these steps:

- Introduce yourself, (Hello, my name is_____) · Tell the person why you are fundraising (We are trying to raise money for our football program...) · Ask if they would like to buy multiples of your items. · Tell them your item is a great, inexpensive gift for fans of any age · Be sure to thank the customer (Even if they do not buy any of your items – remember you are representing your team and town.)

Most people are more than willing to help you in your fundraising efforts. They have probably been in a few themselves. Always remember to thank them and wish them a pleasant day. A good product and good service will quickly bring you success in your fundraising efforts.

D. David Dugan is the president of DD&C and personally helps to maintain their computer support forum at

as well as their Spyware Information site

- Be sure to check out the Brax Fundraising website at

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