



Fundraising Direct Mail That Drives Online Response

March 28, 2011 | By, David Hazeltine

A few weeks ago, I wrote about how [Aretha Franklin would be appalled](#) at the way in which nonprofits track (don't track) online responses and gifts to direct-mail fundraising and membership appeals. In addition to other facts, I stated that the average gifts online are typically 25 percent to 35 percent higher than those by mail (and often twice as much) — one of the main reasons why nonprofit organizations should promote, encourage and track online responses to their mail.

Now, some of you old-school direct-mail fundraisers out there may doubt that online gifts are 25 percent to 35 percent higher and may be thinking, "Just let them respond by mail. It's easier to track." But we all need to realize how people use the Web these days — including many older baby boomers and members of the [G.I. generation](#). Your donors and members have come to expect that anything they can do offline, they should be able to do online.

A 2009 [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) study revealed this: 50 percent of people who donated to a nonprofit, or took some kind of action, would not have done so without first checking the organization's website — and more than 65 percent of all donors visit an organization's website every time they give. Seeing that those statistics are two years old, my guess is that these numbers have only increased. Another statistic I recently overheard that may surprise membership professionals: Close to 40 percent of new members to nonprofit organizations are joining online!

NOTE: We must never lose sight of the fact that it's all about choices these days, no matter what generation you are marketing to. Your mail must allow recipients choices on how to respond — online, mail, phone or even in person.

So, to take advantage of this evolving popularity of responding online to direct-mail appeals, let's look at some strategies that you can implement immediately that will make your mail more engaging and encourage your prospects, donors and members to give, join and renew on your website.

Outer envelopes

Utilize that often wasted space on the back of your OEs. The first thing people do when they decide to open a mail piece is turn it over. You have an opportunity to get the recipient's attention for a few more seconds. Add a message like: Connect with us online at [www.yournp.org](#). Or, depending on the audience and appeal, use: Make your gift online — it's

fast, easy and secure!

Body copy of letters

Use copy such as: Please take a moment right now to renew your "Anytown Museum" membership — via our secure online-giving form at www.anytown.org/renew. Or, complete and return the enclosed membership renewal form in the envelope we've provided.

Another option: It's never been easier to give to [Your Organization] — there are three easy ways...

- Online – at www.yourorganization.org/giving (and get a free gift)
- By Phone – at 800.123.4567
- By Mail – simply complete and return the reply form, in the envelope we've provided.

P.S. of letters

Try: P.S. An online renewal means your dollars go even further. Renew now at www.anytown.org/renew — it's fast, easy and secure. And when you do, we'll send you an "Anytown Museum Magnetic Dry Erase Board" — our gift to you! (see insert for details)

Buckslips or back of reply forms

Potential ideas: Online gifts are convenient — and make your gifts go further! Gifts made at our secure online-giving site save us valuable staff time by eliminating data entry and processing tasks. And, they save you the trouble of looking for stamps and going to the post office too! Please visit www.yourorganization.org/giving right now, while this mailing is still in your hands. (You can also add a photo and description of a back-end premium here as well.)

Reply form, lift notes and other inserts

Use some of the copy above to reinforce the options on any and all of the elements of your mail package:

Back-end premium

Offer a back-end premium in exchange for an online gift. You may have noticed the reference to a gift in the examples above. This is one more strategy that will increase the number of online responses to your appeal/campaign — not exempt of testing, of course. Offer an inexpensive item (and relatively inexpensive to fulfill, too) that will appeal to all generations and both genders.

Donors who are on the fence about responding by mail or online will likely give online because people like to get free stuff. You'll need to segment your acknowledgments to fulfill the premium only to the online responders, but the additional revenue you receive from this segment will more than pay for that process.

Now, before you take the time and effort to pick out and order a new item, go to your premiums closet and see if you can find something worthy to use. Then, estimate the amount you'll need to fulfill based on 15 percent to 20 percent of your overall responses.

As I stated in the "Aretha Franklin" article, getting your constituents to give online is half the battle. Drive them to a dedicated landing page or trackable giving site whenever possible to be sure you are accurately crediting the source of your gifts. If this is not feasible or possible right now, it is important to make your online-giving forms as available and accessible as possible. One way to do this is to add a big, red "GIVE NOW" radio button — in the same position — on every page of your website.

Cautions

There are three cautions I'd like to add about the process of encouraging and collecting online gifts and, for that matter, gifts coming in from multiple channels:

- Online responders are not necessarily good prospects for future online appeals, but remember, they are "direct mail-responsive" until they become "online-responsive." Don't think that because you captured their e-mail addresses that you can save money by not mailing to them. Yes, they gave online — but would they have if they hadn't received your mailing? A short time after they give, via any channel, ask them how they prefer to be communicated with, via acknowledgments, surveys, phone calls, etc., and add these preferences to their records and respect them.
- Don't put people in silos based on their responses — mail vs. Web vs. phone, etc. The best constituents are multichannel constituents. You want them giving via more than one medium, as they'll have higher long-term value, retention and lifetime value. According to the [Blackbaud](#) [Target Analytics](#) [2010 Index of National Fundraising Performance](#), donors connected to an organization through multiple communication channels are at least 20 percent more valuable than donors connected through only one channel. The index also revealed that first-year retention for multichannel donors was 51 percent compared to 30 percent of offline donors and 22 percent of online donors.
- Online donors often give impulsively, and online renewal rates are often low. At least in year two, use mail and phone to get online donors and members to renew (phone calls are a great time to ask them their preferences for your communications).

Take a look at your recent direct-mail appeals to see where you could implement some of the strategies above. Are there improvements you can make to the copy and design for the package(s) that you currently have in the works? Make small investments in the evolution of your appeals so they are more engaging, and implement accurate tracking of online responses to your mail. It will improve your bottom line and your two-way communications with the multichannel, multigeneration consumers who are your prospects, donors and members.

[David Hazeltine](#) is VP of fundraising at full-service direct-response fundraising and membership marketing agency [DMW Direct Fundraising](#). He can be reached via e-mail at dhazeltine@dmwdirect.com, or phone at 508.927.6034.