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## How Welcoming is Your Welcome Package?

By Craig DePole, Senior Vice President, Newport Creative Communications

**Competition is stiff – new mail solicitations are arriving every day. Through the mailbox or the inbox, organizations must build a connection with their donors right from the start to begin a long and fruitful relationship.**

**Below are seven ways to improve your welcome package... and ultimately improve retention.**

- 1. Make it timely.** The surest way to tell your donors you care is to thank them right away. An email “Welcome” should be almost instantaneous. In the mail, it should take no more than two weeks. Donors, and especially Boomers, are all about instant gratification. Technology makes it possible to get that “Welcome” out in less than two days at a reasonable cost. Imagine the warm feelings you’ll create when that acknowledgment arrives promptly. Your mother would be so proud!
- 2. Make it personal ...** and not just the salutation. The Welcome letter should be welcoming. This letter is about the donor and should sound like it was written by an individual, not an organization. Just think how that acknowledgement letter would read if this was the only donor that gave to you all year. A teaser on the outer envelope or the subject line in the email that says “Welcome” is not enough.
- 3. This is not a test.** The package should not rattle off a series of facts and figures about your organization, as if there was going to be a quiz at the end: “we have 27 regional offices, serve 250,000 individuals, had 1 million visitors”. Instead tell the donor a story about how the organization has made a difference in one specific region. Tell about one person who you served and why that matters. Remind the donor what impact your organization had on one visitor and the rippling effect that is making. If you can capture the work of the organization in a story or a photo, you will make it easier for the donor to connect with the organization.
- 4. Offer a virtual tour.** The welcome package should give the new donor a high-level “look around”. Volunteer opportunities, giving clubs, monthly giving programs, upcoming events, opportunity to sign-up for the email blasts or to opt out of list rental. All of these are ways to engage and promote a dialogue with the donor. Incentivize the new donor to check out your website if they joined through the mail.
- 5. Credential yourself.** Show the donors they selected the right charity and remind them that it was a sound investment. Offer transparency – let them know where they can find your financial information, annual report, and IRS form 990. Let them know how much money goes to program work. Include testimonials and other independent seals of approval, such as the Better Business Bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, or Guidestar, if your scores are worth promoting. Remember, just because they sent you a gift doesn’t mean they are convinced they should have.
- 6. Encourage feedback, comments and criticism.** You want to begin a dialogue with your donors and to do that you have to engage the donor in a conversation. Ask the donor to fill out a brief questionnaire to help you get to know them. Offer a low cost premium like a calendar, if you already have some in inventory, or some other useful item that is branded. The response may be low but

you will allow the most engaged donors to show themselves, which you can then segment for further specialized treatment.

- 7. Be brief.** Remember this is the beginning of a conversation, not a complete dissertation. Keep it upbeat and impactful, but don't exhaust the donor with too much. Make the package visually appealing and easy to navigate. If there is a lot of information that you need to send, break it up into two mailings – a Welcome letter first followed by the Welcome Kit, or warmly welcome in a short letter and package the rest of the information in a folder or booklet.

When you send out a welcome letter, you're fulfilling more than just benefits and IRS requirements. You're fulfilling expectations about the organization and the donor's desire to positively impact the world. Use the opportunity to remind donors that they made the right choice, and begin to build the relationship right, right from the start.

Craig DePole is a Senior Vice President at Newport Creative Communications and heads up the new Washington DC office. Newport Creative specializes in providing multi-channel fundraising programs that produce uncommonly good results. Our personalized approach to each client's program produces highly-efficient, high-impact campaigns at highly competitive prices. Contact Craig at 800-934-0586 x432 or [cdepole@newportcreative.com](mailto:cdepole@newportcreative.com) to learn more.