

Overkill Marketing:

Too Much of the Wrong Stuff

Or, “How To Make Your Prospects Tune Out Without Really Trying”

by:
Vincent Fraumeni &
James Pierson



When is an advantage not an advantage? In marketing as elsewhere, it's when you are promised more for your money – and you don't really need more.

Take for example donor e-newsletters, an increasingly popular Internet product available to the planned giving industry. These newsletters are automatically mass e-mailed to your prospects on a regular basis, sometimes as often as weekly. They can feature a header and footer personalized for your program and the vendor usually provides the content.

Where's the problem? The problem is that if your prospects get too many e-mails that are too full of the wrong material and they get them too often, you may lose your readership.

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The Subtle Flavor of Spam

Have you ever received so many e-newsletters and bulletins that you have simply deleted them all in self-defense? It's a natural reaction that everyone – including your audience – can have. But as a planned giving professional it's the last thing you want them to do.



Promotional material automatically mass mailed to a list of e-mail addresses sounds a lot like spam. Especially when it's received with mechanical frequency. Like anyone else, our prospects are unlikely to respond to that approach. They're more likely to reach for the delete key and tune you out.

Dressing pseudo-spam up in a suit and tie and calling it a newsletter doesn't fool anyone. Prospects aren't dumb, and you don't want them to be. Your most powerful argument in favor of their giving engages their mind with persuasive content. The mind of the donor is where the marketing battle is won.

But the content provided for e-newsletters often consists primarily of generic gift-planning and investment advice. That comes as no surprise. Canned information has to be "cookie-cutter" generic so it can be plugged in to e-newsletters for multiple organizations. Regardless of how much information you provide, on the receiving end your prospect will notice not only that such content is being duplicated by others, but also that it's dry and uninteresting.

And you may lose their attention. Forever.

Whose Specialty Is This, Anyway?

Consider the following: The big boys in the finance industry do investment advice – and turn profits – better than anybody else. So when you send canned investment advice to your prospects, you're competing with the mega-financial institutions on their home turf. Does that make sense?

Why take on these financial investment giants when your institution already possesses a unique advantage over them? Your organization enjoys a special relationship with your prospects and you can harness the power of this relationship by means of mission-driven messaging.

Mission-driven vs. Profit-driven

For fundraising professionals, understanding this distinction is crucial, and it reveals the fundamental flaw in the automated donor e-newsletter product.

Profit-driven marketing

- Puts you at a disadvantage. It reduces your message to generic investment advice, and
- Limits your pitch to, "Invest now, lock in great rates, save on taxes!"

Mission-driven marketing

- Empowers your organization in its unique relationship with prospects, and
- Personalizes your message. For example, "Your special legacy to our institution enables us to further the goals that we support together, far into the future. You can make a difference in the lives of those that we serve."

Which works better? Which one grabs the prospect's attention and emotions, and which one doesn't? The answer should be obvious.

Vision-driven Promotion

The profit-driven e-newsletter loses marketing value because of its mechanical, impersonal, and generic nature. It dilutes quality with quantity in the name of convenience, and drives prospects to tune out.

A mission-driven e-newsletter, on the other hand, succeeds because it trumps quantity with a unique, compelling, campaign-specific message. It engages prospects on a personal level. Moreover, prospects see this kind of e-newsletter as a genuine communication from their favored institution – not a canned marketing-product served up by a machine – so their minds will be open to receiving the message it brings, the message about how their legacy can make a difference and have an impact on the community.

That's how you avoid marketing overkill. That's how you prevent your prospects from tuning you out. And that's how you build on relationships and achieve real success for your organization through its planned giving program.



133 Commons Court, Chadds Ford, PA 19317
610-361-7941 | 610-361-0598 fx | info@virtualgiving.com

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Vince Fraumeni is founding principal of Vincent J. Fraumeni, Fundraising Consultants based in Southern California. With over twenty two years professional fundraising experience, Vince works with leaders of non profit organizations to build fundraising programs and market Planned Gifts. He is a former NCPG Board Member, a frequent speaker, and is a founding faculty member for the American Institute of Philanthropic Studies.

Based in Southeastern Pennsylvania, **James Pierson** brings nearly 20 years' professional experience as a freelance copywriter, editor, Internet developer and marketing consultant to his work in Development and Planned Giving. He is currently consulting Communications Manager for VirtualGiving.