

Everything You Need to Know to be Successful in Direct Mail



Celebrating **40 years** of helping your organization **GROW**

response
unlimited

Response Unlimited helps its clients minimize their risk by maximizing their ROI, enabling them to effectively and efficiently grow their organizations, and subsequently change their world.

Dear Friend:

Response Unlimited's mission is to help you further your own mission. And frankly, no other organization is in a better position to help you make it happen.

Whether you are a new organization seeking to grow from a few hundred or few thousand customers or donors, or one that has been around for years, Response Unlimited can help you grow in phenomenal ways.

With 40 years of experience, Response Unlimited's team of professionals is willing and able to help you minimize your risk, maximize your ROI, and enable you to effectively grow your organization.

Response Unlimited is able to assist your business with cost effective list brokerage and management, print management, copy-writing, creative services, and more. And where Response Unlimited has been tasked with handling all aspects of a donor acquisition, the ROI has averaged around 91%. What's more is there are never any hidden costs to using any of our services!

When working with Response Unlimited, you pay only for the services you actually use - and there's never a charge to just contact us for a consultation!

Response Unlimited has always been, and always will be, completely committed to doing business in an ethical and fair way. Whatever your passion to impact and influence the world and those around you, Response Unlimited will share your desire to grow and fulfill your dreams.

Response Unlimited's success and phenomenal results can only be attributed to God's blessings, and working through a qualified and experienced team that understands what makes direct mail work!

So give Response Unlimited a call to see why for the last 40-plus years, Christian and humanitarian organizations, as well as many conservative groups and political candidates, have been turning and returning to Response Unlimited to help their organizations grow.

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Mailing Lists and Creative Services
**response
unlimited**

Lists You Can't Ignore

Border Wall Donors - 34,800,000

These are the staunchest supporters of the border wall that President Trump promised during his campaign for president. They are conservatives who have donated to show their support for a border wall.

United States Justice Foundation - 238,158

These are donors that have contributed to USJF to fight corruption in government and against the ACLU, as well as other such liberal organizations. Selects include active donors, muti-donors, and high dollar donors.

Alan Keyes Universe - 466,506

This is a list of Alan Keyes' complete donor base. These conservatives are passionately pro-life and pro-family and are willing to donate to ensure their voices are heard.

Trump for President - Faith-Based Donors and Supporter - 29,876,038

This list is all actual faith-based responders and donors to President Trump's 2016 campaign. The names on this list also have donated to Christian ministries, religious causes, or have purchased Christian products. It is one of the most comprehensive lists of Trump for President Donors on the market!

Religious Freedom Coalition - 98,397

These are all donors to William J. Murray's various organizations. Dr. Murray is best known as the son of atheist activist Madalyn Murray O'Hair. Having become a born-again Christian at age 33, Dr. Murray and the Religious Freedom Coalition are now actively involved on Capitol Hill making certain the rights and freedoms of Christians in America and around the world are being protected.

Concerned Christians for America's Future - 1,604,954

These are donors to Christian Coalition of America. Since their founding in 1989 by Pat Robertson, the Christian Coalition of America has worked within the pro-family community to challenge and equip them to make a difference in Washington and across the country. Contributors have given to help make sure a strong, moral message is heard.

Secure America Alliance Donors - 7,257

These active donors fought back against President Obama's war on seniors, and are now supporters of President Trump's efforts and policies in support of seniors. Over 80% of these donors gave 4x or more in the past year, with more than half giving in the last six months!

Pro-Life Activists Who Donate - 22,400,000

This list identifies adamant pro-life prospects across the nation and locally. You can also identify direct mail responsive, and those with the greatest propensity to donate to pro-life causes.

Robinson Curriculum Buyers - 21,087

These individuals are primarily home-schooling parents. They have spent an average of \$195 to purchase an entire educational curriculum for their children from the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine.

Donors Who Support President Trump's Muslim Immigration Ban - 22,400,000

These individuals support President Trump's ban on immigration from radical Muslim countries. They believe it is foolish to knowingly invite Islamists who've been indoctrinated in radical Islam onto our shore, as president Obama did.

Motivated Christian Donors and Buyers - 8,400,879

This exciting list includes the Christian target market that you've been looking for. From donors to buyers to sources to denominations, this file is a must test for all Christian products, catalogs, continuity programs, and charitable mailers. Conservative political mailers will also find the right people here.

Western Center for Journalism - 39,754

These individuals are interested in seeing the truth come out. To help expose mistruths and lies fed to Americans via traditional means, and reverse the trend of journalism that merely promotes liberal positions, these donors give to an organization committed to training young conservatives to expose the lies and fake journalism of the mainstream media.

Everything You Need to Know to be Successful in Direct Mail

Why Direct Mail?

Direct mail has been proven to be the most cost effective means to acquire new donors, customers, or subscribers for most organizations, even in this digital age. While other means of promoting your cause or product may be less expensive on the front end, direct mail, when done correctly, consistently pulls the best response rates. What's more, the value of a direct mail generated name surpasses the value of donors, leads, or customers generated through any other means, including internet, telephone, radio, television, email, or space advertising many times over.

There are many reasons for this: First, you are acquiring names and addresses which are already proven to be direct mail responsive. This means if you use direct mail responsive lists for your acquisition or prospecting, the people on those lists are not only more likely to respond to your offer or appeal, but are more likely to become a regular donor or customer of yours. In other words, it is better to acquire people who habitually respond to direct mail.

You can also better get your message specifically to your target market using direct mail by utilizing specific selections such as previous giving or purchase habits, level of previous purchases or donations, lifestyle interests, demo- or psycho- graphics, geography, and much, much more!

Direct mail, unlike many other forms of advertising, is also measurable. In addition, it drives people into other marketing channels, such as your website, retail, blogs and other forms of social media. In fact, thirty percent of those responding to direct mail now do so online!

Direct mail can serve an educational purpose as well as promotional. Not only will you be generating

cash flow, but you'll be able to teach principles and sway audiences to your agenda . . . influencing public opinions in a significant way. Direct mail platforms can also be tested, as can many of its components, such as copy, teasers, offers, timing, price points/asks, and various target markets. *Sometimes a small tweak in any one of those areas can make a huge difference in results!*

The bottom line: a direct mail generated donor/customer can not only be acquired at less cost than from any other source, but it is also easier to cultivate and maintain - and it has more long term value than other means. If you are not using direct mail now, you may be missing out on the most cost effective way to acquire valuable new customers or donors. Yes, the up-front costs may be higher, but the bottom line when it comes to investment *will far surpass* any other promotional effort!

Can I effectively use direct mail for my particular cause or offer?

A mailer must first determine whether they've got a truly unique product or appeal . . . or features and attributes that will set it apart from the competition. In other words, **are the benefits of what you are offering to the reader, or the ability to meet their needs, compelling enough to close the sale?** Is it enough to get people to send you a donation to meet your expected metrics in terms of response rates, ROI (return on investment), or cost per new name/customer/donor acquired? Does your offer or appeal make sense and is it easy to understand? Does your product have a sufficient profit margin (a minimum of 10 to 1 is recommended except with big ticket items)? Is your pricing competitive or are there significant benefits to the customer for it not to be?

And, one of the most important questions to ask yourself - do you have enough opportunity to produce

sufficient, positive, future cash flow from the newly acquired customer or donor? For example, if you've only got one product to sell, and there's no way to sell enough product from your initial mailing to generate a net profit, it doesn't make sense to use direct mail (or to even be in business, for that matter), without a back end ability to sell that customer again in the future . . . whether it be with a different product or the same. Most mailers are willing to lose a certain amount of money to acquire a new donor, customer, or subscriber, knowing that they'll recover that cost within a certain period of time from future transactions with that individual. In other words, the initial sale/donation is just the first step when utilizing direct mail to build your constituency. It's up to you to cultivate them and get them to buy or donate a second time. They can become regular donors/customers to your organization once you've secured a second transaction.

Each organization needs to analyze the value in future, potential revenue from each new donor/customer acquired; then set a goal, within their marketing budget requirements, for an achievable cost per donor/subscriber.

A simplistic way to calculate the value per new donor/customer is just to divide your annual revenue by the number of unique customers/donors during that same time period. However, this often doesn't necessarily reflect an accurate annual value of a new name due to the fact that the loyalty and revenue from current donors/customers affect value, as does normal attrition.

Most organizations hence look at long term or lifetime value of a new customer/donor, which can easily be calculated from past metrics, as long as that organization has been in business for some time.

All of these factors need to be considered when determining if you should be using direct mail. They will all work together towards your success. The uniqueness of the benefits of your product/appeal, potential pricing/asks, attractiveness of your offer, and potential value of that new donor/customer will all have an impact on the answer to this question. ***That's why getting an expert to help walk you through these questions, such as Response Unlimited, should be your next step!***

How much should I spend to acquire a new donor, customer, or subscriber?

This figure varies from company to company based on a number of factors:

- 1. The short-term/long-term/lifetime value of the new donor/customer**
- 2. The expected payback period and whether it meets the goals of the organization**
- 3. The budget, targeted growth rate, and other goals of each respective organization**

These are all inter-related factors which should determine each organization's criteria for cost. Each company must set their own cost goals, which should be based on the factors above; however, at times other things come into play which do not factor into the numerical logistics. A few examples:

- *Directives from the board or top management*
- *Corporate valuation goals*
- *Unexpected funding designated for growth*

What's great about direct mail is that if accurate records are being kept, it's easy to determine each of these first two factors based on prior history (the exception is a new organization where more guesswork would be involved).

One caveat, however – if you've been used to acquiring names via a channel other than direct mail, and plan to utilize direct mail in your cultivation process, you'll find the names acquired through direct mail to be much more valuable to your organization, both long-term and short-term, than any other.

Where Response Unlimited has been responsible for selection of lists used, creative, and production/ mailing, the average ROI has been around 91%. This is because Response Unlimited helps its clients minimize their risk by picking list working for similar mailers, writes phenomenally effective copy that generates higher than average response rates, and keeps production/ mailing costs low while maintaining superior quality.

What criteria do I use to measure success?

Each and every organization must set their own criteria. Some look merely at ROI, some at the percentage response rate. Both of these measurements, when used alone, are flawed. ROI merely takes into consideration revenue over cost, ignoring the number of new customers, donors, or subscribers obtained. The percentage response ignores the cost factor in acquisition.

A better metric is the cost per new donor/customer/ subscriber/lead. This number is easily achieved by subtracting the total revenue generated from the mailing from the total cost, and dividing that by the total number of first time transactions. Keep in mind, thirty percent or more of those people will respond through your website or toll-free line, which should also be added to your calculations. This metric combines both the response rate (number of respondents) and the revenue. If you are selling a product, you may want to (or not) include the product cost in the equation.

You should then compare this figure to the potential value of each new name. For example, if you're a non-profit and historically each donor on average donates \$150/year to your organization, you may feel very comfortable spending a third of that, or \$50, to get that first time donor. But you'd better have a system in place to cultivate each new name! Once you have enough of a track record, you can also easily calculate the payback period for each new donor. Many non-profit organizations, as a rule of thumb, will spend up to their average gift to acquire a new donor.

What about using other means of acquisition, such as email, telemarketing, radio, texting, search engines, social media, television, etc..?

There are times when other means of acquiring new donors or customers should be considered, or used in conjunction with direct mail. For example, a prevalent news story can be used to dramatically

increase email open rates, or significantly increase the revenue generated from cold calling. This can be a natural disaster, or political election, or news of your own making. Offers that are highly educational/informative in a unique sense may be successful candidates for some of these channels, as are offers that require a high amount of visualization or demonstration. Yet almost always, unless timeliness is the main factor, direct mail will cost less per new donor or customer than any other source!

These other channels vary in cost, and some with lower cost per impression than direct mail may be very appealing for that reason, but should be approached with caution as response rates are normally a fraction of those from direct mail. This is particularly true of email when used for acquisition purposes. Seldom however, does the bottom line match that of direct mail. For example: new donor acquisition mailings Response Unlimited creates and mails, to lists it recommends, historically return approximately \$0.91 on the dollar from just the initial gift!

When does it make sense to use email for promotional purposes?

Every organization should be utilizing email, but not for acquisition -- aside from extraordinary circumstances such as a natural disaster, elections, or anything else which is predominant in the public's attention where immediate action is required. Otherwise, email should be avoided for acquisition purposes. The response rates are just too minuscule and there are seldom any exceptions. Spam filters, competition for attention from the sheer volume of emails individuals receive every day, and the aura of skepticism that is prevalent with unsolicited emails has drastically affected response rates. Not to mention the legal and "best practice" ethical issues that regulate unsolicited email which could blacklist your organization permanently -- whether or not you are exempt from federal laws.

However, once an individual completes a transaction or requests more information, email marketing to your own constituency is not only wise but expected, and usually welcomed. At the very least, it should be

utilized as a reinforcement or educational function which cultivates and enhances your relationship with the individual recipient. Hence, as in direct mail, your message should be as personal and locally relevant as necessary. It should be based on prior transactional relationships with that individual and ideally used as more of a means to enhance and increase response rates from other marketing channels. If you do, for example, ask for a donation, some of the most effective email appeals have merely asked for a tiny donation, say, for \$3. Rarely is email marketing effective in raising larger gifts or soliciting the purchase of a high-ticket item without a multiple step approach.

How is Response Unlimited different than a typical ad agency or direct mail marketing firm?

Response Unlimited makes available many, if not most, of the services that other agencies or marketing agencies do. But unlike other companies, you are not required to sign any contracts and can utilize only the services you feel you need to assist you in your marketing efforts. Some organizations strictly utilize Response Unlimited's list brokerage services, some only print production brokerage, and some only creative services, whether it be copy-writing, graphic design, or both. Some only use Response Unlimited's list management services, where we promote an organization's own mailing lists, which can result in \$1 to \$3 per name per year, or more, in additional revenue. In so doing, you are charged nothing for list recommendations, strategy, consulting, or just picking the brains of experts. ***The professionals at Response Unlimited are always available for you -- just a phone call away!***

Why use Response Unlimited for list brokerage?

Nobody knows the Christian and conservative list world better than the professionals at Response Unlimited, and their expertise in many other markets are unsurpassed. Simply put, there's a 40-year track record of knowing what lists work, and which don't,

for your specific offer. Response Unlimited is privy to results from hundreds of mailings each year to as many as 50 million individuals.

Chances are, similar appeals have already been tested. By utilizing the professionals at Response Unlimited to recommend and acquire your acquisition lists, you will be significantly reducing the risk factor in selecting mailing lists to test.

What's more, Response Unlimited never marks up the cost of a mailing list over and above the published pricing, as do many other agencies and brokers. You pay the same data card prices that are published, and Response Unlimited is paid strictly from the brokerage discount (usually 20%) it receives as a list broker from the list owner or its manager.

Response Unlimited will always recommend the lists we believe will perform the best for your particular offer, regardless of any profit incentives. It costs you nothing to get a recommendation for your next acquisition mailing. Many companies see immediate dramatic increases in their prospecting results just by switching their list brokerage to Response Unlimited.

Why utilize Response Unlimited for printing and mailing services?

Simply because of the sheer volume, and relationships with many production shops nationwide, Response Unlimited is usually able to secure better pricing on direct mail production and mailing services than a mailer is able to find on their own, all while assuring you the top quality output and service.

Response Unlimited is as much involved in the entire process as you want us to be. Many agencies and direct mail firms automatically build into their pricing (after also receiving commission) hidden "per piece mailing fees" of a few cents per piece of mail, which can dramatically add up. On top of this, their contracts call for monthly consulting fees and other charges, which are not reflected in the costs of individual mailings. With Response Unlimited, you will know exactly what you'll be paying, right up front! There are no hidden fees ever!

Often when companies have us review their previous mailing results, we find they are significantly overpaying for production and mailing -- sometimes double! It costs you nothing to get an extra bid from Response Unlimited!

Why use Response Unlimited for list management services?

As a list manager, Response Unlimited becomes responsible for the promotion and marketing of any list you may wish to make available, being paid a 35% commission, 20% of which is passed on to any broker involved in each transaction. The list owner receives 65%. The list owner maintains control of the mailing list -- approving the frequency and dates of outside rentals, the mailer, and the specific copy or offer. Each rental is for a one-time use, and the list owner controls the terms.

Response Unlimited should be your top choice for a list manager simply because more organizations call Response Unlimited first for their list brokerage, whether they're small or large. Many agencies utilize Response Unlimited as their exclusive broker when it comes to the Christian or conservative target markets. No other company knows these markets better than Response Unlimited! It has been around for longer than any other company serving these markets. Its reputation for generating excellent results for its mailers is second to none!

How do I know which lists will work the best?

This is why it is best to first contact Response Unlimited for all your mailing list needs. The professionals at Response Unlimited work with hundreds of mailers and are privy to knowing which lists work for what types of offers or appeals. They look at things such as making sure, if possible, that you're only mailing known direct mail responsive names, individuals who have recently responded to similar offers, and those who respond with a similar dollar amount as what you are seeking. They will examine the options of certain selects that may

improve your response rate, and may even suggest copy improvement that could boost your response rates dramatically!

If someone responds to my direct mail, do I get to keep that contact even if they don't initially send money?

Yes, you can add anyone to your internal customer or prospect list who responds to your offer from another list. If there was no initial transaction, but it was a positive response, you should be able to convert a large percentage of these people to customers or donors at a lower cost than "cold lists". Add them to your future prospecting or house mail programs until you've picked as much of the low-hanging fruit as makes economic sense. This is one of the reasons many successful donor acquisition mailing programs use "gimmicks", such as surveys and petitions. Not only do such techniques improve overall response rates and increase the number of overall donations acquired, it creates a list of high-end prospects that can be effectively mined regularly for additional donors, and placed on the rental market for even additional revenue.

How many times can I use a rental or exchange list?

A list can only be used one time, unless other arrangements are made with the specific list owner (manager), which Response Unlimited can arrange.

Should I hire a professional to write and design my piece?

Unless you have someone on your staff with considerable experience writing and designing direct mail, it is advisable to hire a qualified direct mail copywriter, and in some circumstances, a separate graphic designer.

When hiring a professional creative team, ask if they've ever created a mailing that has mailed at least a million pieces. If they haven't, don't trust their "experience".

Response Unlimited's creative team has had many

packages that have mailed in the millions of pieces. You can trust the expertise of its writers and designers to dramatically reduce your risk and maximize results. From initial strategy to final copy and design - they know what techniques and tricks will make your offer or appeal stand out, get the needed attention, get opened, and garner a response! The team of experts at Response Unlimited will help you identify your unique selling proposition that will set you apart from other competing mail -- packaged in a benefit oriented manner that will dramatically boost your response rate.

How large a test and how much money do I need to get started?

For a new package, we generally recommend an initial test of 25,000 pieces divided between 5-10 different mailing lists. This will generally cost between \$0.45 to \$0.60 per individual depending on a variety of factors -- whether you're renting or exchanging mailing lists, using regular bulk mail or non-profit postage, and the specifications or components of your specific mailing, which can greatly cause the cost to vary.

It is important to test any new mailing package to multiple lists. Because if you only test one list, and it fails to perform up to expectations, you will have no clue whether it was due to the list being tested, your copy, your offer, your price points, or any combination thereof. If, for example, you tested five lists, and three of the five met or exceeded your expectations, you know that you can continue to mail that package successfully. If all or nearly every list failed to perform, obviously something else beside the list selection was the problem.

Response Unlimited can greatly help you reduce your risk by recommending lists already performing well for other mailers. We'd be happy to review your copy and offer to determine if improvements should be made prior to mailing.

Obviously, the larger the mailing you do, the lower your unit cost will be.

We offer free, insightful consultation for each and every client. Contact us today for a free recommendation at info@responseunlimited.com or give us a call at 540-943-6721.

What kind of response rate can I expect?

Your expected response rate depends on many different factors and will greatly vary based on the uniqueness and strength of your offer or appeal, as well as the ability for you to target a clearly defined market segment. It will also greatly vary based upon the type of appeal/organization or product/offer. For example, it is very rare, unless highly regional, that a charitable or missions fundraising appeal will average more than 1% in transactional responses. However, if it is political in nature, or linked to a broader social issue or societal injustice, or involves human victims of such injustice that can be "righted" with their action -- in addition to their donation -- it can generate a 2%-3% response rate . . . *often more than break-even!* These are the types of opportunities the creative team at Response Unlimited can help you identify.

How do I determine what my target market is?

Unless you're just starting out as an organization, the best way to identify your target market is by looking at your current customer or donor base. What unique beliefs, characteristics, demographics, and buying/giving patterns comprise your current constituency? This does not mean you cannot target other markets as well -- perhaps with a tweaked message or offer!

This is also one reason to enlist the help of professionals like those at Response Unlimited, who have been helping organizations such as yours for 40 years. Often, one is so close to or set in their ways, that it's hard to look beyond the very obvious and identify other opportunities which could launch your efforts to a new stratosphere of success utilizing direct mail.

It's always wise to get another set of eyes to look at your program and results, in order to identify the potential you may be missing.

What is the next step after acquiring a new donor/customer, and how can I cultivate those new contacts?

Very seldom does an acquisition mailing generate a net profit, although a large percentage of companies that use Response Unlimited not just for mailing list selection, but for creative and production/ mailing services, do in fact break even. The average ROI for such Response Unlimited clients is around 91%.

But regardless of whether or not you break even from your acquisition mailing, you immediately need to go to work cultivating those new donors or customers!

Make sure you thank them right away, preferably within 24 hours of receipt of their initial contact with you. This can be with a letter or phone call -- or preferably both! Email can and should be put to immediate use in this regard, but never rely solely on email since the deliverability and read rates are normally pathetically low.

It is imperative you respond to higher dollar transactions, particularly in fundraising, with a phone call from the president or principal of the organization. The goal is to make the person feel special and reinforce the benefits of their involvement with your organization, or the purchase of your product(s).

In fact, this should be the goal and purpose of your entire program of cultivation -- a lifetime relationship between you and them! Make them feel special. Make them your friend. Treat them in a very personal way, and if possible, learn what triggered their initial response (and why), and feed upon that motivation.

Identify those in demographics who have the potential of becoming some of your largest donors/ customers, and pay special attention to building those relationships.

Cultivating a new friend is a step-by-step process, and just like you cultivate personal friendships, use the same methods with these new friends -- letter-writing,

email, phone calls, and maybe even texting. Make them feel very special and wanted. And most of all, cater to their own peculiar needs that first triggered their involvement with your organization!

Don't forget to ask their advice, and keep it a personal one-on-one relationship as much as possible!

What are the most common mistakes made after acquiring a new customer/donor?

The most common mistakes mailers make when using direct mail are:

- *Being too slow at fulfillment*
- *Not thanking a donor or customer immediately*
- *Waiting too long to ask for the second donation or sale*
- *Inadequately having a follow-up and cultivation program in place*

Unless you are prepared for the "back-end", don't even mail!

At times, a new customer or donor may be acquired based on an appeal or sale of a product that differs from the specific mission of the organization, making it almost impossible to create long-term value from that individual.

Should I be mailing lists of contacts in my possession who have never sent us money or haven't done so in the past year or two?

Yes, names and addresses of those you've had contact with, but you've never been able to "close", or those who've "lapsed", may well be your best prospects!

It is best you develop a special program designed to convert these people to customers or donors. This can usually be done at a cost lower than prospect (acquisition) programs. It's advisable that these lists also be treated the same as a prospecting list, and

tested in that manner.

When should I stop mailing a particular name that's on my list?

You should continue to mail internal non-active customers/prospects as long as it makes economic sense to do so. Many organizations treat these internal lists as a prospecting list, so they are tested, or segments of them are tested, for both prospecting and house mailings. You should also consider specifically targeting these individuals with specific programs.

What are the 11 most common reasons for failure in utilizing direct mail?

- 1. Targeting the wrong market** is a common error we see mailers often make. It is always best to narrow your target market as well as it can be finely-tuned.
- 2. Not utilizing direct mail generated mailing lists** when using direct mail for new donors/customer acquisition is a huge mistake! Highly targeted lists that are not direct mail responsive are likely less than par. The reason: there are only two types of individuals -- those who trust and read direct mail and have a history of responding positively, and those who don't. However, if you are using telemarketing for acquisition, try to select telemarketing generated lists. Television and radio generated names also work well for telemarketing acquisition, but direct mail generated names rarely works well for telemarketing.
- 3. Failure to get your carrier envelope opened** and your letter read is a very common mistake! *A writer should spend as much time working on the strategy and copy for a carrier envelope as he does on all the other components of a mail package combined.* The carrier must entice the reader to open the envelope. The letter superscript and opening three or four words must entice the reader to continue on. To effectively accomplish these purposes, you must

incite curiosity, make a promise, present with a unique benefit, or provide intriguing facts to be continued inside and throughout the letter. Don't "spill all your beans" on the carrier or in the opening of your letter -- they must have a reason to read on!

- 4. Failure to write in a way that appeals to the reader.** Unless you are appealing to a highly technological or educated audience with a message where you're required to impress them with knowledge to close a sale, always write, if possible, at an 8th grade level. Try to avoid sentences more than seven words long and words more than three syllables. Always write in the first person singular as if you are only addressing one reader (technically, you are!). Avoid paragraphs more than five, and definitely more than seven lines long. Never end a page with the end of a sentence -- always force the reader to go on to the next page to complete a thought! Use everyday, common language and never be pedant. Make your copy flow by using connecting words at the beginning of each paragraph, such as "And", "But", "So you see", "But that's not all", "That's because", etc. Edit out unnecessary words such as "that".
- 5. Making your letter too short!** Unless the reader is very familiar with your organization or product already, take as much space or length necessary to close the sale or get the donation. Never second-guess that the recipient already knows who you are. Leave no stone unturned! Answer every objection a reader might be able to conjure up to not respond to you! Stress the benefits to the reader and explain why it will be to their detriment not to respond. Utilize their emotions of guilt, greed, sense of living, altruism, self fulfillment, etc. Yet do not make your letter redundant. Qualify your reader from the onset and convince him/her of the qualifications of why you're the one writing them. Do not be afraid of a long letter! More often than not, unless your organization is a household name, a longer letter will outperform a shorter one. Don't be afraid of an 8, 10, or 12 page letter (or longer) if that's what it takes to close the sale -- particularly for a large

dollar transaction or donation!

- 6. Using the word "we" rather than "you" is a big mistake!** Write from the perspective of the benefit to the reader. People care about "what's in it for me." Other than establishing credibility, trustworthiness or answering objections -- don't dwell upon you or your organization. Always edit out every incidence of "we" in your copy, and replace it with the word "you" if possible. In fact, always use "you" rather than "we." The stranger you are writing really doesn't care anything about the writer, other than your credibility -- unless you are working from the perspective of a victim.
- 7. Using additional inserts that distract from the letter can destroy the response rate.** Simply put, every component of a mail package must stand on its own, stressing all the benefits to the potential customer or reader. But unless a component is absolutely necessary to back up or confirm what is said in the letter (such as testimonials, graphs, photos, etc.), it is always best to include those things in the text of the letter or include them on the reply form. Every insert outside of the letter has a potential to distract, which could be the death-knell of your letter. Time and time again we've tested mailing with and without a brochure, and nearly always the mailing without a brochure out-pulls the one with a brochure -- usually significantly! Each component, including the reply mechanism, must force the reader to read the letter -- the purpose of which is to close the sale or get the donation. It should take the place of you personally visiting the recipient, sitting down on their couch, and walking away with a sale or donation.
- 8. Not distinguishing yourself adequately from the competition.** Assume someone is already supporting a similar cause as yours, or subscribing to a similar periodical, or purchasing a similar product. What is the unique benefit(s) (not features) that sets you and your product or need apart from the competition? This is particularly true if a lot of organizations offer what you offer. You've got to set yourself apart from

the pack. Why are you better? Be sure to "sell the sizzle, and not the steak!"

- 9. Not using the best signer for your mailer.** Give a lot of thought to who should sign your mail. Don't assume it should be someone within your organization. Consider someone outside who is a well-known person who people know and respect. If such a "celebrity" signer can't be had, try an expert in the field or topic you are writing about. Also, if it makes sense, consider writing under the signature of a victim -- which will often outperform any other signer.
- 10. Mailing at the wrong time.** In acquisition, mailing between Thanksgiving and Christmas, or right in the midst of a major political campaign, can absolutely kill response, unless is it related to those holidays or campaign. If it is, be sure you mail early enough, considering post office delays.
- 11. Asking too little.** If you need a certain average donation, of \$35, for example, don't ask for anything less!

Why should I consider renting or exchanging my list, and what are the benefits?

There are multiple reasons to make your own list available. The foremost reason is the additional revenue you can generate from renting your list. You set the parameters of who can use it and for what offer. You approve each use of your list and the exact offer. You do not need to rent to competitive mailers or for competitive appeals.

But an active, direct mail generated mailing list can easily generate between \$1 to \$3 net to you, per name, per year, or more. In other words, say you have a list of 25,000 last 18 months direct mail generated names. *That could easily result in as much as \$75,000 in annual income you are not getting!*

What's more, many lists owners will not make their lists available to companies which do not reciprocate, keeping you from accessing the very best lists on the market. Other lists are only available on exchange.

Many list owners falsely fear that by renting their

list it will adversely affect the results from their own mailings. However, studies show the opposite happens. The more the people on your list become accustomed to the positive benefits of direct mail, the more direct mail responsive they'll be to your own appeals.

You, as a list owner, can also block out specific dates so no individual can mail when you're mailing, and limit the number of times their list is rented or exchanged. You, the list owner, call the shots!

Lastly, there is the biblical principle of ownership. What we have really belongs to God, and we should not be selfish with what God has entrusted to us. Besides there are many great products, publications, and causes other than yours that your constituency can benefit from. Why deny them knowledge of these great offers? Contact Response Unlimited to learn more!

In this day and age with transactional data on every consumer reaching the billions, your donor or customer's name is already being rented, with someone else reaping the benefits. Why not reap the benefits and serve those individuals yourself! If public relations is something to consider, a pseudonym, if necessary, is always an option!

How do I keep people from stealing my names?

Unless exceptions are made in advance, a rental or exchanged list can only be mailed or used one time. A list manager, such as Response Unlimited, will include a number of "seed" names and addresses in each rental of your list and carefully monitor the mail to ensure no misuse of the list takes place. We also encourage list owners themselves to provide us with additional "seed" names to include. It's very, very rare, but if a mailer uses your list more than once, we'll find out!

How do I calculate creative costs into my mailing costs?

When hiring a professional to create your acquisition mailing, remember that those costs are a fixed cost, not a variable cost. When paying a flat fee to have an effective prospect mailing created, that same basic package can be mailed dozens of times to hundreds

of thousands or even millions of recipients. So those creative costs must be extrapolated to the entire number of people eventually receiving that mailing, not just the initial test, or it will radically skew your cost/revenue analysis.

When is the best time to mail?

Every organization is different, but for new donor acquisition, it is best to avoid mailing between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and in the month to six weeks leading up to a major political campaign. There are exceptions to this rule of thumb, however. Our experience also sometimes shows a slight decline during summer vacation time, but that is not a consistent conclusion as it seems some years response rates can peak during July and August. It is also wise to use news cycles to your advantage. In other words, if an issue is predominantly in the news and your appeal relates, *you should be in the mail!*

If you are selling a product that can be given as a gift at Christmas, start early -- probably in September -- and continue mailing until you are no longer able to fulfill by Christmas. The last thing you want is to get a lot of first-time customers angry because you cannot meet the Christmas deadline!

How can I increase my bottom line by changing my offer?

Often there are changes you can make to your offer which can dramatically improve your average sale or dramatically boost the future value of each new customer. For example, an opt-out program to automatically ship a consumable product, or continuity program or club where your customer automatically receives product from you every 6 to 8 weeks. Or try volume discounts, multi-year subscription discounts, and more! Often testing various price points can prove worthwhile -- and a lower price point doesn't always produce the best response rate due to a phenomenon of perceived value. ***Test, test, and test again, until you come up with the right offer!***

This also proves true for fundraising. You get what you ask for. In other words, if you ask for a \$10 donation, your average gift will be around or slightly more

than \$10. It's very difficult to succeed in new donor acquisition with a \$10 or even \$20 gift. You need to be trying different techniques to boost your average gift, and this is one of the most effective uses for premiums. Just asking for a higher amount helps!

However, be careful using front-end premiums or promising to send a premium for any size gift. Those new donors may never respond again to you unless you offer them another premium each time you ask them for another donation.

When does it make sense to mail to a compiled list?

Normally using a compiled list makes sense only when targeting a very tiny geographical area requiring very specific demographics or if there are direct-mail responsive lists available matching your target market.

Do I need to pay for a rental name if the person is already on my list?

A "net name" arrangement, whereby credit can be secured for names of people who are already your donors or customers, is common but must be secured at the time you place your order. You can also obtain such arrangements for a name on multiple lists, something referred to as a "multi" or arrange at time of order to re-mail those multis on a future date.

Normally, industry standards dictate that a mailer must pay for at least 85% of the names ordered, and proof of duplication (a merge-purge report) must be provided prior to taking the discount. There are normally no net name arrangements for a list order of under 25,000 names and addresses unless permission is obtained in advance.

"Nixies" (or unmailable names eliminated in the hygiene process), can be credited as well, no matter the size of your list order.

Should I be mailing nationally or regionally?

This depends on whether your target market is national or local, or if you are charity or nonprofit with a local outreach. As a rule of thumb, it's always best to try to regionalize your message, if it makes sense, even when you normally mail nationally. But rarely does it make sense for a nonprofit with a local outreach to mail nationally.

I have a business with "brick and mortar" stores. How can I use direct mail to grow my business?

Direct mail can be used in many different ways to drive traffic to local stores. You can advertise sales, time-sensitive offers, contests, special events, send discount coupons and more! If you've got a unique or niche product, you can utilize direct mail to sell direct to consumers outside your geographical area. What's so great about direct mail is you can target exactly the demographics or interests that match those customers representing your greatest potential, or do saturation mailings into specific neighborhoods.

When does it make sense not to ask for an immediate sale?

When you've got a high-ticket product or service, or maybe you're looking for a long-term contract, it may be best to first generate a qualified lead using direct mail, and then follow up with a sales call or a phone call. These multi-step approaches can be tested compared to a one step approach, where you attempt to close the sale through an extensive sales letter, versus a more brief approach.

Various methods can be used to qualify your leads so you aren't spending resources trying to sell those who simply cannot purchase. This can be done by better fine-tuning list selections or modifying your copy.

Interested in hiring an expert? Contact us at info@responseunlimited.com or give us a call at **540-943-6721** and let us help you grow your organization!

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Helping You Change the World by Growing Your Organization . . .

- **List Brokerage** - Finding the right people - providing you with the best return on your investment.
- **Copywriting** - Professional and creative direct mail copywriting with proven results - at a reasonable cost.
- **Design Services** - Professional design - to help convey your message.
- **List Management** - Marketing your list to other groups - increase your revenue by just saying "Yes!"
- **Print Brokerage** - Highest quality printers - lowest possible prices.
- **List Hygiene** - Increase your deliverability - stop wasting money sending to bad addresses.
- **Data Enhancement** - Append critical info about your donors, customers or subscribers - making your mailings better.

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