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# THE DONOR JOURNEY

A Workshop to Optimize Direct Mail Fundraising  
Presented by: Mile19 Marketing

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## THE IDEA

Donate to over 100 nonprofit organizations (as both a general donor and a mid-level donor) and track our donor experience for 120 days.

How do our clients stack up?

REFERENCE N°

123.456.789



- 1 \$28,400 to 108 ORGS**  
\$50 gifts to 88 orgs (general donors)  
\$1,200 gifts to 20 orgs (mid-level donors)
- 2 120 DAY EXPERIMENT**  
All gifts mailed on the same day via “white mail” or ACH
- 3 A VARIETY OF MISSIONS**  
Large & small: animal rescues, health care, faith-based, food banks, education, etc.
- 4 ACCURATE TRACKING**  
We used a pseudonym to be able to accurately track what mail is associated with what gift

# WHAT DID WE TRACK?



## RECEIPTING

Did we receive a receipt?

How long did it take?

Were we given an easy way to give again?



## THANK YOU

Did we receive a thank you?

How long did it take?

What kind of Thank you?



## APPEALS

How soon did we receive our first appeal?

What is the typical cadence?

Anything noteworthy in creative?



## NEWSLETTERS

Cadence of newsletters?

How many pages?

Do they contain an ask?



## ACQUISITION

How soon was my name sold?

What kinds of packages are being sent?

# RECEIPTING

“The donor is the hero” is a basic principle in direct mail fundraising.

Receipting is the first step in the journey where the donor is acknowledged.

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# RECEIPTING BASICS

- Acknowledgement of the gift
- Timing before appeals
- Additional ways to give



# RECEIPTING

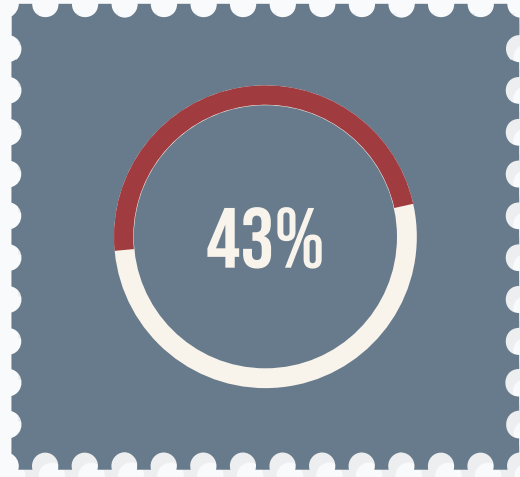


**GENERAL DONOR**  
Of the 88 donations  
made, 44 orgs sent a  
receipt



**MID-LEVEL DONOR**  
Of the 20 donations  
made, 10 orgs sent a  
receipt

# RECEIPTING



## GRADING ON A CURVE

If we add in the 8 orgs that didn't send a receipt but *did* send a thank you (at least acknowledging the gift) that means **43% of orgs made no acknowledgement at all.**

*Imagine giving someone \$1,200 and not having the courtesy to even say "I have received your gift."*



# RECEIPTING



## SALT IN THE WOUND

Of the 46 orgs that never acknowledged our gift, 16 put us in their mail file and our first correspondence from them was an appeal asking for more money!

# RECEIPTING



## MAKE IT EASY TO GIVE AGAIN

Of the 108 orgs we gave to,  
only 54 sent a receipt.

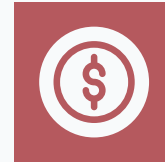
Of those 54,  
only 11 gave us an easy  
way to give again.

# OPTIMIZE RECEIPTING



## **TIMELY**

Send a receipt acknowledgement between 7 and 30 days of the gift



## **HELP ME GIVE AGAIN**

Simply including a return envelope in the receipt letter allows donors an easy way to give again

# A RECENT TEST:



## Client A:

- Started receipting in November 2021
- Is currently netting positive
- Long term impact on new donor retention is hopeful

## Client B:

- In past years, the year-end receipt did not have a way to give
- By including a return envelope, it generates \$90-\$100k per year on a file of 25,000 donors



# THANK YOU

A thoughtful thank you for a gift that has been given - is basic human manners.

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# THANK YOU BASICS

- Acknowledgement of the gift
- The donor is the hero
- Make it personal



# THANK YOU | GENERAL DONOR



Of the 88 donations made, 18 orgs sent a thank you of some kind (20%)

- 12 Thank you cards
- 3 personalized form letters/postcards
- 1 phone call
- 2 emails



**70 orgs sent no thank you of any kind!**

# THANK YOU | MID-LEVEL DONOR



Of the 20 donations made, 10 orgs sent a thank you of some kind (50%)

- 7 handwritten cards
- 1 personalized form letter
- 1 phone call
- 1 email



**10 orgs sent no thank you of any kind!**



# THANK YOU

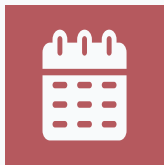


## SALT IN THE WOUND

Of the 108 orgs we gave to, 16 sent no receipt and no thank you of any kind - ***yet began sending appeals asking for more gifts.***

Of the 108 orgs we gave to, 25 sent no receipt and no thank you of any kind - and additionally ***have never sent any follow up mail at all.***

# OPTIMIZE THANK YOU MAILINGS



## **TIMELY**

Send a thank you acknowledgement between 7 and 30 days of the gift



## **PERSONAL**

The more personal the touch, the more authentic and genuine it feels

# A RECENT TEST:



## Client A:

- Sends a yearly thank you mailing every January (without an ask, but does include a return envelope)
- By adding a donor survey, they quadrupled results
- By adding a “freemium” those results grew again by an additional 25%

# APPEALS

Appeals that work well are like fruits  
and vegetables:

Fresh is best.

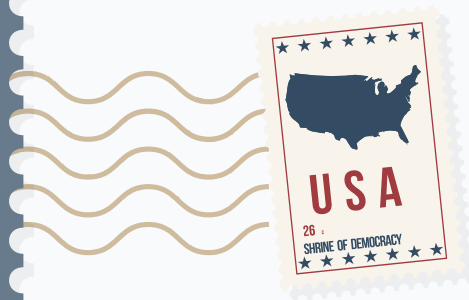


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## TAKEAWAY #1

Timing  
is everything...



## TAKEAWAY #2

Think outside  
the box a bit!



## GENERAL DONOR STATS

- 8 out of 88 orgs sent the first appeal within 30 days
- 9 out of 88 orgs sent the first appeal in 60 days
- 15 of 88 orgs sent their first appeal in 90 days
- 21 of 88 orgs haven't sent any appeals



## MID-LEVEL DONOR STATS

- 1 out of 20 orgs sent the first appeal within 30 days
- 3 out of 20 orgs sent the first appeal in 60 days
- 4 of 20 orgs sent their first appeal in 90 days
- 4 of 20 orgs haven't sent any appeals



## CADENCE OF APPEALS

- 18 out of 108 orgs mail at least 1 appeal every 30 days
- 14 orgs mailed both an appeal and a newsletter in the same months
- 13 orgs regularly mailed more than 1 appeal per month
- 3 orgs mailed 3-4 appeals *per month*



# WAYS TO OPTIMIZE APPEALS



## VARIABLE COPY

As much as possible, use variable copy. This personalizes the mail and encourages the reader to keep reading



## BE BRIGHT

We saw a lot of green and brightly colored packages. This stands out against the oodles of white #10 envelopes



## INTERESTING INSERTS

Among the dozens and dozens of buckslips, we only saw a handful of inserts that were different and eye catching



## AVOID TEMPLATES

It's already hard enough to stand out in a stack of mail, don't do yourself a disservice of buying a template that a dozen other orgs are already using

# WAYS TO OPTIMIZE APPEALS



**It's hard to get noticed  
If you're always just following the crowd...**

# RECENT TESTS:



## Surprises:

- 5 arrays vs 3 arrays (3 arrays boosted response by 9%)
- Using ask arrays vs. an open ask in a sustainer recruitment package, boosted response by 65%
- Blind outer envelopes have been long thought to create intrigue and boost response -- two recent tests have proved the opposite

# NEWSLETTERS

Our hero the donor loves to get a report back on what their dollars are hard at work doing.

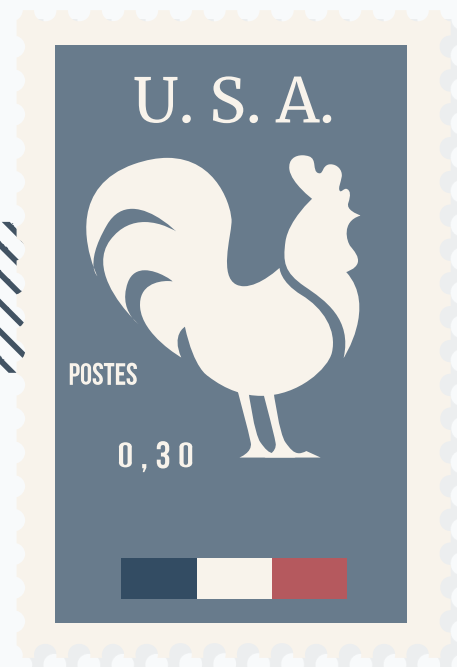
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## GENERAL DONORS

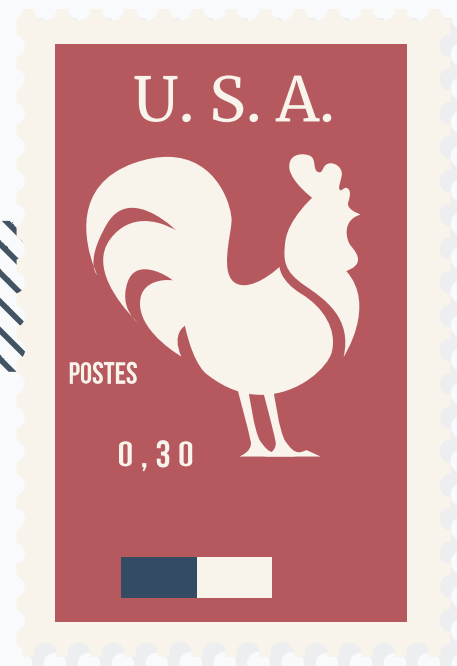
- 19 of 88 are sending newsletters
- 8 in the first 30 days
- 6 in the first 60 days
- 5 in the first 90 days
- 69 out of 88 have not sent a newsletter at all





## MID-LEVEL DONORS

- 3 of 20 are sending newsletters
- 1 in the first 30 days
- 2 in the first 60 days
- 17 out of 20 have not sent a newsletter at all



# NEWSLETTER SIZE & ASK



100% included an ask and/or a way to give in reply.

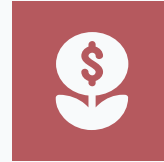
- 14 use a 4 page format
- 1 uses a 6 page format
- 1 uses an 8 page format
- 3 use more than 8 pages
- 1 uses a 6x9
- 2 use an 8 ½ x 11 folded sheet

# OPTIMIZE NEWSLETTERS



## QUARTERLY

At least once a quarter, donors should receive feedback on what their gifts are doing



## MAKE THE ASK

If you don't ask, the answer will always be no



# RECENT TESTS:



## Surprises:

- Adding a cover letter to the newsletter vs. a simple single panel reply, lifted response by 15%
- Personalized ask arrays vs. static asks lifted response by 19% and average gift by 46%
- 16pg newsletter vs 12pg newsletter is not winning in YoY comparison

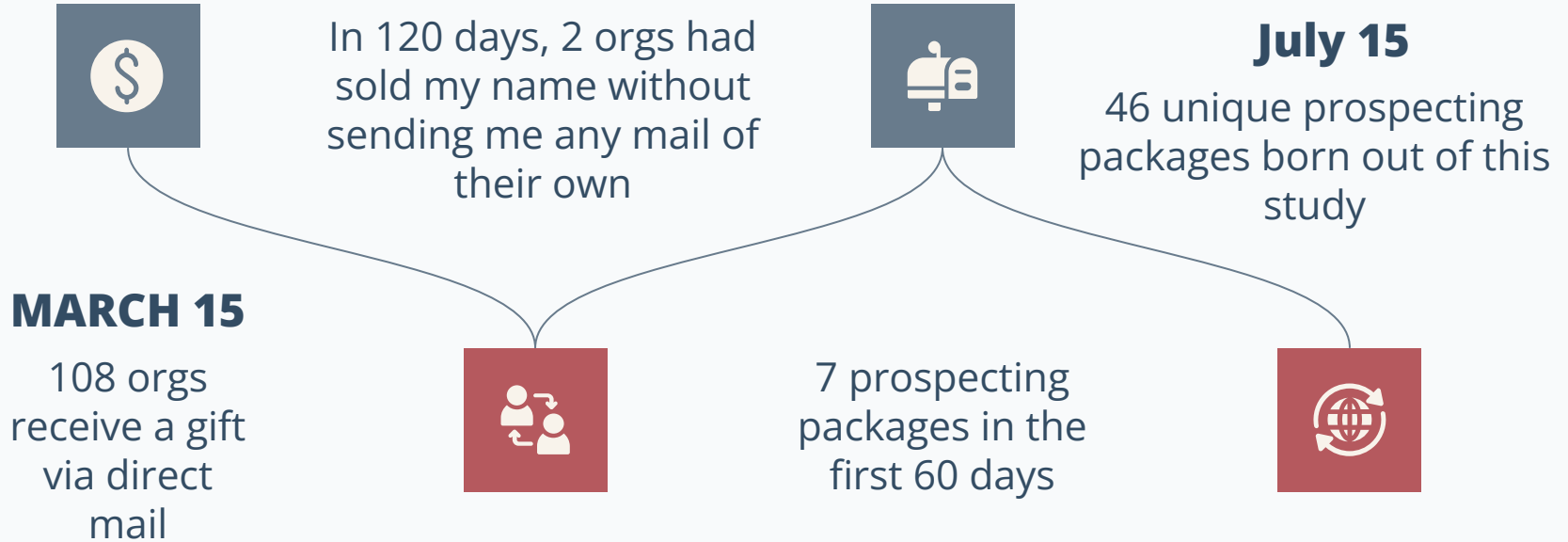
# ACQUISITION

Who's selling my name?

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# ACQUISITION





## ACQUISITION STATS

- 18 of 46 packages had a “freemium”
- 3 had a survey/petition engagement device
- 5 had some sort of currency in them
- 20 were letter only

# TIPS TO OPTIMIZE PROSPECTING



## **THOUGHTFUL BOUNCEBACK**

Bouncebacks are tried and true engagement devices, but be careful to make a concrete connection with the donor as how this item “helps” the cause



## **BE CREATIVE**

Mailboxes are jammed with cries for help, be creative and grab the donors attention. Avoid gimmicks, be relevant to the cause.



## **MONEY IN MONEY OUT**

Be careful sending money/coins in the mail. Test this package as its highly expensive and can turn donors off.



## **BIG NAMES ARE TRENDY**

Famous names are trending right now and are attention grabbing. This is the direct mail version of networking at a swanky party!

# CURRENT WINNERS:



- Address Labels (currently receiving a 1:1 ROI)
- Survey
- Creative Insert and Bounceback
- Co-ops (cooperative database) are winning across the board

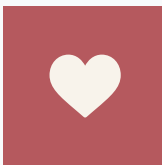
# FINAL TAKEAWAYS

“The donor is the hero” is a basic principle in direct mail fundraising.

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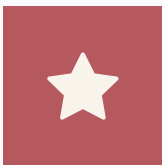
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# THINGS TO REMEMBER



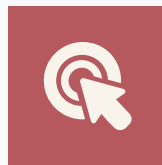
## **GOOD MANNERS**

Show your donors gratitude by receipting, thank yous and report backs



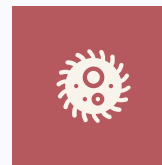
## **BE ORIGINAL**

Test your way into new and creative packages. You don't know what's broken if you don't test it.



## **CROSS CHANNELS**

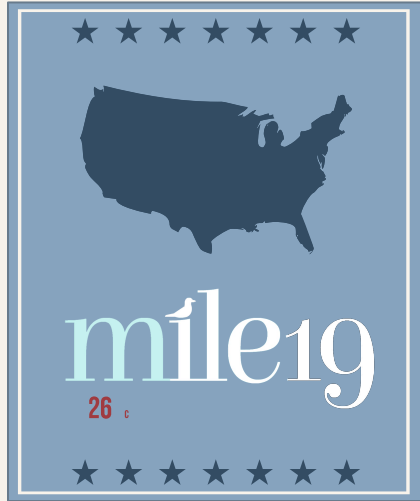
7 of the 108 orgs sent us emails after our donation. Its a digital world we live in!



## **DATA HYGIENE**

Data hygiene is foundational to the donor journey





# THANKS!

**Do you have any questions?**

[info@mile19marketing.com](mailto:info@mile19marketing.com)

