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In This Issue:

Direct Mail Copywriting,
Part Two

The Celebrity Auction

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The Grassroots Fundraising Journal is happy to consider articles for publication. Please submit copy typed, double-spaced. If computer-generated, please submit highest quality printing possible (no dot matrix printouts, please). Please do not submit material typed in all capital letters.

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The Art and Science of Direct Mail Copywriting: Part Two

By Richard G. Ensman, Jr.

Part one of "The Art and Science of Direct Mail Copywriting" covered direct mail basics and preparing the appeal letter. But there's more to a direct mail fund raising package than a letter. This section tells you what to do once you've written a good letter. This is the second part of a two-part series.

Besides the appeal letter, most direct mail fund raising packages contain four additional elements: a brochure (sometimes called a "motivator"), a response device, an exterior envelope, and a donor reply envelope.

The Exterior Envelope

The exterior envelope physically carries the appeal to the reader. Since there are various practical and legal limitations on the size and shape of mail, you have a limited number of envelope design variations available.

Most appeal envelopes are sized number 10—standard business-sized envelopes. A fund raiser can certainly use a smaller envelope—a number 7 or number 6¾, for instance—but because many of the inside materials you'll develop will be large or lengthy, you'd have to adapt them to fit a special envelope format at great cost and effort.

Most exterior envelopes have a very simple layout. Some agencies use their regular business envelope for the direct mail fund raising piece. If the appeal letter contains a fund raising theme or a special logo, the envelope should also contain this. A few agencies have recently experimented with changes in the return address on the exterior envelope: for example, using the name and address of the individual signing the letter on behalf of the agency in place of the agency's name in the return address section.

Color and teaser copy is being used more frequently. "Teaser copy" is the "invitation" on the face of the envelope urging the reader to explore further. An example: "Your action in the next two minutes may save the life of a child . . ." or, "If you DON'T care about our country's natural resources, DON'T open this envelope." Colored envelopes are used for the same reason: who, after all, wouldn't want to open a bright yellow envelope arriving in the morning's mail? Sometimes teaser copy and color envelopes produce higher-than-normal results. Sometimes they have no effect. Occasionally, they depress results. Testing is the only way to determine their affect on your own appeal.

Most organizations still use a standard bulk mail indicia. Yes, big donors often receive a special letter with a first class stamp on the envelope. And they should. A few organizations have even tried using first class stamps on all appeal envelopes. Stamps supposedly create a personalized effect, but they are expensive. Using first class stamps can double the cost of an appeal. Is it worth it? Only if the extra cost motivates donors to give more.

It is possible to have a piece of both worlds: the U.S. Postal Service does carry "bulk mail" stamps, which can be affixed on envelopes instead of an indicia. It's a lot of work and a lot of licking, but if stamps are important, they can be used cheaply on a bulk mail basis.

Like appeal letters, envelopes can be purchased and printed very inexpensively. As most direct mail fund raisers know, however, there's a great variation among printers on envelope

A reader may march through pages of heavy text or peruse a brochure containing hundreds of statistics only to throw away a "cluttered" response card. The response card is the reader's only way to take action on the appeal. The reader should know exactly what to do the minute the card comes into view.

prices. Number 10s printed with simple copy can run from \$15 to \$45 per thousand. The secret of low prices? Print in large quantities and find a printer specializing in envelopes. Most large cities have a few. Yes, this means part of the appeal will be printed by one company and the envelopes by another. But the cost savings will be dramatic.

Response Devices

A "response device" really isn't a "device" at all; it's a sheet of paper—or a combination of sheets of paper—cut and formatted to make it easy for the donor to fill out and return.

The "classic" response device is a stiff card, about 8½ × 3½ inches. This size card fits snugly into a number 10 envelope. Other size cards can be used if the appeal is carried in other than number 10 envelopes. Also, some mailers are experimenting with a pre-printed donor receipt, 8½ × 7-inch cards folded over once, giving them more copy space.

The combination reply envelope/response card has been around for a while, yet it's not used extensively. You've seen

the combos: Number 6¾ (check-size envelopes) with a long flap on the back. Imprinted on the underside of the flap is information about the appeal and giving options. The reader doesn't have to refer to a separate response card for this information; he or she just marks the appropriate donation level on the flap, places a check in the envelope, licks the envelope, and deposits it in the mail.

Names and addresses of the prospective donors are almost always imprinted on the response device. Whether it's done by hand, addressograph, or computer, names and addresses almost always appear on the device. Since the response card is usually the first item in the direct mail package, the name and address typically appear inside the glassine portion of the number 10 exterior window envelope. This allows the mailer to address both the response card and the entire package once. Pre-printed names on the response card almost always increase fund raising returns.

The appearance of the response card is crucial. A reader may march through pages of heavy text or peruse a brochure containing hundreds of statistics only to throw away a "cluttered" response card. Remember: *the response card is the reader's only way to take action on the appeal.* The card should have lots of "open" or "white" space, with any text concentrated in the right corner, away from the prime visual focus on the card which should enumerate ways to give. Giving options should be highlighted; the reader should know *exactly* what to do the minute the card comes into view. And remember: some readers may be bored by the appeal by the time they get to the response card, so the open, breezy "look" of the card becomes important in renewing their interest in giving.

The content of the response device should conform to the content of the appeal letter. If the appeal letter urges the reader to "send \$10 to feed a hungry child," the response card should begin with a reference to "feeding a hungry child." Giving options might begin at \$10. A small photo reinforcing the copy might appear in the corner of the card. And if the appeal has a theme or logo, this should be placed at the top or upper right hand corner of the card.

About typefaces and colors. Generally, response devices should be "middle of the road" in style of type and choice of color. Since space is limited, a clean, easy-to-read sans serif typeface often works best. Any titles or headlines should be proportionate to the size of the card: larger than whatever text is contained, but never occupying the equivalent of more than three lines of ordinary type. Color? It need not be stark white, but the color of the device should complement the color of the envelopes, the brochure, and the appeal letter.

Motivational material often increases response card effectiveness. Small photos or illustrations of clients' needs

help sell your appeal. So do brief descriptions of items or services that gifts will buy. For instance: "\$25 will buy a year's supply of bandages for our Asian hospital . . ." If a foundation or corporation has offered to match donor gifts, say so. Nothing motivates donors more than to know their gifts will double in value as a result of someone else's actions. Always note if gifts are tax-deductible.

Finally, in this age of accountability, a brief note inviting readers to request your annual report and financial statement might work wonders. No one has ever tested the value of such a note on a response card, but put yourself in the position of a skeptical donor: a short note promising accountability is reassuring and inviting. One caution: some states require that response devices offer financial statements to prospective donors. If your state is among them, be sure you include such an invitation.

Reader involvement in the response card stimulates contributions. To involve the reader, you can place checkmark boxes next to donor levels. Or invite readers to sign their names at the bottom of response cards. These simple techniques help personalize the giving process. Some agencies even invite donors to write notes to clients along with their gifts, express their views on events of the day, or even make comments about the organization's services.

Unusual giving options can be offered via response devices. A few charitable organizations, for example, have offered credit card donation plans on their response cards. It's easy to make such an arrangement with your local bank. In return for a small percentage of charges (between 3% and 5% for most nonprofits) you can have your own credit card "merchant number" and accept donation charges anytime. Is this worthwhile? Only if the practice results in significant gift increases.

Some organizations use the response card to solicit pledges or build restricted support for a particular program. In other cases, response devices contain freewill "covenants" expressing the donor's intention to join a monthly giving club. Pledges, of course, mean extra record keeping and billing.

Because response devices may involve extra design work and heavy stock paper, expect to pay at least \$30 to \$50 per thousand for this element of your direct mail package.

Reply Envelopes

Reply envelopes allow the donor to drop a check or money order in the nearest mailbox without having to address an envelope of their own. Some reply envelopes are postpaid, allowing donors to mail a gift without bothering about postage. Although a few fund raisers insist that postpaid business reply envelopes (BREs) are little more than an

institutionalized custom, these devices generally increase the number of contributions received in an appeal.

Remember: when John Jones receives a direct mail appeal, he's got to make lots of decisions. He's got to decide to keep the appeal out of the wastebasket once it's received. Then, he's got to decide to open it and read it. Next, he must ponder his ability to make a gift and then decide to do so. Next, he must get his checkbook and the response card. He must write the check and place it in an envelope. Sounds simple, but everything you do to make it easier for John Jones to give will increase the likelihood of your appeal's success. Postpaid reply envelopes carry a subtle message: "Here . . . just insert your gift and drop it in the mail. We want to make it easy for you to help. . . ."

Appearance is simple. The typical BRE is a number 9 or number 6¾ envelope, imprinted with the U.S. Postal Service's BRE indicia. Always consult the postal service before printing BREs; improperly designed envelopes will not be delivered. The postal service makes BRE permits available for a nominal annual fee and will gladly provide envelope proofs—containing a "Facing Identification" bar code—for your printer.

Little experimentation has been done with BRE formats. While the postal service prescribes the general BRE format, individual mailers can choose their own envelope typefaces and colors. Will warm colors increase the size and frequency of contributions? Will conservative typefaces increase or depress contributions? Only testing can yield an answer, and not much testing has been done.

Reply envelopes should be purchased and printed along with exterior envelopes. Printers will charge between \$15 and \$40 per thousand envelopes, depending on quantity purchased.

***Don't forget the
principle of contrast.
. . . If your appeal letter
is very warm,
throw some statistical
material in the brochure.***

Brochures

The last element of most direct mail pieces is the brochure—the “accent piece” or “motivator.” This item attempts to highlight a particular feature of your program or agency. Usually, the brochure attempts to provide contrast between the thrust of the appeal letter and the image your prospective donor may have of your organization’s work. Let’s suppose, for instance, that your appeal speaks with great emotion and warmth of the needs of homeless youth in your city. The letter asks readers for personal commitment—and financial sacrifice—in the hope of solving the problem. Some readers will want more information about the need: What do public policy sources say about homeless youth? Are statistics available to define the problem further? How many clients are you serving now? How many do you anticipate serving in the next year? Where and how does the agency serve youth? The appeal may well have created an emotional tone, a sense of deep human concern toward the needs of homeless youth, but the brochure portrays the agency as competent, incisive, and deliberative.

Formats vary—and creativity is king. The quality of brochures and motivators has improved over the last decade; no longer are three-fold picture-and-text stories the norm. Direct mail brochures come in all shapes and sizes, limited only by the size of the exterior envelope. But that’s not all. Some mailers have even disregarded the traditional brochure entirely and used newspaper reprints to tell their stories. Or mini photo albums. Or small agency-sized scrapbooks. Or material composed by agency clients in their own handwriting. A few mailers have even enclosed mass-produced phonograph records containing the voices of clients or board members. The possibilities are limitless.

Don’t forget the principle of contrast. If most of the appeal is text-oriented, include some strong graphics in the brochure. If your appeal letter is very warm, throw some statistical material in the brochure. If the rest of the appeal is printed in bright colors and on bright paper, keep the brochure simple, conservative, and classic. A brochure or motivator is rather like “another side” of your appeal for funds. Like a person, an appeal can be calculating, warm, funny, concise, visionary, or even disturbing. And, like a person, an appeal can reflect another side, full of complementary qualities. Let these qualities show through in your brochure.

The brochure may become a keepsake, so write with an eye toward your permanent audience. Brochures are not personal letters. They end up on coffee tables and bedroom night stands. Don’t hesitate to write two or three drafts for this important mailing piece; make it a little formal, a little classy. Its distribution will extend far beyond your initial audience.

Visually, print quality should be tops. Brochures are usually typeset, not produced on the office typewriter. Photos or illustrations should be pasted up perfectly and adequate white space should surround copy on every page or leaf of the brochure.

Assume your reader knows nothing about your cause or organization. Even if a reader is heavily involved in the affairs of your agency, chances are there’s something he or she doesn’t know. Talk about some of the basics in your brochure—where your agency is located, how many people are on staff, how many volunteers contribute their time, what qualifications you have for dealing with a particular issue, how many people you’re serving. Don’t forget to mention unusual or unique features of the organization—special kinds of service, special annual events, commendations, awards, and other public recognition.

Some of the brochures may very well end up in the hands of people who will learn about your organization for the first time. So tell your complete story and put your best foot forward.

Keep your copy lively. Your writing may not be as chatty and informal in your brochure as in your direct mail letter, but it should still be interesting. Remember the imaginary critic sitting in front of you? Imagine that he or she is sitting down in a quiet living room, about to read your copy. What would you want this person to know about your agency? What exactly would hold this critic’s interest. Keep each idea to a few sentences, use active voice, and hold off on fancy, colorful adjectives. If you like, try writing the first draft of your copy in story form:

It all began some fifty years ago in a small barn. Six men and three women—all concerned residents of the Lewiston neighborhood—gathered together to talk about youth. And the Lewiston Youth Center was born.

Use action photographs in your brochure. One or two photos of your building, staff, or equipment won’t convey a strong message to your readers. But shots of youth playing basketball (maybe catching a strained expression on a player’s face as the basketball rebounds), senior adults operating complex machinery, or young adults engaged in job training, might do it. Don’t forget to add a little novelty to the photos—something that will catch and hold attention. How about, for instance, a photo of a group of senior adults playing kickball? Or a photo of teenagers helping disabled children learn to swim?

Remember: pictures should show people doing something. Be sure you capture action, vibrancy, and image in your camera—and transmit these views to your readers on the printed page.

If you must use statistical material, combine it with interesting graphics. Let's say you're about to use a photograph of a child petting a deer for a local zoo fund raising campaign. You could include statistics on children's zoo field trips underneath the photo. Or you can combine statistical material with narrative:

It doesn't seem possible that CityArts is serving so many people. Five years ago, 27 clients joined the rehabilitative arts program. The next year, 39 clients joined. This year, 67 clients are participating. CityArts has grown over the past five years: from 6,000 client contact hours five years ago to 65,000 client contact hours today.

Consider premiums as an incentive, but don't jump on the premium bandwagon. Some groups will include a small gift in their direct mail pieces, either in place of, or in addition to, a brochure. The gift might be a small booklet, a medallion, a plaque, a pen, a bag of seeds, a tiny photograph, a set of name-and-address labels, or any one of hundreds of other premium possibilities. Premiums are, in theory, supposed to build a spirit of gratitude on the part of the donor—resulting in higher gift levels. Sometimes things work out this way, sometimes not. Fund raisers know, however, that premium programs can be expensive—even doubling the cost of a direct mail piece. And once premiums become a fund raising “staple,” some donors may become “premium-bound,” expecting a small gift every time they receive an appeal.

Fund raisers also know that some donors will usually question the value and propriety of premiums. If tiny gold-plated pencils are included in a mail appeal, for instance, donors might wonder whether the soliciting agency really needs their help.

- If you want to give donors something, but don't want to spend money, aim for a symbolic premium. One agency included tiny bits of tar-coated shingles in an appeal for a new roof. Another enclosed a sample of children's artwork in an appeal for a community outreach program. Still another included a tiny cardboard replica of a window in a solicitation for energy conservation improvements. Be creative. Sometimes the symbol is more powerful than the real thing in a direct mail piece.

Brochures will give you a chance to be imaginative in your writing and graphics. Just be sure your brochure is consistent with your agency's image. Be sure the subtle messages you convey really “fit” your agency's posture in the wider community.

Like response cards, brochures vary in format. Printing costs vary widely. A simple 8½ × 11 inch, three-panel brochure can cost as little as \$30 or \$40 per thousand pieces for a simple printing job of black ink on white stock. Color brochures or photo-laden brochures can run as high as \$90

or \$100 per thousand pieces. It's possible to go even higher if the brochure is physically large, full of color on every panel, or custom-designed. The challenge here? Letting your creativity run wild—and finding economical prices to match.

Present your case in human terms. Remember that people give to people—not to faceless institutions or causes.

Summing Up

There's no single or simple formula for a successful direct mail appeal. Many factors affect the quantity and quality of the response. Among them:

- Good copy and graphics. You don't want to use a 5:05 p.m. mimeograph job. And you don't want to use a lavish four-color letterpress job, either. The secret is to look convincing, credible, professional, and dependable—without being ostentatious.

- A well-targeted audience. You can produce the most impressive and elegant direct mail appeal possible, but unless copy is geared toward the interests of your audience it will not succeed.

- An inspiring story. Check with your favorite critics to determine if your story is worth reading. Actively solicit negative opinions about your copy and graphics. Your revisions will be much better for it.

- A real need—and a need presented well. Be sure your case for support is documented and credible. And be sure you present it in human terms. Remember that people give to people—not to faceless institutions or causes.

- Donor involvement. Involvement goes beyond the direct mail appeal. If you wish to solicit funds from your friends, you'll have to keep in touch with them on a regular basis—through annual reports, newsletters, visits and tours, thank-you messages, and other forms of personal communication. A donor is a friend. Unless the friendship is maintained through ongoing contact, your appeals for funds will eventually lose momentum.

- Testing. If you're uncertain which approach, color, typeface, story, or length will work best with your donor, test. Compose two versions of your appeal and send each to a random selection of your audience. Compare the results.

What worked and why? Did one version outpull the other in terms of dollars raised? Number of donors? Number of new donors? Average gift size?

Once you answer these questions, test again. And again. And again. Test for any feature of your direct mail pieces you feel might have a bearing on results. Once you discover a successful, workable format, use it over and over again—until results decline. Then, start a new testing program.

Direct mail fund raising need not be full of mystery. Direct mail appeals are, after all, nothing more than a communication between two people—you and your prospective donor. Share what's on your mind and in your heart. Let the donor know—through carefully developed copy and graphics—that you want to establish a permanent relationship. Get to know your donor and help your donor get to know you.

Mutual affection—and support—will surely follow. ■

Advertisement

Do you want to get your office organized?

The Exchange Project, the training program at the Peace Development Fund, offers two booklets for sale. Andrea Ayvazlan's booklet, *Organizational Development: The Seven Deadly Sins* (previously serialized in the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*), is helpful for anyone who is a member of any group. Learn how to cure "Founder's Disease," develop long-range planning, and avoid horrendous meetings. Andy Rothschild's, *Office Systems: Pointers for Getting Better Organized*, offers nuts-and-bolts suggestions on how to set up an office, and improve internal office systems and personal systems. Each booklet sells for \$4. To order, send a check payable to the Peace Development Fund:

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517 Union Ave., Suite 206
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The Celebrity Auction— Exciting, Glamorous Fundraiser

by Tom Conroy

You've seen celebrity tennis tournaments, celebrity golf tournaments, gourmet cooking parties and fashion shows—all successful fundraisers. Those gave us the idea of putting on a "Celebrity Auction" as a fundraiser for our local Home Health and Counseling Services Program—a community program providing such services as Meals on Wheels, Friendly Visitors, home care and counseling.

As a public relations firm, we had worked for many years in the publicity end of the entertainment business, witnessing first-hand the relationship of fans to the stars. We saw that fans were enthusiastic and dedicated to their particular star: writing fan mail, standing in long lines for hours on end to get seats to concerts by such stars as Barry Manilow, Bruce Springsteen, Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton, to name but a few.

And these behaviors were not confined to young people either! Senior citizens, and people of all ages in between, had their own fans: Bing Crosby, Frankie Laine, Bob Hope, Red Skelton. In fact, we are all fans to a degree. Younger fans are often more vocal, but older fans appreciate an autographed album by Johnny Mathis or Rosemary Clooney as much as the young fans want something of Kenny Loggins, Cory Hart or Tom Cruise.

Tom Conroy is the Public Relations Director of Laurel Resources, Inc. in Walnut Creek, California.

The idea of a Celebrity Auction was to ask stars of stage, screen, television and the recording industry, as well as professional athletes, leaders of government, and others to donate personalized items that we could auction off at a public fundraising event.

The Celebrity Auction is tailor-made for publicity. When you are dealing with names like Yoko Ono, Burt Reynolds, Dolly Parton, Frank Sinatra, the Grateful Dead, Janet Leigh, Dustin Hoffman, etc., there is immediate interest. As we collected donated items, announced the auction date and place, and produced other press items related to the auction, we made sure our name was mentioned and our non-profit programs affecting the lives of many thousand homebound, elderly and handicapped people. The effect of budget cuts to Meals on Wheels, Jobs for Seniors, Friendly Visitors and our other programs was highlighted as the necessity for the Celebrity Auction.

An auction of this type might work for your organization, too. Read on for details of how we did it.

Where to Begin

With our first auction, we began soliciting items for the auction six months before the date of the actual event. We mailed 400 solicitation letters and received 180 donated items as a result. (This was so successful that for our second auction we mailed 900 letters and received 380 responses.) The more items you receive from celebrities,

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Dear Bob Dylan:

Most non-profit charitable organizations are doubling their efforts these days trying to raise money. We have to. Budget cuts and increased needs for services.

So what else is new?

Realizing the affection fans have for stars like yourself, we want to hold an auction, tied in with a San Francisco radio station, where listeners will phone in bids to the Celebrity Auction.

The fans will be happy and we will raise money for our many programs, such as Meals on Wheels where volunteers deliver hot meals daily to homebound senior citizens and prepare their own meals. We have a Friendly Visitor Program where volunteers make an hour's visit to the homebound once a week. In most cases, the only mailing face these seniors see all week belong to our volunteers. We also have home care and counseling services which help many needy persons.

If you could send us a financial donation, fine—we could sure use it, but we think we could get some mileage with a personal item that belonged to a star.

Do you think we have a good idea? Will you help us? Thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Tom Conroy
Tom Conroy
Public Relations Director

Enclosures

on the scales and measured in weight. We have written to stars at hotels and night clubs where they were appearing and they have received the letters.

Your greatest cost in doing a Celebrity Auction will be postage: the postage to mail the initial letter seeking the donated items, and the postage for thank you letters to those stars who do respond. (All donations should be thanked immediately.)

Our first donations, received weeks after the initial solicitation mailing, would have made our debut auction successful even if we hadn't received another thing. But we used early donations—such as a fur coat donated by Yoko Ono and worth \$12,000, and a 1984 Toyota station wagon—as publicity to inspire more donations. The story of Yoko Ono's donated fur coat was leaked to a reporter in the San Francisco office of United Press International and appeared in newspapers all over the world, as well as in the Los Angeles *Times*, the *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Variety* magazine. Phone calls started coming in from New York, London, Honolulu, and New Orleans, and from other celebrities we had not contacted, all offering donated items of their own!

Gathering the Items

As we collected the donated items, we catalogued each one carefully so we knew who gave it, the value, and a suggested, but not mandatory, starting price, as bidding in this type of auction is a purely personal thing. We saw Tina Turner fans bid \$50 for an autographed black and white glossy photograph which, in all honesty, when purchased

the greater your chances of attracting a wide range of fans. Also, keep in mind that you must have enough auctionable items to allow for a two- or three-hour program.

Gathering the names and addresses of celebrities is the most difficult, and the most important task. Form a committee to work on building the mailing list (although one person may end up doing most of the work). We tried using the resources of the public library (Celebrity Register, Who's Who In America, local telephone directories for Los Angeles), but quickly found that the addresses in the reference books were outdated and most stars do not live in the Los Angeles area.

A resource that was useful was *Billboard Magazine's International Directory of Entertainment Artists*. This directory lists performers' personal managers and, where appropriate, their recording companies. Writing to stars in care of their personal managers is the best way to have your letter reach them. Another excellent reference book is *The Address Book* by Michael Levine (Periger Books Press). This also lists celebrities via their personal managers or public relations firms.

For stars of stage and screen, you may write in care of the studios producing their films or the television networks they work for. Do not write in care of the Screen Actors Guild. They no longer can afford the costs of forwarding mail on to stars.

Stars and celebrities like getting fan mail. Like box office figures, it is a barometer of their popularity. Unfortunately, in most cases not all the letters are read, but merely placed

<p>16 November 1985</p> <p>Mr. Tom Conroy CELEBRITY AUCTION LAMEL RESOURCES, INC. 110 PETTICOTT LANE Walnut Creek, California 94596</p> <p>Dear Tom:</p> <p>Certainly it's our sincerest hope that the enclosed contribution from BRENDA LEE will be a well-received addition to your celebrity auction.</p> <p>We wish you every success with this endeavor.</p> <p>Regards, <i>John J. Morrison</i> (Mr.) John J. Morrison Business Coordinator JRM/lt</p> <p>ENC: (1)</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Shilts</i></p> <p>APRIL 24, 1986</p> <p>MR. TOM CONROY LAMEL RESOURCES, INC. 110 PETTICOTT LANE WALNUT CREEK, CALIFORNIA 94596</p> <p>DEAR TOM,</p> <p>ENCLOSED YOU WILL FIND AN AUTOGRAPHED COPY OF "TOPGUN" BARRY HAMILTON'S BEST MUSIC, AND AN AUTOGRAPHED PICTURE OF BARRY HAMILTON FOR YOUR CELEBRITY AUCTION.</p> <p>I SERIOUSLY HOPE THESE ITEMS HELP TO MAKE YOUR "SECOND ANNUAL CELEBRITY AUCTION" A SUCCESSFUL ONE.</p> <p>BEST OF LUCK. IT REALLY COULDN'T BE FOR A BETTER CAUSE.</p> <p>WITH kindest regards, <i>Wendy Helt</i> WENDY HELT ASSISTANT TO BARRY HAMILTON</p>
<p>APR 5, 1986</p> <p>Mr. Tom Conroy Public Relations Director LAMEL RESOURCES, INC. 110 PETTICOTT LANE WALNUT CREEK, CALIFORNIA 94596</p> <p>Dear Tom:</p> <p>I am enclosing a letter of authorization to someone you will find enclosed. We hope to have another "Celebrity Auction" if you will not otherwise mind.</p> <p>Please see: <i>Trisha Walker</i> Trisha Walker President, Lamel Resources, Inc.</p> <p>BT</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Trisha Walker</i> Trisha Walker Entertainment Services</p> <p>Mr. Tom Conroy, LAMEL RESOURCES INC., 110 PETTICOTT LANE, WALNUT CREEK, CA. 94596</p> <p>APR 11 1986</p> <p>Dear Mr. Conroy,</p> <p>I HAVE PLEASURE IN ENCLOSED SOME AUTOGRAPHED PHOTOS OF GEORGE STRAIT, TOGETHER WITH AN AUTOGRAPHED ALBUM FOR YOUR AUCTION. IN YOUR LETTER YOU DID NOT STATE WHEN THE AUCTION WOULD BE, BUT I HOPE THAT THIS WILL HELP YOU RAISE MONEY FOR YOUR VERY WORTHWHILE CAUSE.</p> <p>IF I CAN BE OF ANY FURTHER ASSISTANCE, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO LET ME KNOW.</p> <p>Sincerely, <i>Trisha Walker</i> TRISHA WALKER PRESIDENT FOR GEORGE STRAIT</p>

in bulk, cost one penny. By leaving items open for bid, we realized much more than if we had starting prices. For how can one place a value on a 1948 original recording of "16 Tons" by Tennessee Ernie Ford and autographed by the artist? A fan, a San Francisco banker, wrote a check for \$100 and was happy with his bargain.

Promoting the Event

Next we designed and printed a combination program and catalogue, listing all the donated items by number. We sold advertising in the program to local banks, the local telephone company, hotels, restaurants, and Chevron USA (located in our area). The advertising revenue became part of the auction proceeds. The ads were sold on the strength of the donated items and the treasured names of the donors.

The catalogue or program is necessary for anyone attending the auction, for it matches numbered items with the donors. Copies of the program mailed weeks ahead of the auction to women's groups, fraternal organizations, and church and youth groups helped create an audience waiting for auction day.

We also created flyers advertising the Celebrity Auction and distributed them at local movie houses and other entertainment facilities.

Our next step in the promotion of this event was to persuade Adolph Coors Company to print 700 posters advertising the event. The poster consisted of simple art work used mainly in our flyers and program. By allowing Coors to have its name across the top of the poster, we had the benefit of Coors drivers distributing the posters, saving us 75¢ each in distribution costs.

Finally, although we never purchased advertising, we did achieve good mileage on public service announcements for a combined 36 radio and television outlets.

Finding a Site, Date, and Auctioneer

We thought a lot about where to hold the auction. We could have had church halls, recreations halls, gymnasiums. Instead, we selected the largest hotel in our area, the Concord Sheraton Hotel. We persuaded Sheraton General Manager Scott Seymore that it would be good community relations to present the Celebrity Auction in the main ballroom of his hotel. The event would produce months of publicity and up to 600 guests, many of whom would purchase beverages and food. The ballroom was donated.

Date selection was our next concern. We researched the area's calendar of forthcoming events. We did not wish to compete with a major sporting event, rock concert, or school graduation. We are located in the San Francisco Bay Area where something is always taking place. In our planning we regarded all events as competitors. We even used a ticket agency (BASS) with 76 outlets to sell our tickets.

Next on the agenda was hiring a professional auctioneer. Our publicity produced many volunteers for the post, but none with experience. They were mainly local media personalities, probably excellent emcees.

Our event required an auctioneer who could keep the auction moving, keep the bidders competing and get the totals up in an entertaining way. We needed some experience. A good auctioneer is like a circus ringmaster—he must control the tempo so people don't get bored, visit among themselves, and eventually wander away. We decided to accept the donated time of a pair of experienced auctioneers with a background in auctioning automobiles, livestock, and art. They proved skillful in the art of working several bidders against each other so they would spend a lot of money but feel good doing it.

The Celebrity Auction is such a fun thing, with television crews interviewing the guests and so much action taking place that it is easy to lose sight of the reason for the auction. We carefully explained the purpose of our organization to the auctioneers, that we were there to raise money, but that we did not want them to overpower the audience. We wanted our guests to leave impressed with their bargains. We found two auctioneers were necessary to spell one another because an auction with a large, excited audience can be a challenge.

Auctioneers for a Celebrity Auction should wear tuxedos. We traded space in our program for the rental of their formal attire with a local rental outlet.

A Little Extra

Adding a little more fun and color to our auction, which did not distract from the festivities and kept people until the end of the event, was a raffle. For \$15 a ticket we had an end-of-the-evening drawing, including donated weekends at Lake Tahoe, a Caribbean cruise, gift certificates for dinners, cases of champagne, and entertainment events. This is strictly optional, but we had a captive audience of those purchasing raffle tickets, and while waiting for the finale, many participated in the auction as they got caught up in the spirit of the festivities.

Volunteers

We had six personable and charming women the evening of the auction who worked the main door to the ballroom selling raffle tickets, carried auction items to the auctioneer for display, accepted payments, gave out receipts, helped the auctioneer identify bidders, turned items over to successful bidders, and kept a record of who bought what!

The Beat Goes On

We were satisfied with the productions of our "Celebrity Auctions." We realized it could have been tied in with a dinner or seminar, but items like "Wheel of Fortune's" Vanna White's dress, sports jacket belonging to Jack LeLanne,

golf clubs of B.J. Thomas, original scoresheet of Henry Mancini's "The Thorn Birds," Barry Manilow's "Copacabana," Paul Anka's Bonwit Teller ties, Hugh Downe's ties, Johnny Mathis' cookbooks and 20 autographed albums, drumsticks belonging to Aerosmith, Cory Hart's gold chain, a Marilyn Monroe doll, one of Phyllis Diller's crazy hats, Jerry Reed's sport shirts, Dustin Hoffman's autographed playscript of "Death of a Salesman," and literally hundreds of autographed photographs and recordings was truly entertainment enough.

In addition to raising money, our "Celebrity Auction" was a perfect community relations event. We displayed copies of our good press coverage, human interest stories of our program at work. We mounted them on wall displays and made brochures available. But the in-depth articles on our organization by Oakland *Tribune*, San Francisco *Chronicle* and *Contra Costa Times* have proved invaluable. The public relations value of the auction cannot be measured in money and eventual support. Our organization was in the newspapers, radio and television for months. This third-person selling on the part of the press is actually the endorsement, a stamp of approval by the Fourth Estate. The public relates to this.

The Celebrity Auction, like any fundraiser, needs the courage of your convictions and the desire to make money. It is without any risk—all of the items have been donated, you can't lose *any* money. Our postage for soliciting items was less than \$250.

In our case the celebrity auction has produced many unforeseen rewards:

1. Other grassroots organizations have contacted us wanting to know how to produce a similar auction. For a small fee, we have provided our updated mailing list and a planned campaign to other organizations located out of our geographic area. The fees are part of our fundraising.
2. We have won the friendship and respect of successful entertainers who wish to become involved in our organization. Famed recording star Frankie Laine has performed at five benefit concerts and more are in the planning stages. Jazz great Dave Brubeck did a benefit concert for us.
3. We have sincere offers from pianist Roger Williams and comedienne Phyllis Diller to do benefits as soon as their schedules permit.

Ours is not a national organization like the American Heart Association, the Cancer Society or the Lung Associations. But with a pair of celebrity auctions to our credit, we are armed with new-found self confidence. Our publicity office has taken on the air of a theatrical agency. We are constantly contacting stars to do benefit concerts, as we relish the rewards of two successful "Celebrity Auctions."

But if we had to put our finger on the most important facet of our fundraising activity, it has to be unquestionably the *publicity!*

We will do another celebrity auction. We have to! Unsolicited items continue to arrive. People in our area call for the projected date of another event. But we will do something differently next time. A Celebrity Auction, country-western style, and featuring only personalized items from country stars like Crystal Gayle. As a group, the celebrities from Nashville were the most generous. We can see it now. An auction outdoors, barbeque, country music, square dancing, and the voice of the auctioneer: "What are we bid?"

Steps in Producing a "Celebrity Auction"

For a typical grass roots non-profit charitable organization, the following steps are all you need:

1. Call for a meeting of the Board of Directors to seek approval for staging a "Celebrity Auction." Most will resist for they have never tried anything like it. Explain the low-overhead involved: postage and volunteers or temporary secretarial help to address and stuff 700 letters.
2. Compile your mailing list.
3. Check the calendar for a date many months into the future. Avoid Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, World Series and Super Bowl. When you do select a date, check it against other events in the area on the same date. For any auction, you need people. You won't have any if they're attending graduations or the annual festive events.
4. When you have selected a date you can live with, seek a site. This depends on your locale. A recreation clubhouse, Elk's Lodge, high school gymnasium. A small hotel does tie in with a Celebrity Auction, and you should get the room at no cost, strictly on the basis of the crowds you bring to the hotel.
5. With your Board approval on the idea of the auction, approval of expenses, a date and site, you are ready to draft your solicitation letter. The letter should be brief and to the point. Explain something of your programs. Whom do you help? Why do you need the auction? The letter is important, it will be your only contact with hundreds of celebrities.
6. Appoint a publicity chair. For the next six months or so, he or she will be very important to the success of this fundraiser.
7. Type one good original of your final solicitation letter and make 500-600 copies depending on how many names are involved.
8. Find an auctioneer. Not a local radio personality or popular politician, but an experienced auctioneer who will get you top dollar for the items on your auction block.
9. Put together a working crew to sell tickets, programs, collect checks for the auction purchases, etc.

10. Make signs bearing numbers 1-500, large enough for the auctioneer to read them in the audience from the stage or platform. Each person attending the auction will be given a number and is in this manner identified. These ten points are a "must" for the production of a "Celebrity Auction." ■

Book Review

The Lowdown on the High Cost of Insurance

In the past several years, the high cost of liability insurance has become a national crisis. For example, in 1986:

- the rates of a program aiding the elderly with a community center and jobs program increased from \$4,300 to \$16,000
- a small theatre group had its rates increased from \$750 to \$12,000 for a policy with less coverage; and,
- a rural development achievement center with no previous insurance claims saw its premium climb from \$891 to \$22,000.

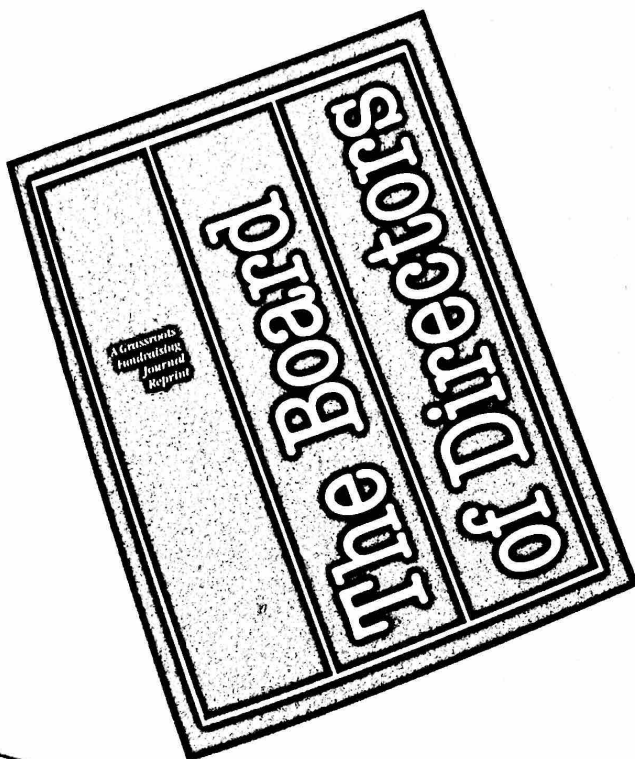
And, a 1985 national survey revealed that insurance companies had either cancelled or not renewed coverage for 20% of all child care programs.

Concern about how this crisis affects the nonprofit sector led the California Community Foundation to collaborate with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the California Association of Nonprofits in publishing *Nonprofit Organizations and Liability Insurance: Problems, Options and Prospects*.

This publication, the first of its kind oriented exclusively to the nonprofit sector, details how and why the liability insurance crisis has occurred and using simple, understandable language, offers a range of possible solutions, including how to become a wise insurance consumer.

The California Community Foundation and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation shared the cost of developing the booklet which was authored by a California Association of Nonprofits (CAN) associate, Pamela Davis. Ms. Davis, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, is also currently writing a dissertation on the subject of nonprofit risk pools as an alternative to high insurance rates or loss of insurance.

The report is available for \$5.00 from the California Community Foundation, 3580 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1660, Los Angeles, California 90010 ■



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Number 4 (August 1983): Grammar for Grantseekers (Putting together a readable proposal); Federated Fundraising (a case study of a federated fund); Asking Current Donors for Extra Gifts.

VOLUME THREE

Number 1 (February 1984): Cash Management for Smaller Non-Profit Organizations; Using Phonathons for Renewal; Free Advice for a Price (how to hire and use a consultant).

Number 3 (June 1984): Computers for Non-Profits (Part Two); Setting Up a Canvass (Part Two); Fundraising Luncheons (Part One).

Number 6 (December 1984): Developing a Membership Base; How to Break Through the Bureaucracy (getting access to government money); But Will They Open the Envelope? (designing carrier envelopes for direct mail appeals).

VOLUME FOUR

Number 3 (June 1985): Membership Record Keeping; If We Only Had an Endowment (What to consider in starting an endowment fund); A Community United (case study of a farming community's fundraising efforts to help a family in need).

Number 4 (August 1985): Through Rain, Sleet and Snow (the personal experiences of a canvasser); Major Donor Prospecting;

Hiring a Development Director; Rapidly Growing Women's Funds; Long Beach "Friendraiser" (case study of a special event designed for publicity).

Number 5 (October 1985): Planning and Running a Phonathon; When Money Isn't the Problem; Philanthropy 1984 Summary.

Number 6 (December 1985): How to Use the Media; Grassroots Fundraising: Back to Basics.

VOLUME FIVE

Number 1 (February 1986): State of the Journal; Raising Money from Churches; Creating a Successful Renewal Program.

Number 2 (April 1986): Seven Deadly Sins, Part One (Organizational Development); Marketing for Grassroots Organizations, Part One; So You're On The Air: Writing PSA's.

Number 3 (June 1986): Seven Deadly Sins, Part Two; Logistics of a Major Gifts Campaign.

Number 5 (October 1986): Marketing, Part Three; Personal Giving Plans, Part Two; Beating The Numbers Game.

Number 6 (December 1986): Changes in the Tax Law; Marketing, Part Four: Using Your Donor Surveys; Fundraising is a Song and Dance (Case Study of a Benefit Musical); Creating Slide Shows.

VOLUME SIX

Number 1 (February 1987): Strategic Planning for Voluntary Non-Profits; A Personal Story: Raising Money For a Trip to the Soviet Union; Twenty Words That Sell.

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