Contents

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On Our Cover · OUR COVER PHOTOS ARE FROM A CAR WASH-A-THON HELD BY SAVE OUR CUMBERLAND MOUNTAINS (SOCM) IN TENNESSEE. SOCM IS A NONPROFIT, GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION WORKING IN TENNESSEE FOR SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN AREAS SUCH AS SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY, CLEAR CUTTING, STRIP MINING, MOUNTAIN TOP REMOVAL, ABANDONED MINE LANDS (AML), TOXIC ISSUES, AERIAL SPRAYING, TAX REFORM, VOTER RIGHTS, AND THE DISMANTLING OF RACISM.

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LETTER FROM THE ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

JENNIFER EMIKO BOYDEN

I'm often approached by the kids in the neighborhood to buy frozen cookie dough or magazine subscriptions as part of their school's annual fundraiser. I'm always happy to buy things I don't really need so that our local elementary school can buy things it really does need, like a play structure. After all, my daughter will attend that school one day, and I want her and her friends to have a pleasant outdoor area to play in instead of the concrete slab that's there now. But why should public schools have to raise private funds? Why is public education — along with other so-called public services such as public parks and public libraries — no longer 100 percent publicly funded?

Among others, there are two big and obvious reasons: the Bush administration's tax cuts and, of course, the billions going to the war in Iraq. Personal income taxes as a percent of our Gross Domestic Product have dropped 28 percent since May 2001. Unfortunately, the tax cuts are not helping those who are most financially stressed. As Robert McIntyre, Director of Citizens for Tax Justice, points out, "The bottom 60 percent of all taxpayers get only 15 percent of the fully phased in tax cuts, while the best-off 1 percent get more than half of the tax cuts."

If you want to know what the country could have done with the lost tax revenue and with the funds that have gone to our war on Iraq, check out the "Tradeoffs" section of the National Priorities Project website (http://database.nationalpriorities.org). Here are some examples of what you'll find:

• If the country hadn't provided $56.5 billion in tax cuts to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans this year, California could have used its share — $6.5 billion — to provide 2,442,764 children with health care. North Carolina could have used its $1.6 billion to build 1,247,614 homes with renewable electricity.

• With the money from its taxpayers that has gone to the Iraq war through 2007, Washington State could have had $10.4 billion to provide 1,845,786 scholarships for university students. With their $40.9 billion gone to the war, New Yorkers could have built 232,535 affordable housing units.

President Bush has called on Congress to make most of his tax cuts permanent; meanwhile, his proposed FY 2008 budget would eliminate essential public education and social service programs. (For an excellent analysis of Bush's proposed budget — and how the administration claims that foundation grants can substitute for government funding — see Rick Cohen's article on the Nonprofit Quarterly website: www.nonprofitquarterly.org/section/863.html.)

While we fight for a more equitable tax system and fully funded social programs, this issue of the Journal provides you with three how-to articles grounded in the current reality of nonprofit budgets. Linda Cowan of Save Our Cumberland Mountains describes their Car Wash-a-thon — a fun and inexpensive fundraiser for any group. Next, Ellis Robinson offers ideas for maximizing your direct mail response rates by using in-house and inexpensive lists of people to mail to. Andy Robinson wraps up the issue with an in-depth look at a new way of thinking about major gift solicitation — by involving your entire staff. We hope these articles give you ideas and inspiration for your own fundraising efforts. Even as we fight for tax reform, we need to keep on with our bake sales, car washes, and personal solicitations.

Raising Money *from a* Car Wash-a-thon

BY LINDA COWAN

There are car washes and then there are car wash-a-thons. Our group was skeptical about the potential of a car wash-a-thon as a fundraiser. We had held day-long car washes and not made more than $200. To our amazement, the car wash-a-thon not only made more money than we had ever made in a single event, it also brought in more money in donations from people giving at the free car wash than we had ever made by charging during a regular car wash.

Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM), a grassroots nonprofit organization in a rural part of Tennessee, works to protect the land, air and water quality by promoting responsible business practices in forestry, mining, and aerial spraying. SOCM believes strongly in being supported from the grassroots level. We raise money through dues, major donor campaigns, house parties, events, mail appeals, phone-a-thons, and planned giving.

SOCM's Campbell County chapter is in a mountainous area in the heart of the Cumberland Mountains. With about 40,000 people, the county is ranked in the bottom quarter of county economies nationwide, with high unemployment and primarily minimum-wage factory and service jobs.

As with all SOCM's local fundraising events, we had these five goals for the wash-a-thon:

- Bring attention to issues that we are working on
- Involve lots of group members
- Raise money
- Repeat and improve the event every year
- Have fun!

HOW IT WORKS

A car wash-a-thon is a free car wash. It works the same way that a walk-a-thon does with one exception — instead of the sponsors making pledges for one person walking, sponsors pledge a certain amount for each car that the group washes. All of the group's members can be involved in the event — either washing cars on the day of the car wash or soliciting pledges from business and individual sponsors before the event — or both. Although the car wash is free to the public, people who get their cars washed are also given information about the group and invited to make donations.

A car wash-a-thon is a fun event, but it does require a lot of physical work at the car wash itself, so it's important to have enough enthusiastic helpers to ensure success.

The most important part of preparing volunteers for the event is to role-play asking for pledges. We want our members to feel as confident and comfortable soliciting as possible. The role-play includes a concise pitch or message about what the chapter is working on. Since most members solicit people or businesses they have a relationship with, we work to develop a message that reflects the member's passion.

Members are encouraged to collect pledges up front — and we give awards to the people who collect the most money in pledges before the event — but it is not necessary. SOCM bills for any unpaid pledges. This strategy works fine in a small community where the solicitors have relationships with the businesses and individuals they solicit, but it might not work as well in a larger area.

PLANNING THE EVENT

Allow about four to six weeks to plan this event, using the following steps:

1. Set a date and a rain date for the car wash.

2. Find a location to have the car wash. It's good to have the car wash in a well-traveled area. Make sure you have at least one water source. Two are better. If only one is available, purchase a splitter or "Y" so you can attach two hoses. The location should be a place that will allow easy access and flow of cars. You don't want to be bogged down with people having to pull in and back out to get their cars washed. Make sure the site can handle the amount of water that will run off. We use environmentally friendly soap, and we look for locations that are paved, with drainage into the sewer system.

3. Decide how many cars you will wash and what recognition you'll give sponsors. In one space with two hoses you can wash between 50 and 100 cars in a day, depending on water pressure, weather, traffic, and timing. You can provide recognition at the event for businesses that sponsor it and for donors who give a specific amount or more (SOCM asks for sponsorships of $50, $100, $150 and lists anyone giving $50 or more) by listing the sponsors (with their permission) on posters or flyers at the event.

4. Design a flyer that announces the car wash to the community. Also, make posters that people can hold up on the day of the car wash advertising the car wash to passing cars.

5. Send a letter to your members, volunteers and anyone else you think might be willing to help with the Car Wash-a-thon, along with flyers, pledge forms, and a reply card (see samples). The reply card gives people a chance to commit to getting sponsors, to help the day of wash, and/or to make their own financial commitment. Follow the letter with a phone call to people who don't respond with the reply card.

6. Three to five weeks before the car wash, hold a meeting of those who have volunteered to get sponsors. Help them brainstorm possible sponsors, including businesses, friends, co-workers, family members, neighbors, church members, doctors, and any other acquaintances, and review how to ask for sponsorship and pledges. Check in with volunteers about once a week to see how their pledges are coming and to encourage them to spend some time gathering pledges each week.

Flyer:

THE CAMPBELL/ANDERSON CHAPTER OF

Save Our Cumberland Mountains

is having a

WASH-A-THON

FREE

BEGINS AT 10:00 a.m.

CAR WASH

at

PIZZA HUT

Hwy. 25-W • LaFollette

SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 1998

OUR GOAL – 50 CARS! RAIN DATE – JUNE 20

Member response / committment form:

Campbell/Anderson Fundraiser

Kathy, here's how I can help . . .

☐ I will get pledges for the chapter

☐ Here's my ☐ gift of ☐ pledge of

☐ $5 ☐ $10 ☐ $15 ☐ $20 ☐ $25 ☐ ______

☐ I can help the day of the car wash (See ✓ Check List)

Name____________________

Address____________________

City__________ State_____ Zip________

Phone____________________

✔ Check List

☐ Wash Cars

☐ Supervise Washing of Cars

☐ Count the Cars

☐ Talk to customers about SOCM and the Chapter's work

☐ Help with refreshments

☐ Help with clean-up

PLEASE MAIL BY AUGUST 31

Letter to Members ▶

Save Our Cumberland Mountains
224 S. Main Street, Suite 1 • P. O. Box 479
Lake City, TN 37769
423-426-9455 or 426-9307
FAX 423-426-9289

August 8, 2001

Dear Campbell/Anderson Chapter Member,

At our July chapter meeting, the chapter decided to have a Wash-a-thon (car wash getting pledges) as part of its chapter fundraising plan. The date is 10:00 a.m. Saturday, September 8, at Pizza Hut in LaFollette. A rain date is scheduled for September 22. We plan on washing 50 cars. We've raised as much as $2,000 in the past. Let's all pull together and see how much we can raise this year.

You, as a chapter member, can help in one or more of the following ways.

✔ Take the sponsor sheet provided and ask your friends, neighbors, doctors, church members, etc. to sponsor the chapter with a pledge or donation

✔ Make a pledge or donation yourself

✔ Come out the day of the wash and help

We need people who can:
- wash cars
- supervise the washing of cars
- count the cars
- talk to customers about SOCM
- help provide refreshments for workers
- help with clean-up after wash-a-thon

If you are willing to help, please fill out the enclosed reply sheet and mail to Linda at the SOCM office no later than August 31, 2001.

If you get sponsors and cannot collect the money, mail your sponsor sheet to the office and we will collect the pledges for you. If you can collect the money, we are asking that all money be turned in by the end of September.

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

Campbell/Anderson Chapter

Pledge Form:

SPONSOR SHEET • SAVE OUR CUMBERLAND MOUNTAINS • CAMPBELL/ANDERSON CHAPTER

Member's Name____________________

Address____________________

____

Phone____________________

PLEASE PRINT

Thank you for taking the time to sponsor the Campbell/Anderson Chapter in its endeavor to have a FREE Car Wash. Your donation will help continue the important work that SOCM does in our communities, counties, and throughout the State of Tennessee.

Here's How It Works: Our goal is to wash 50 cars. To sponsor the Chapter, you can make a pledge per car washed or pledge a flat amount. For example: Twenty cents per car up to 50 cars would make your total pledge $10.00. Fifty cents would make your total pledge $25.00. NOTE: Your pledge is per car up to and no more than 50 cars.

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE	PLEDGE	PAID

7. Put up flyers advertising the car wash in local grocery stores, convenience stores, gas stations, and bulletin boards, where allowed.

8. Start gathering supplies for the wash-a-thon. You'll need good hoses, nozzles, a "Y" fitting for the faucet, extra "O" rings/washers, sponges, rags, car wash soap, tire cleaner (optional), window cleaner (optional), brushes for tires, lots of buckets, sun screen, and a First Aid kit. (You want extra buckets so clean water is ready at all times. It is important when really dirty cars come through that the water is changed and the sponges and rags are thoroughly rinsed to keep little rocks and sticks from scratching the paint on other vehicles.) Plan to provide plenty of water, snacks, and lunch for your volunteers. Other supplies include the posters to hold up announcing the car wash to passing cars, information about your organization, membership brochures, and any other materials you want to give to the people getting their cars washed. And don't forget a couple of donation buckets. Even though the car wash is free, many people will donate anyway. In fact, we raised more money from donations at this *free* car wash than when we charged per car!

9. On the day of the event, gather early to organize volunteers. Four teams of four is optimum to keep from getting overworked. That way two teams can alternate working each hose. If you don't have that many volunteers, you can still get the job done. On each team one person rinses, one washes tires, and two wash the car. The two washing the car should work a system that allows for washing and quickly rinsing so soap doesn't dry on the vehicle. Get a couple of other volunteers to stand alongside the road with the posters to get people's attention. A couple of people need to be available to talk with customers while their car is being washed about the issues the organization is working on. Another person needs to keep track of the number of cars washed. Once you have reached your goal, you can decide whether your teams have the strength to wash any more cars.

10. Have a blast! Don't forget to thank the owners for the use of their property and water. Be sure to clean the area, so you'll be welcomed back next year.

11. Collect any outstanding pledges and thank volunteers for all their hard work!

A NOTE ON OUR SUCCESS:

When Wal-Mart moved into the area, SOCM learned that the Wal-Mart Foundation was matching fundraisers of nonprofit groups up to $1,000. We got an application form, filled it out, and it was accepted. So while we raised what was already an amazing $1,300 from the car wash that year, with the Wal-Mart grant, the grand total was $2,300.

Not bad for a car wash! GFJ

LINDA COWAN IS THE FINANCE MANAGER AND GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING COORDINATOR AT SOCM. WHEN ASKED HOW SHE LIKES HER JOB, ONE OF HER FAVORITE RESPONSES IS, "I HAVE THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS. I NOT ONLY GET TO RAISE MONEY, BUT I GET TO SPEND IT TOO."

Direct Mail ON A Shoestring: Finding the Lists You Need for Affordable Prospecting

BY ELLIS M.M. ROBINSON

EDITORS NOTE: This article addresses one of the key elements to a successful direct mail program, namely whom to mail to in order to get the best possible response. (Keep in mind that 1 percent is considered a very successful response rate for a mailing to people who have never given to your organization before.) To find information on other aspects of direct mail, including how to write a good letter, what the rest of the direct mail package should contain, and the cost and production of direct mail, check out www.grassrootsfundraising.org for other articles on this topic, as well as Ellis's book, *The Nonprofit Membership Toolkit* (Jossey-Bass, 2003).

At one time or other, nearly every nonprofit organization seriously considers using direct mail to attract new members and donors. But many wonder how you tackle such a project without spending a fortune. Don't you have to spend hundreds of dollars just to rent lists of people to mail to?

Not necessarily. This article suggests some cost-effective ways you can ease into direct mail by using lists you already have or can get access to easily (and cheaply). These types of lists fall into three basic categories:

1. People who already know you
2. People who care about your cause
3. Neighbors

The best prospects are people who already know you. People who care about your cause (or one like it) will be the next most likely group to respond to a direct mail appeal. Neighbors might respond, if your issue has broad enough or personal enough appeal. Each of these categories is discussed in more detail here.

#1: BEGIN WITH THOSE WHO KNOW YOU

There are four types of people you already know who are most likely to respond to a direct mail appeal: lapsed members, buyers, in-house contacts, and people who know your people.

Lapsed members

Lapsed members are people who have joined your organization or donated to it in the past. You have asked them to renew but they still have not rejoined. People on this list are usually your very best prospects. Not only do they know who you are, but they have already given money to your group at least once. Your goal now is to convince them to take that same action again. Depending on how robust your efforts to renew these lapsed members are (including how many renewal mailings, calls, or other reminders you send them) , you can expect a 2 percent to 8 percent return from this list. If your list of lapsed donors has more than 1,000 names on it and if it reaches back more than a couple of years, consider segmenting the list by length of time since the donor's last gift, or start by testing just the most recently lapsed names.

The best prospects are people who already know you.

Buyers

Buyers are people who have spent money with your organization but have not made an independent contribution. They may have paid to attend a seminar or bought a book or T-shirt. They have already made the decision that your group is worth their money — here's a chance to ask them to support it again. There are two things to think about with this group of people. First, if you find a number of people buying things but not joining, consider creating a two-tiered pricing structure for your saleable items, one price for members, and a slightly higher price for non-members.

Second, if people are buying tickets to attend an event such as a luncheon, auction, or conference where the fee is significant, consider recognizing those participants as members even without a separate membership contribution. In most cases, at least part of the registration fee can be considered a contribution to your organization. By being included among your membership, these attendees will get newsletters and other services that will encourage them to keep supporting you.

In-house contacts

In-house contacts include those folks who found you because of their interest in your cause. They may have responded to an op-ed or article in the newspaper, called after a radio interview, signed up on your website, attended an event or lecture, or written or called to ask for more information about what you do or the cause you work for. But they haven't yet given you money. Depending on how they found you and how long ago they contacted you, some of these prospects will be more inclined to respond to a direct mail appeal than others. Again, if your list of these people is larger than 1,000 names, consider segmenting it by the source of the name and how recent the contact. (For more information on collecting in-house lists, see my previous *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* article, "Making the Most of In-House Prospects," May/June 2003.)

> **Most people donate to more than one nonprofit in areas that interest them.**

People who know your people

People who know your people include friends, families, colleagues, and vendors of your staff, board, and key volunteers. These people are likely to be familiar with your organization through a trusted contact — you or someone you work with. That's the best endorsement a group can get. (You may already be tapping many of these contacts for major donor gifts. However, there are usually more names on the list than your team can reliably contact one-on-one. Here's where you can put these names to work.)

People on this list will probably respond best to a communication coming directly from their personal contact — a hand-addressed envelope or a return address showing the person they know. At least make sure the personal contact is included on the letterhead — the board or staff list — so the recipient can see the direct affiliation. (Please note: you cannot mail hand-addressed envelopes by bulk mail. However, you can use the same letter, envelope, and return form and/or envelope as your more general mailing and send to this group by first-class mail. Ask the contact to handwrite their name above or below the group's return address. This category is usually worth the extra postage, since you expect a strong response.)

#2: PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT YOUR CAUSE

People who care about your cause are the next best audience for direct mail. These types of people include members of allied organizations, people who have participated in events related to your cause, people who have contributed to campaigns on issues similar to yours, and users and customers of businesses whose activities relate to your cause.

Members of allied organizations

People who belong to organizations similar to yours are a great source of prospective members or donors. They have already identified themselves as interested in a cause very similar to yours, and they have demonstrated through those gifts that they understand that it takes money to make the change they want to see. The more closely a group's issues overlap with yours, the more likely their members are to respond to your invitation.

Usually, such groups exchange lists of members or donors. That means that in order for you to have access to another group's list, you have to be willing to let them prospect to your list as well. Some groups are reluctant to exchange their names on the assumption that they might lose members to the other group. This is an unlikely outcome, since most people donate to more than one nonprofit in areas that interest them. Furthermore, it is very difficult to expand your membership affordably if you don't exchange lists with other groups. When you do, pay attention to the following guidelines for exchanging lists:

- Don't give away your big donors' names. (You define big.)
- Only exchange for names of actual donors (not in-house contacts), preferably at their home address, and ideally donors recruited by mail. (Donors who were recruited by a telephone or door-to-door canvass will not respond as well to your mail appeal.)
- Review and approve a sample of what the other group will mail to your list.
- Protect your mail dates. For example, make sure the other group is not mailing to your list during the two or three weeks before or after the date you send a special appeal to your members.
- Only exchange names and addresses. Do not include e-mail addresses or phone numbers.
- Don't include the names and addresses of anyone who has asked that their name not be exchanged. (This is an option you should give all your donors when they join).

Participants

People who have participated in related events or sports might be another source of names. For example, riders in the local bike-a-thon might be supportive of a group working to build trails.

Campaign contributors

Lists of campaign contributors can be an effective source of names if the candidate or ballot issue is clearly aligned with your issue. Lists related to more local campaigns (town council) usually work better than those related to larger issues or elections (U.S. Representative). Also, local candidates or ballot issue campaigns are more likely to let you use their list than are state or national candidates. If the campaign wants to exchange lists, find out about restrictions on letting candidates use your list. (Check with Alliance for Justice — www.afj.org — or a similar organization before releasing your list to a candidate.)

Users and customers

People who use or buy the services of groups or businesses related to what you do may also be responsive to your ask. A river protection group, for example, should be very appealing to paddling permit holders or clients of rafting guides or outfitters. Lodgers at a resort might be interested in joining a group that provides affordable housing to community workers.

#3: NEIGHBORS

Is there a geographic focus to your services or programs? Perhaps your community center is well known to people living in the immediate area or you want to invite more people nearby to visit your charter school. If everyone living in a neighborhood should be interested in what you are doing, consider doing what's called a saturation mailing.

Begin by identifying the area by five-digit zip code or carrier route. Call your local Post Office and ask them how many households are in the zip code. Then put together a basic direct mail package, address it to "Resident" or "Neighbor" with the city, state, and zip code, and deliver the letters to the local Post Office. (Ask your Post Office manager for the formatting and packaging details they prefer.) The letter carrier will then drop one off to every address in the zip code.

A saturation mailing can save you considerable money on a per piece basis: the envelopes are preprinted, and there are no costs to buy or rent lists or to merge and purge them with a data processing program. Also, the postage for this type of mailing is the lowest available. (As with all direct mail of more than 250 pieces, you will need a bulk mailing permit.) Because such a mailing goes to every home and business, be sure your appeal is universal enough to truly be of interest to almost everyone in the neighborhood.

A saturation approach can be very effective if you are essentially the only group like yours in your small town or community. It also is a good way to reach seasonal or part-time residents. Although your letter will not be forwarded, it will be delivered to every household receiving mail at the time. (In my town in Florida, the number of households doubles, from as low as 3,200 in August to about 6,400 in February and March when the "snowbirds" are in town. As you can imagine, we get a lot of "Neighbor" mail in the spring!)

A caution on this approach: Be realistic about how interested this geographic audience may actually be in your cause. No matter how comparatively inexpensive, any geographically focused mailing can be a costly proposition if the issue is not one that appeals to a broad cross section of locals. On the other hand, if your issue is of great local appeal, geographically focused mail provides the additional benefit of getting your message directly into the hands of the folks who may be most concerned about what you are working on. They may not respond the first time, but the increased visibility adds to your credibility and community support. This is especially true if there has been (or could be) a disinformation campaign leveled against your group!

Voter registration rolls

Lists of people registered to vote may be another source for targeting prospects by neighborhood. In most states, the county's supervisor of elections decides how and if registration data are available. Nowadays, the information is usually available electronically. For a few dollars, you may be able to get the names and addresses of registered voters in your community. Be sure to ask what types of information are available. Sometimes you can get age, gender, party registration, even phone numbers — all of which may be useful information for segmenting the list and fine-tuning your audience.

Be realistic about how interested this geographic audience may actually be in your cause.

Property owners

The names of property owners may also be available electronically from your county assessor's office. More and more of this information is available online or on CD by request. Check with your county tax collector.

Neighbors lists are most effective when your group is highly visible in a concentrated geographic area. Two of the greatest indicators of the success of a direct mail campaign are, first, that the prospects are known to be people who donate money, and second, that the prospects are known to be people who respond to direct mail appeals. You don't know if either of these criteria apply to this "neighbors" category, so proceed with caution. Start small and test, test, test.

RENTAL LISTS

Once you have exhausted these free possibilities, you may want to venture into the realm of rental lists. Tens of thousands of such lists are available. (Check out http://directmag.com/resourcecenter/listfinder for an easy peek at some of the options.) Not surprisingly, some are much better than others.

The first place to start is with closely allied groups that have a similar "culture" to your group. For example, an environmental group can choose from lists as diverse as Friends of the Earth, GreenPeace, Natural Resources Defense Council, and The Nature Conservancy. If you are a land trust, a list of those who support The Nature Conservancy is probably a good match. If you are an advocacy group, people who have given to such groups as Friends of the Earth, GreenPeace, or NRDC will probably be more responsive.

Focus list rentals on donor lists, recruited by direct mail, with home addresses. If you are wildly successful with these lists and still need options, consider also testing publication lists (magazine subscribers) or even catalog buyers. By this time, you will probably have a relationship with a list broker. Ask him or her to recommend lists to you. Most are very knowledgeable and eager to share information on what has worked for groups like yours.

These list sources should give you a range of options for beginning your direct mail prospecting campaign. Test a few, then expand, depending on the urgency of your issue and your tolerance for risk. The good news is that if a list works once, chances are it will work again. You can productively remail to a list (yes, the same people) as often as quarterly. But keep in mind that lists you've exchanged or gotten from other sources are almost always approved for one-time-only use. Be sure to get permission (and an up-to-date list) from any list owner whose list you want to use again based on your previous success with it.

USING A MAILSHOP

How many evenings have you spent stuffing envelopes for a group mailing? This process may be effective and even fun for small mailings to 2,000 or fewer names. However, to keep your sanity and your volunteers happy, I suggest using a mailshop for mailings of 2,000 or more pieces. Such a service will insert your letter and other documents into the carrier envelope, affix the address, prepare all the pieces for bulk mailing, and deliver them to the post office. Usually, your printer will deliver materials directly to your mailshop, saving you a trip. The charge for mailshop services is almost always much less than the hassle of lining up volunteers and spending hours manually preparing a mailing. Plus, by putting machines to work doing the inserting, you can often get your mailing out faster — and free up your volunteers for writing letters to the editor, coordinating outreach, or doing other actions that can only be done personally.

Why Direct Mail?

One question that often arises is why, in the age of e-mail, websites, and instant messaging, a group would invest in direct mail.

The reality is that your prospects have their own preferences on what they respond to and how. Just as many retailers have storefronts, websites, and paper catalogues — and may sponsor special events, too — the successful organization will use many tools to promote its cause.

Nonprofit groups are finding a strong synergy among techniques. Direct mail increases visits to websites, while e-mail can raise the visibility of your group and make a prospect more likely to respond to direct mail.

Many people are still reluctant to give on a website for fear of giving out a credit card number or other privacy issues. Nationally, less than 3 percent of charitable gifts are donated online, and many of those are in response to massive media campaigns that raised the awareness of the organization. For example, following the Indonesian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, virtually every newspaper in the country was driving readers to the websites of the American Red Cross and other aid groups. The moral of this story is that when your organization is getting the kind of (positive) free promotion that aid groups received two years ago, you can count on significant income from your website. (At the same time, those same aid groups raised a lot of money with direct mail campaigns for the same issues.)

Direct mail works best for audiences that you are reasonably certain have a strong interest in your work. Direct mail works because it arrives in someone's home, giving the recipient the convenience of reading your message in your words at their leisure. It is easily accessible to all the contributors in a household. And it is easy for people to respond to.

Yes, direct mail can be expensive, so move into it slowly and methodically. Choose your best prospects first and track the payoff. Using the tips in this article, you can build a cost-effective direct mail program that will complement your other outreach efforts and improve your group's visibility and power on all fronts.

AVOID MAILING MULTIPLES

One factor to keep in mind once you start mailing to other people's lists is that they may very well include some of your existing members. If you use more than one list, they will probably have at least some of the same names among them. A merge/purge process makes sure all the names are in the proper postal format while combining lists to eliminate duplicates and comparing with your house list to delete addresses of people who are already members.

If you are using one or two small lists, you may be able to manage this process manually. However, as the number of names and lists grows, trust this merge/purge function to an experienced data processing firm. Your mailshop may be able to manage your merge/purge for you. As you add more lists, especially exchanges that use different data fields and formats, consider using a specialist who can then send the data directly to your mailshop. My favorite is Catapult Direct (CatapultData.com).

To minimize complaints about multiple mailings, ask your data processing service to use a household merge/purge. This helps make sure you are only mailing one piece to any given address at the same time. (If one of your lists includes Angel Lopez and another includes Rosa Lopez, both at the same address, a household merge/purge will make sure only one of these is mailed.) Be sure to provide the data processor with a suppressor file of your active members to eliminate from the mailing.

Saturation mailings present a singular challenge. Since they are being mailed to everyone in a specific geographic area, it is not possible to eliminate mail to your members in that zip code. Consider sending a letter in advance to your members alerting them to the project and thanking them for their membership. You may also ask them to ask their neighbors to keep an eye out for the mailing and support your cause when the letter arrives.

GO FOR IT!

Direct mail remains an effective, efficient method for getting your message out to a targeted audience and convincing them to invest in your work. With some creative research and exchanges, you can build your membership and donations at a price you can afford. GFJ

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More Askers = More Money:

An All-Staff Approach to Major Gifts

BY ANDY ROBINSON

Deep in the heart of every development director you'll find an enduring fantasy: volunteer board members who ask for big gifts face to face. This vision is so pervasive and persistent that an entire industry — books, articles, workshops, consultants — has emerged to promote and service it. As a member of that industry, I can report that demand never ends and business is brisk.

This worthy fantasy can come true, but progress is usually measured in small, incremental steps. However, given all the challenges associated with board members' participation in fundraising, it surprises me how few organizations turn to the other available "human resource": their staff.

To raise money successfully, nonprofits need at least three things: a strong case for giving, prospective donors to solicit, and people to do the asking. Grassroots activists tend to assume — incorrectly — that they lack the second element — prospects for big gifts. However, most donors can and will give much more than you think. For example, people tend to contribute five to ten times more money when asked in person than they do when solicited by mail. If you can't or won't meet with your supporters, you're leaving money on the table.

Most donors can and will give much more than you think.

For most organizations, the biggest barrier isn't, in fact, a lack of donors, but rather a lack of *askers*. Perhaps it's time for a different approach to major gifts — one that deploys your human resources in a different way by focusing a little less on your board and putting a lot more energy into training and motivating your entire staff.

Consider Toxics Action Center (www.toxicsaction.org), which works in neighborhoods across New England to address the human health impacts of pollution, pesticides, workplace chemicals, and other poisons. They use a traditional community organizing model: canvassing neighborhoods by knocking on doors, sitting at kitchen tables, meeting with community groups, and organizing both formal and informal networks of residents to fight corporate and government misbehavior.

After five years of building their major gifts program, Toxics Action now raises $110,000 per year — one-quarter of its annual budget — from individual major gifts of at least $250. Using the time and talents of eight staff members, only one of whom is a full-time fundraiser, the organization conducts 250 to 300 donor visits each year in homes spread across six states.

ALL TOGETHER NOW

At Toxics Action, the first rule of fundraising is that every staff member participates. If you're on the payroll, you meet with members and ask for big gifts. Period. Everyone is trained together (regardless of previous experience), everyone works the phones together, and everyone schedules appointments during the same weeks. This egalitarian approach leaves no fundraiser (or prospective major donor) behind. Here's what makes this strategy work.

1. A campaign model with specific goals, deadlines, and a very tight calendar. Twice a year, in January and September, Toxics Action shuts down most regular activities for two weeks to concentrate on major donor fundraising. The first week of each campaign is dedicated to staff training and phoning donors to set up appointments. On the second week, everyone hits the road for donor meetings. Staff can and will do a bit of their normal work during this period, but for two weeks, fundraising is *the* priority. Conversely, organizers and support staff do very little major donor fundraising between campaigns, so when it's over, it's really over.

A third campaign is organized each May to follow up with remaining major donors and prospects, but this one is limited to a few senior staff. The rest of the staff canvasses through the summer, improving their door-knocking skills and building up the membership base.

2. Devotion to the numbers. During the campaign, all goals are stated and tracked numerically (see the campaign analysis chart on page 14). Each staff member begins with a list of between 55 and 70 members and is expected to reach half by phone during the first week, with the goal of scheduling 15 to 18 visits for the second week. These numbers are tallied and discussed at the end of each work day, so a dose of daily accountability is built in to the process.

3. A commitment to storytelling. Everyone is encouraged to tell and develop their own stories — why they're personally involved, why they do the work — and trained to elicit stories from the members. They all learn and tell organizational success stories. According to consultant Valerie Reuther, who helped Toxics Action to develop and perfect this approach, even the pitch —"why you need to give now" — is framed as a story.

4. A "culture of practice," in the words of executive director Alyssa Schuren. Training week feels a bit like boot camp: a typical 12-hour day includes repeated role plays interspersed with actual donor phone calls, sharing stories from the organizational "story bank," point-by-point training on conducting donor meetings, followed by more phone calls and role plays (see daily schedule).

Every stage in the solicitation process is discussed, modeled, and practiced. "We break it down into very small pieces," says Schuren. "We learn them one by one and then we put the pieces together."

Picture this: a series of practice stations encircling the room dedicated to the most common telephone excuses — "I don't have time to meet with you," "Just mail me something," and so on. During one training session, solicitors spend more than an hour rotating through these stations, practicing their responses until they feel prepared to address any objection they might hear on the phone. After such rigorous training, the actual phone calls are much more manageable.

5. Persistence powered by a dose of realism. During training-and-telephone week, staff members spend about 15 hours total on the phone with the goal of scheduling their 15 to 18 appointments. That's about one appointment per hour, during which they also confront a lot of voice mail, the occasional wrong number, and a taste of rejection. Everybody is given clear expectations from the start: one meeting per hour is a good result, so keep working your way through the list. If you make enough calls and talk with enough people, you'll reach your goal.

Sample daily schedule for the first week of the campaign

8:45–8:55 AM	Introductions
8:55–9:15 AM	Phone practice
9:15–10:30 AM	Phone calls
10:30–10:45 AM	Debrief
10:45–11:00 AM	Break
11:00 AM–noon	Storytelling workshop: How to collect and shape our stories
noon–1:30 PM	Donor meeting training: Putting together all the pieces for the first ask
1:00–2:00 PM	Lunch; write confirmation notes for scheduled meetings
2:00–3:00 PM	Phone calls
3:00–3:15 PM	Debrief
3:15–3:30 PM	Break
3:30–4:30 PM	Donor meeting training: The close and second ask
4:30–5:00 PM	Approaching renewals (previous donor visit) vs. upgrades (never been visited)
5:00–6:15 PM	Phone calls
6:15–7:00 PM	Dinner; write confirmation notes for scheduled meetings
7:00–7:15 PM	Phone practice
7:15–9:00 PM	Phone calls
9:00–9:15 PM	Debrief; review daily and running totals of calls made, meetings scheduled

6. A culture of mutual support. Everyone is accountable for both individual and collective goals, but the campaign leaders — Schuren and development director Mia Scampini — are encouraging and even gentle in their critiques. People laugh a lot, especially at their own behavior. While facing difficult work together, a tangible esprit de corps is modeled and reinforced by the leadership. Mutual support is built in at every stage. For example, during donor visit week, three conference calls are scheduled so everyone has the chance to share notes, commiserate, and inspire each other.

New employees are told that they will be accountable for raising money, and that they will also be trained and supported.

7. Transparency in recruitment. Before they sign on, new employees are told that they will be accountable for raising money, and that they will also be trained and supported — and everyone, regardless of job title or seniority, will be doing the same work. Once hired, nobody can credibly complain that "Fundraising isn't my job."

8. The courage to ask for much bigger gifts. Toxics Action members who have sent in $50 checks are generally asked for $1,500 during the meeting; those who have sent $100 checks are asked for $2,500. The result: during the fall 2006 campaign, the average gift was $538. These visits can lead to even larger contributions over the years, as $500 donors increase their gifts to $1,500 or more.

Each donor meeting is, in effect, an organizing meeting.

Scampini tells a typical story: "It was a working-class neighborhood. The family had previously given $45; the man was a surveyor and his spouse worked as a homemaker. Looking around their house, I had my doubts, but they had both been active in our local campaign, so I asked for $1,500. The husband said, 'We were thinking about $500, so why don't we meet in the middle and we'll give you $1,000.' I was blown away — but this happens to us all the time."

9. Embracing the wisdom that fundraising equals organizing. If you calculate staff expenses in the cost per dollar raised, the Toxics Action model starts to look less profitable. But this analysis misses the larger point: every contact with constituents is a chance to deepen commitment, strengthen relationships, and encourage members to accept responsibility for the health and growth of the organization. Each donor meeting is, in effect, an organizing meeting. Fundraising provides another opportunity to sit with members in their homes, ask about their concerns, discuss how they want to participate to address those concerns, and involve them in the work.

This method also helps the staff to become better organizers. They improve their listening skills, discover the value of persistence, and learn to speak about the organization in a compelling way. If for a similar campaign you wanted to recruit board members and other volunteer leaders to join the campaign, they would gain the same skills while expanding the pool of askers and potentially reducing your costs per donor reached and dollar raised.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

This model, which works very well for Toxics Action, also has its quirks and disadvantages.

Lots of time, no dependents. All current employees are under the age of 35; none have children or other dependents. (This hasn't always been the case — toward the end of his tenure, the former executive director was raising three kids — but the staff has always been relatively young.) Yes, they have lives outside of Toxics Action, but they also have enough flexibility to participate in a two-week fundraising blitz with several 12-hour days and lots of travel. Of course parents can travel and put in long hours — many do — but with young

Fall 2006 Campaign Analysis

In this chart showing the results of Toxics Action's fall campaign, the wide range of individual results — average gifts ranging from $85 to $1,716 — reflects a variety of factors, including the previous giving history of the donors, the difference in response rates and gift size from donors who had been visited previously compared to those being visited for the first time, and the varying levels of experience, comfort, and aptitude of the solicitors.

At Toxics Action, the usual practice is to pair the most generous donors with senior staff, who in many cases know them personally from previous campaigns. In this instance, the executive director focused on top-tier renewals, generating more than half the money raised (and skewing the averages in the process). This approach provides a kind of insurance policy for the organization — it makes sense to match your best solicitors with your best prospects — but the unintended consequence is a harder slog for everyone else. It might make sense to team up seasoned staff with less experienced askers when going out for some of the bigger gifts, for a two-on-one approach. Although it would take the less experienced staff away from some of their own visits, this approach might propel them into more success. Nonetheless, even when the two primary fundraisers (executive director and development director) are removed from the equation, the non-fundraising staff averaged $243 per visit — a very respectable result for a grassroots organization.

STAFF POSITION	PROSPECTS TO CALL	YES, WILL MEET	NO	MAYBE	MEETINGS COMPLETED	TOTAL RAISED	AVERAGE GIFT MEETING
Executive director	26	25	1	0	22	$37,755	$1,716
Development director	100	27	25	2	25	$11,430	$457
State director	57	19	17	1	16	$9,630	$602
Organizer	70	17	12	1	17	$1,451	$85
Organizer	58	15	16	2	12	$3,860	$322
Organizer	61	16	22	3	12	$1,270	$106
Organizer	57	13	26	0	13	$1,770	$136
Administrator	61	13	17	2	11	$1,735	$157
Totals	**490**	**145**	**136**	**11**	**128**	**$68,901**	**$538**

children at home, it could be challenging to honor this campaign schedule.

Staff turnover. The flip side of employing a relatively young and childless workforce is that they tend to relocate more frequently than the general population. New staff must be recruited and trained all the time, which means that donors often meet with different solicitors each year. However, the group's major donor income also rises each year, so although this situation is a challenge for the group, it does not seem to be an obstacle to the success of the campaigns.

You can reach "critical mass" for a campaign like this with as few as three or four staff solicitors.

Limited board involvement. Toxics Action has had limited success in engaging its board or other volunteers in these campaigns. Because most of their board members have jobs and family commitments, it's hard for them to join in such rigorous schedules. However, board members do provide prospect names, contribute money themselves, and occasionally participate in donor visits.

ADAPTING THIS APPROACH FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Although the Toxics Action model may seem daunting — very few nonprofits can shut down the office for two weeks while the entire staff raises money — perhaps you can redesign it to meet the needs and circumstance of your group. Here are a few suggestions to spark your thinking:

• ***Reduce the time commitment.*** Spend two days on training and phoning, and three days on visits, for a total of one work week instead of two. This approach might work well for local groups where most constituents live within the neighborhood, city, or county. The fundraising days don't have to be consecutive — you could do training and calling one week and schedule donor meetings for the following week, with a few days of regular work in between.

• ***Spread out the time commitment.*** For example, you might dedicate half of everyone's work hours for a month, with scheduled time for collective training, phoning, and donor visits. As a variation, you could devote four or five consecutive two-day-per-week blocks of time to this work, say every Wednesday and Thursday for a month, divided among training, calling, and donor visits. If any of your board or volunteers can make a regular time commitment, this might be a viable strategy for involving them.

• ***Recruit a smaller staff team.*** Rather than taking every staff person off their other work, you could focus on development and executive staff. According to trainer Valerie Reuther, you can reach "critical mass" for a campaign like this with as few as three or four staff solicitors.

Other lessons from the Toxics Action approach can be applied to your fundraising program even if your program doesn't involve such concentrated campaigns. Here are a few:

• ***Share the numbers.*** For those who don't do it every day — and for some who do — fundraising is mysterious. Require time at staff meetings and retreats to talk about where your money comes from. Discuss the pros and cons of various types of nonprofit income. The message: by providing more money, especially unrestricted income, a successful major gifts campaign benefits everyone, regardless of job title.

• ***Collect and share stories.*** Successful fundraising is based on compelling stories. Every organization needs a "story bank" that details the group's history and accomplishments along with the individual and collective stories of the participants. All staff members can contribute, even if they do no direct fundraising.

• ***Build a fundraising component into everyone's job description.*** Even if you can't corral your entire staff into soliciting big gifts, how can you match their talents and passions to your fundraising needs? Perhaps they could participate in a donor visit by sharing a story, and then listen and learn while someone else does "the ask."

Successful fundraising is based on compelling stories.

When fundraising is left solely to the development staff, it reinforces three all-too-pervasive myths: that fundraising requires specialized skills or a unique personality, that it's not the "real work," and that it's somehow demeaning or corrupting. Let us pledge to destroy these myths once and for all. Requiring that everyone on staff participate would be a great way to start. GFJ

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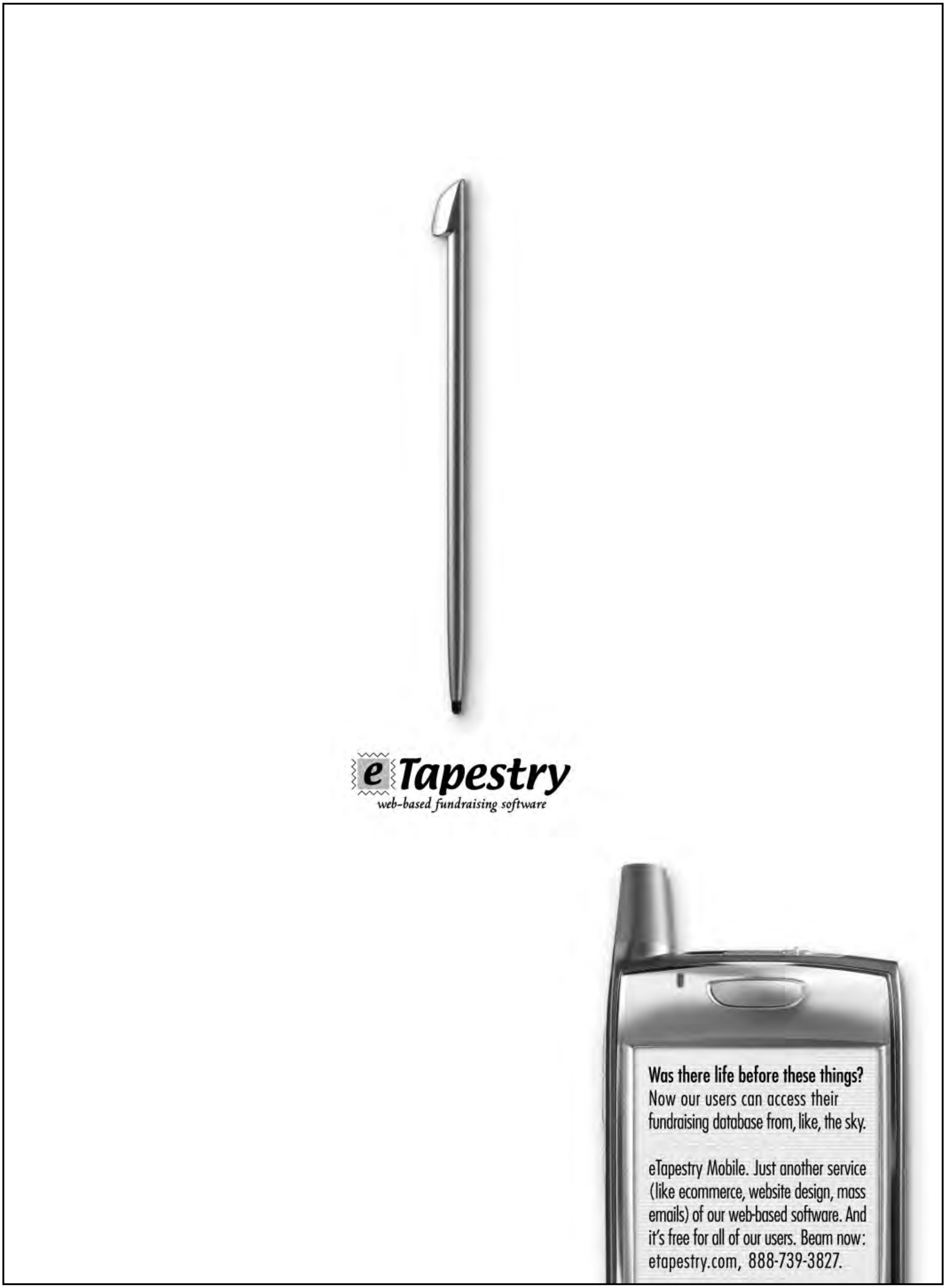
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