GREATER PUBLIC

How to Start an Acquisition Mail Program

Acquisition mail is truly an investment. It is both a financial cost and an expense in staff time to design a piece that will deliver results for this particular method. To ensure that the investment is performing over time, you must commit to recording, monitoring, and assessing the results of the mailing campaigns.

Acquisition mail doesn't typically yield a positive net result in year one, so when beginning or restarting a program be prepared to look at a two- to three-year cycle to ensure that the return on investment produces a strong long-term net investment. When you examine the results, be sure to factor in online gifts from people who received the mail then gave online as well as mail returns.

Dos

- **Limit the design**: Keep the graphics minimal. Use easy-to-read fonts and colors.
- **Keep copy brief**: This is not the place for long-form storytelling. Refine your case and keep it short, simple and powerful.
- **Do test discounts**: Include special offers for the membership amount, thank-you gifts or other special opportunities.
- **Keep up-to-date:** Look at what other nonprofits are testing and finding works.
- **Be realistic about ask amounts**: Keep your ask ladder modest. Acquisition mail is not the best method for finding new $500 donors.
- **Focus on one goal**: The point of this piece is to gain new donors. Eliminate anything that distracts from that objective.
- **Time it well**: Mail your piece in conjunction with an on-air drive or at a time when you will be actively fundraising on other platforms.
- **Select audience well**: Select lists that help you find folks that look like your best current supporters
- **Keep clean data**: Make sure you have clean data so you aren't paying to mail to your current or former donors.

What to Track

It's critical to know your donor acquisition cost for each list segment and campaign to maximize your investment.

- Costs of each segment and/or list
- Costs of mailing components (envelopes, letterhead, postage)
- Number mailed in each segment
- Number of mailed response
- Total $ raised
- Average $/segment
- Net result/segment
- Cost/name
- Online donor match-back results