Direct Mail Basics

Best Friends
SAVE THEM ALL
Direct mail is just one type of **direct response marketing**. Direct response is a type of marketing designed to generate an immediate response from donors where each donor response can be measured and attributed to individual communications. Channels include:

- Direct mail
- Digital (many channels, including email, web, social, text)
- Telemarketing
- Direct-response TV (DRTV)
- Radio
- Canvassing (door to door, face to face)
Align your practices with your values, and follow ethical guidelines and principles.

- Have honest brand representation
- Have strong security policies and procedures
- Honor communication preferences
- Quickly respond to inquiries and complaints
- See DMA ethical business practices guidelines for more

In today’s digital age, many people think mail is outdated or a waste of money. But that’s not the case!

• Donor mailings are profitable.
• It drives donations to multiple channels.
• It’s the main driver of new donor acquisition.
• Most donors begin their relationship with Best Friends through the mail.
Many/most donors begin their relationship with you in the mail, so it’s important to keep in touch through that channel.
It’s important to communicate with donors through several channels. Multichannel donors are very valuable!
Multichannel

Foster a multichannel approach:

• Unique URL on all direct-mail packages
• Corresponding digital/email appeals
• Online and social retargeting to mail recipients
Direct mail program elements

The following are beneficial for a healthy and growing direct-mail program:

– Appeals
– Newsletters
– Renewals
– Lapsed mailings
– Acquisition
– Acknowledgements
– Welcome kits
Appeals

Purpose:
• Share stories
• Engage donors
• Raise money

Your appeal packages should include a solicitation letter with a reply device and return envelope. They can also include special inserts, reports, premiums, and more.

Don’t forget the unique URL for online donations!
Restricted appeals can be a great way to raise funds for urgent needs, BUT can easily cannibalize unrestricted revenue later in the year.

When asking for restricted funds:

• Be specific in your ask
• Include details
• Follow up with donors

Steer clear of doing too many emergency appeals. It can give the impression that your organization isn’t properly managing its finances.
Purpose is two-fold:
- Stewardship (sharing impact, thanking and engagement)
- Revenue generation*

Best Friends newsletters are very stewardship-heavy but do include a cover letter with an ask.

*A solicitation with your newsletter may not be right for your org, but you can include a return envelope.
Renewals

Purpose: Prevent donors from lapsing

Some orgs have renewal mailings that run monthly; others only send them a few times per year.

Dear [Donor],

Today, she could be the poster child for resilience. But it’s no exaggeration to say that when Miss Missouri was rescued from a puppy mill, she appeared to be a broken dog. She had been a mama far too many times, she had a double “cherry eye” (a detached third eyelid that forms a red pocket in the corner of the eye) and she was terrified of people. At the time, she didn’t even have a name. In the papers the breeder provided, she was referred to only by a number.

A local rescue group was able to place Miss Missouri safely in foster care. And then, just when it seemed her luck was turning around, they discovered she had come to them pregnant, and the sum of her issues was more than the rescue group could handle. Thanks to you, Miss Missouri came to Best Friends, and her five little pups—BamBam, Shimmer, Ripple, and Puddle—got names instead of numbers.

For dogs like Miss Missouri, your Best Friends membership means medical care, companionship, and the chance for mom and pups to all find homes of their own. So please renew your membership today.

Caregivers had their hands full with Miss Missouri. A sharp-paw and pug mix, she was prone to health problems. Doctors treated her skin and ear issues and operated to repair her cherry eyes. And, of course, this mama many times over was also spayed.

It turned out Miss Mo, as she came to be called, also needed a lot of help overcoming her emotional issues—dissipating anxiety, compulsive barking, constant pacing, even sensitivity to sounds. But because you cared, she received plenty of encouragement from patient caregivers and trainers. She was finally able to put her puppy mill past behind her and heal not only physically, but emotionally, too.

[Over, please]

Membership Renewal Notice
Purpose: Reactivate lapsed donors

It’s generally cheaper to reactivate a lapsed donor than to acquire a new donor.

Watch metrics closely to make sure lapsed donors are still less costly to reactivate than to acquire new donors.
Purpose: Acquire new donors

Acquisition keeps your bucket from being too leaky. You won’t retain all of your donors, so you need to supplement with new donors.

Work with a list broker to rent lists.

You will lose money on acquisition. It’s an investment that pays off, however, over the course of your relationship with the donor.
Acknowledgements

Purpose: Thank-you letter for donations

Many orgs include an additional ask in their acknowledgements. Best Friends doesn’t, but we include a return envelope.

- Thank your donors as quickly as possible.

- Customize thank-you letters for restricted gifts and other special gifts, such as holiday matching gift campaigns.

- Customize thank-you letters for new donors with a welcome or “thank you for joining” message.
Welcome kits

Purpose: Welcome new donors to your organization

In addition to a prompt acknowledgement, welcome kits help start your relationship off on a positive note.

Collect actionable info on new donors
A note on premiums

Try to limit premiums to items your donors will value, and that also promote your brand. Best Friends uses premiums such as:

• Calendars
• Address labels
• Luggage tags
Outer envelopes

Your first goal is to get them to open that envelope. A great outer envelope will usually have:

- An eye-catching, urgent teaser
  - “You can help save them all by 2025!”
- Beautiful and neutral or positive animal imagery
  - Sad or injured animals on the envelope may have the benefit of shock factor, but they may not always foster positive donor relations and can denigrate the reputation of shelter animals.

Matching gift challenge inside!
YOU CAN HELP SAVE THEM ALL BY 2025
Test, test, test to figure out what your donors and prospects respond to. Some variables:

- Plain vs. colored envelope
- Kraft or faux-kraft envelopes
- Different images (animals by themselves, animals with people)
- Logo size and placement
- Faux labels or faux stamps
- Personalized teaser ("Jane, you can help save them all by 2025!")
- Faux “hand-written” font
- Real pen font

You’ll be surprised which techniques can lift response rates.
Segmentation is the process of taking a group of constituents and breaking it into “parts” for the purpose of message customization and analysis.

Many orgs use RFM (recency, frequency, monetary) segmentation.

Best Friends uses behavior segmentation, segmenting our list based on donor behavior or relationship type.

See “Segmentation 101” for more info.
The frequency of mail depends on your budget, revenue goals and organizational culture.

Start off slow and pay close attention to donor responses and feedback.

Remember: **The #1 reason donors give is because they were asked to give.** Your donors are already hearing from many other orgs in the mail, so it’s important to stay in touch and ask for their support.
You can use a spreadsheet to measure responses to all of your mailings, including average gift, total raised, net per donor, cost per dollar raised, and much more.

Other metrics to track: package results, acquisition list results, ask string tests, retention rates, reactivation rates.

See “Sample Direct-Mail Summary Report” for a template.
Communication preferences

• Make it easy to adjust communication preferences.
  – Include a donor services extension on the reply device.
• Try to be as nimble as possible.
  – Accommodate channel and frequency requests.
• Remain positive.
• Share the positive results you see in mail.
• What do they like to receive?
• They can customize their communication preferences.