

Annual Appeals Should Be Year-Long, High-Touch Campaigns

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A majority of non-profit organizations send out annual appeal letters this time of the year to encourage supporters to donate funds and reap the year-end tax benefits.

Recognizing it's a simple task to do each year (e.g. revise the letter from previous year, print and mail) to garner some funds, most non-profit organizations will tell you that they are not happy with the results. But they continue to do it year-after-year.

The problem is that sometimes it is the only communication supporters have from the organization and it can be insulting to only hear from an organization when they want you to open your wallet.

Some non-profits are getting smarter and developing high-touch campaigns to communicate with their supporters throughout the year, here are some ideas:

- Utilize your board to call supporters in your database once or twice a year to 1) thank them for their commitment and 2) ask if they have any questions about the organization. These calls should not include any reference to donations.
- Develop a simple newsletter issued a few times a year that updates your supporters on achievements and activities. Individuals want to know how their donations are being used.
- Send a short note and a copy of a positive newspaper article your organization and/or its programs received. (NOTE: Be sure to gain the paper's permission for use of the article.)

Probably the biggest challenge for those of us willing to donate funds at year's end is the number of annual appeals that we receive. Last year from October through December, I received 20 annual appeal letters and my pile is already stacking up to be bigger this year. So make a connection with your supporters on an ongoing basis and the return on your year-end ask will have a better return on investment.