

Creating Effective Direct Mail Charitable Solicitations: The Effects of Enclosures and Different Appeals

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What types of direct mail charitable solicitation work for different segments of prospective donors? Do enclosures help or hurt the effectiveness of an appeal to different donor lists? To address these questions, we mailed materials to 1440 mailing list members according to a three-factor between subjects experimental design. The three factors were: mailing list—wildlife (high involvement) donors vs. medical (low involvement) donors, enclosure (presence or absence of an enclosed sticker), and version of the appeal (vivid story vs. informational appeal). The envelope contained one of two appeals from the Fund for Animals—a wildlife charity. In some experimental conditions, the envelope contained a sticker).

Wildlife (high involvement) donors paid significantly more attention to all versions of the appeal than Medical (low involvement) donors [$F_{(1,251)} = 8.37, p < .01$]. This main effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction. Some appeals contained an enclosure, a Fund for Animals window sticker that exhorted people to “Save the Buffalo.” This enclosure raised attention for Wildlife donors and decreased attention for Medical donors [$F_{(1,251)} = 4.75, p < .05$].

The pattern of the means and significant effects for the attention data were precisely replicated not only by the self-reported time spent looking at the questionnaire, but also for the objective knowledge of subjects in the different experimental conditions. The enclosure increased objective knowledge of the appeals for Wildlife donors and decreased objective knowledge for Medical donors [$F_{(1,262)} = 6.00, p < .05$].

There was no evidence of the main effect indicating reciprocity, but the enclosure actually decreased responses from some groups of prospective donors. Instead, the results indicate that the enclosure acted as an *attention modifier* of the person opening the envelope. A recipient would find it easy to glance at the “Save the Buffalo—Fund for Animals” sticker and quickly evaluate whether to carefully read the appeal. The significant two-way interactions showed that the enclosure increased attention and comprehension for the Wildlife donors and decreased attention and comprehension for the Medical donors. This confirmed the role of an enclosure as an attention-modifying agent.

A strongly significant triple-order interaction [$F_{(1,263)} = 8.49, p < .005$] described the relationships between list, type of appeal, and enclosure. The interpretation of this

interaction is straightforward given the two-way interaction in the attention data discussed above.

In the introduction to this paper, we describe the “oversolicitation” of many Americans by nonprofits using direct mail. As people have to cope with many solicitations, they may learn strategies for processing them rapidly. This resembles Johnson and Russo’s (1984) finding that experts making choices use strategies to quickly eliminate inappropriate alternatives early rather than processing them deeply.

An easy way to evaluate the appeal is to quickly scan enclosures before reading the appeal. If someone were involved with wildlife causes and received an enclosure, they were likely to process the appeal deeply. If they were not involved, the enclosure cued them to shallow processing. Subjects involved with wildlife causes paid more attention to appeals with enclosures. Subjects involved with medical causes paid less attention when a sticker was enclosed with the appeal. This was reflected both in self-reported attention and in knowledge of the contents of the appeal.



Reference

Johnson, Eric J. and J. Edward Russo (1984), “Product Familiarity and Learning New Information,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 11 (June), 542-550.