

DIRECT FORUM

FEBRUARY 2014

VOLUME 10 ISSUE 2

Direct Forum is a free email newsletter containing useful direct marketing tips, news updates and how-to information. It's convenient, informative and I am not trying to sell you anything!

1. What not to do when storytelling

2. Which **typeface should you never use** in printed material; other follies designers continue to engage in

3. Every package **that is not personalized is compromised**

4. My reasons to continue using **direct response as a fundraising tool** backed by these six facts

What not to do when storytelling

Story is King.

That is one dictum that ad men live by because **to move product, you have to tell a compelling story.**

I know this because my earlier life was spent in advertising agencies in four different cities: Bombay, Munich, New York and Toronto.

So, I know I speak with some authority when it comes to storytelling to diverse audiences and I have noticed that there are four crucial mistakes writers make when telling a story.

Alongside is one of the many letters I received this year. This one is a story about a disabled senior called Ruth and the letter made all four of those crucial mistakes.

Although you won't hear about it on the news tonight or read about it in tomorrow's newspaper, there is a crisis in our community. Some of our elderly neighbors -- the oldest and frailest among us -- are literally starving to death.

Dear Supporter,

It is hard to imagine in this country . . . the land of prosperity . . . that thousands of elderly people are literally starving to death. We'd like to believe that only happens in other places, but it's happening right here in Snohomish County.

Often blind, confined to wheelchairs, or simply too weak to leave their homes, you might never know these seniors exist.

Yet behind closed doors and drawn shades they are silently wasting away, often so isolated there's no one to ask for help.

As a loyal supporter of the Senior Services Meals on Wheels program, I know you understand the difficulties so many of our seniors face. Can I count on you to extend a hand of kindness to the elderly neighbors in our community once again? Your gift to our Meals on Wheels program can help us reach out to more of our elderly neighbors with home-delivered meals . . . meals that save lives.

It doesn't cost much. You can use the enclosed meal tickets to help us provide an entire week of nutritious meals for just \$35, or \$70 will provide two weeks of meals. It may be the difference between life and death to someone like 76-year-old Ruth.

When I first met Ruth, she had lost nearly 25% of her body weight and was a fragile 94 pounds. She was barely more than skin and bones.

Earlier in the year, Ruth suffered a stroke and lost the ability to use one side of her body. Then, she had to have her left leg amputated.

CONTINUES ...

Mistake 1: Beginning with a meek opening.

Remember, your first sentence is most powerful attention grabber.

It is usually what someone sees first and has the vital task of making the reader say: “I want to know more about this.”

Imagine a magazine article without a strong lead. How many readers would it attract?

Better still imagine you are watching TV, flicking channels. Suddenly something catches your attention and you stop to watch.

The first line must act the same way. It’s your best, and maybe your only, shot at capturing your reader’s attention and you only have three seconds to do that. **Keep it short but involving.**

Mistake 2: Not using subheads to break up your copy

Once you’ve got your reader’s attention, they usually don’t just start reading but instead they start scan for something to reinforce their initial interest.

That’s why it’s best to break the copy into sections using subheads.

Mistake 3: Not using images of the person you are talking about to embellish the story

Images are highly effective at capturing attention and should always be accompanied by a caption that explains who the people involved are in your story. Put a caption of 2 or 3 lines,

usually under the photo, to further keep the reader inside.

Remember people are interested in other people.

Also don’t use stock photos. Experts recommend that non-profits train employees to take photographs of their programs and people. How hard is that now that every one owns a mobile device with a camera?

Mistake 4: The biggest one of all—forgetting to involve the reader

Learn from your favourite novel or fiction writers. They have the uncanny ability of telling a story that draws you in completely.

It’s called showing or painting a picture with words.

The moment the reader can visualize the image you’re trying to paint, you’ve involved them, and that’s what good storytelling is all about,

Every great storytelling letters should be able to do that in spades.

I have been scripting stories for Special Olympics Ontario for the last 9 years and I am proud to say that the giving response has been from 19% to 25%—that’s like getting a gift back from every 1 out of 4 people who read the story.

On the next page is my latest Special Olympic Ontario story about Alex D’Silva.

CONTINUES ...

November, 2013

Special Olympics
Ontario 

**Please help us
create a place where
everyone belongs.**

Dear Friend

Like all loving parents, we are proud of our two beautiful sons – Alexander, age 13 and Aris, age 9. And like you, we too are looking forward to the warm, family times coming up during the holidays. We give thanks— thanks to you for having played a part in our family's happiness, *sight unseen*, when you decided to "Adopt an Athlete". We thought you might enjoy getting to know us.

The other good news is that the "Adopt an Athlete" program you participated in was a great success. It helped approximately 1,600 Special Olympics athletes and families, who are equally appreciative. Alex was diagnosed with Down Syndrome shortly after he was born. On the very first day in grade one when Alex returned home he said, "Mom, I don't want to play tag with the kids at school, because I can't run as fast as them."

Those words tore my heart and I hugged him tightly so he would not see the tears in my eyes.

We decided we would always raise Alex like we would raise any other child. We expected from him and for him nothing less than any other child. We spent every day of his life teaching him that he could do everything, but more important that he deserved to do and get everything everyone else does.

Determined to do something about Alex's concern that he couldn't run as fast as the other kids, we looked into Special Olympics and found a wonderful all sports program.

Alex loves the Special Olympics program so much that he now asks, "When is the next class?"

**Special Olympics provides individuals like Alex
who have intellectual disabilities and families like ours with so much.**

One day as we drove past the school playground, it broke our hearts watching him sit silently under a tree, while the other kids laughed and played or talked about a hockey game they won or the soccer practice they had. At Special Olympics he proudly takes part in the conversation and talks about the sports programs he is participating in – *Alex now has a place to socialize and feel part of a group.*




Here is the link:

<http://youtu.be/7s22HX18wDY>

Here are two more videos produced by my students last year for the charity, Lisa Brown Foundation on YouTube.

<http://youtu.be/GAohZup-ZXc>

Created by the following students:

Account Executives: Marina Ferraz & Graeme Paterson

Research: Abhinesh Devavarapu

Copywriter/Creative: Oliver Ifurung

Art Director: Urvi Shah & Maxie Winick

Production/Budget: Harmeet Singh

And the second:

http://youtu.be/hO_FscYlinA

Created by the following students:

Account Executive: Nicole Ciciretto

Research Coordinator: Sophia Miao

Copywriter: Rebecca Nugent

Copywriter: Jessica Bronstein

Art Director: Mark Gronowski

Production Manager: Tracy Jiang

Finally, **the best way** to tell a story is **by producing a video**

Videos have become an integral part of social media and are widely viewed and shared by millions.

I have been teaching and encouraging my students to do that and this year eleven groups of students each produced a pro bono video for the charity 'The Massey Centre for Women' pro bono.

They also created this direct mail piece alongside for the charity for free, which got a 8.1% response from their small list of less than 1,000 current donors

Videos, like movies, pack all the power of sight and sound that allow you to tell some great stories. Like this one fabulous one from Thailand:

 **A child shouldn't have to take care of another child alone.**

Ms. Jane Sample
123 Anywhere Street
Toronto, Ontario M1M 1M1

November 26, 2013

Dear Ms. Sample,

Imagine being pregnant as a teenager without any support — emotional, social, or economical.

Now imagine being a teenager who doesn't know what to do, has no time for education, nor the skills required to build a successful future for herself and her child.

It is the generosity and kindness from many supporters and parents like you that make it possible for Massey Centre to provide hope and shelter for high-risk pregnant and parenting girls.

No, a child shouldn't have to take care of another child alone. But many of them are forced to. **Could you imagine if you had to face these challenges at such a young age?**

Many girls in this predicament are alone. They may rely on the generosity of friends and relatives for a couple of nights, but the truth is that many of them end up with no other choice but to live on the streets where they are vulnerable to violence and abuse.

The adolescents who call Massey Centre home are one of the highest-risk and most vulnerable groups in Canada.

The facts are alarming. More than 80% of those who come to the Centre are poor, have been neglected, sexually and physically abused, and traumatised. In fact, many of the adolescents are active substance abusers and more than 94% were not enrolled in high school.

I cannot express to you how much your support would help right now. It will offer hope, making it possible for high-risk and vulnerable adolescents aged 13-21 to **start new lives at the Massey Centre each and every day.**

Ms. Sample, your gift now of \$36, \$50, \$100 or whatever amount you are comfortable with will ensure that our doors are always open, and that a child shouldn't have to take care of another child alone.

Every mom who leaves Massey Centre leaves with a plan and the necessary skills and confidence required to succeed as both an individual and a mother. All our programs teach and support young moms in bonding with and attending to the mental health needs of their babies, greatly reducing the risk of developmental delays and behavioural disorders.

(Turn over, please.)



Which typeface **should you never use** in printed material; **other follies** that designers continue to engage in

If you notice, I have just changed my newsletter again so that the body copy is now in a serif font. That's because I remembered an important proven fact— sans serif fonts (like the one here) are the easiest to read.

The previous one (like this one) can actually hinder legibility and slow down the reading process.

This is proven by author Colin Wheildon, who spent nine years testing more than 200 people on a number of different type and layout elements, for his book: *Are You Communicating or Just Making Pretty Shapes*

Mr. Wheildon's research found that a serif typeface like Times New Roman is more than FIVE TIMES easier for average readers to comprehend than a SANS serif type such as this one or Helvetica, Verdana or Arial.

Yet, many designers continue to use sans serif fonts in their reading materials because they are popular as online reading typeface.

Wheildon also found that:

- 47% of readers complained strongly about the difficulty of reading a sans serif font

- 9.8% reported that reading it caused them physical discomfort
- 19.6% said they had difficulty focusing on the type after having read a dozen or so lines. The same group reported no problem reading another article set in a serif font.

No wonder books, newspapers and magazines continue to use serif fonts.

Printed material is not only supposed to look attractive or colourful or stylish... it is also intended to be read.

So, the function of design should be:

To ensure readership and to organise the distinctive elements of the printed material.

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This involves many important principles of layout design such as:

1. Leading the reader

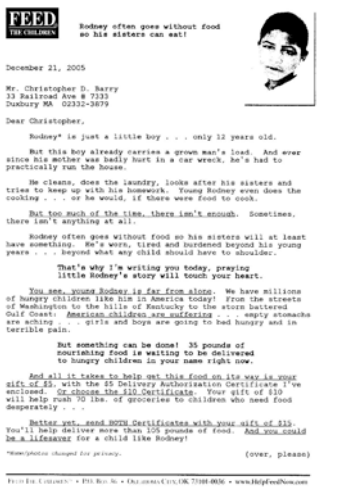
Imagine walking into a room with 3 pictures, each of the same size, shape, and colour. Which would draw your attention first? Hard to say, isn't it?



Now, simply by tilting one of them, the designer can force your eye to go there.

That's leading the reader.

2. Space utilization



Vary your sections. Making them visually different makes them easier to absorb.

Break it up with pictures, colours and even different widths

Having to plough through information that all looks the same can lead to boredom.

And a bored reader is a lost reader.

3. Eye movement.

Eye movement research shows that the eye tends to jump around and rests on whatever seems the most inviting or exciting.

So choose the most important parts of your copy, that you want the reader to definitely read and use underlining, bolding, bulleting or highlighting on them.



4. Image placement

Photographs or illustrations should face the copy

You can hold the reader's attention by making your images or illustrations face the copy. This leads the reader into the copy and keeps the eye focused on the message.



When the image looks away from the message it leads the eye out of the page and is gone forever.



Another point: In English we read from left to right.

Images placed on the right side hinder the eye from reading and jumping back to the left side to continue reading. But those on the left doesn't seem to bother readability

CONTINUES ...

5. Other Items that dominate are faces looking right back at you.

We humans are social animals. We communicate in a positive way by looking at another person's eyes, or in a negative way by refusing to make eye contact.

Yes, a picture is worth a thousand words. People remember less than 10% of what they read — but more than 50% of what they see.

In a world drowning in information overload you only have a few seconds to attract your target audience's attention and visual make it more engaging.

6. Cartoons or comic strips: they seem to attract the most attention because we are curious to know the joke.

7. And Hand Written Messages:

Like this one!



10 YEARS AGO



NOW



Every package that is not personalized is compromised

Jerry Hurtsinger once said that and I agree.

However, the true value lies not in personalizing your letter but in being personal.

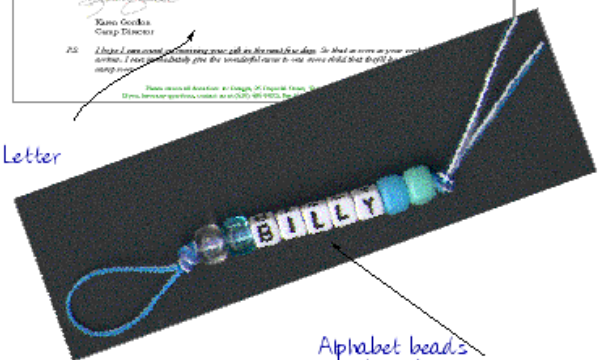
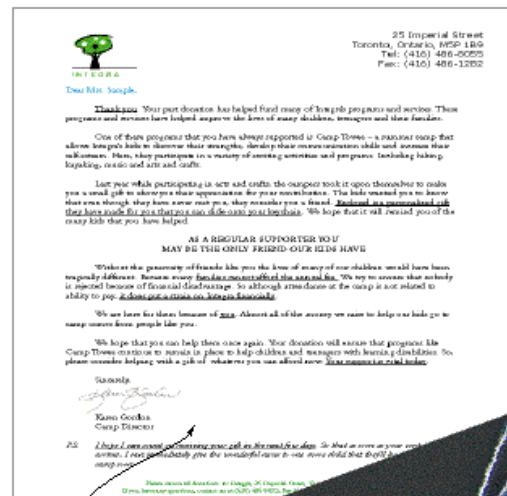
It's not just making sure you get the name and address right but how personal your message is to the recipient. Simply ensuring that the name and address is correct is effective as a strategy and is a product of the database or CRM system that the donor information is housed in. But you still need to connect the dots.

So here is what I suggest—test a segment of your donor list.

Here how I did for the charity Integra Foundation. This piece was mailed to 228 people who had given over \$50.

- I personalized the message with small details like telling them how much they gave the last time.
- I then thanked them for their past donations and gave them a small personalized gift with their name on it.

The Result: It generated 2,750 times the initial investment. Now that's what I call a great ROI (return on investment).



CONTINUES ...

Another example: this beautiful piece alongside that I had the privilege of working on for the Montreal Agency DTC Direct Inc. Each painting had the recipient's name imprinted above the door of the shop.

Here is an email from the client:

Billy.

I was overwhelmed by how many people sent me emails or picked-up the phone to say thank-you. Many stated that this was the most unique Christmas card ever received. I also sent this to individuals in the pharma industry who were invited to the Canada Post webinar, which I was the speaker. I had one response from them.

Don Baker
DTC Direct Inc.

And of course there is my own year-end mailing to my friends, colleagues and clients. **It was featured in my previous newsletter.**

This is always my signature piece where I try and apply all the important principles of direct marketing, from ensuring that it gets opened and read, to effectively telling a compelling story and ensuring a great response.

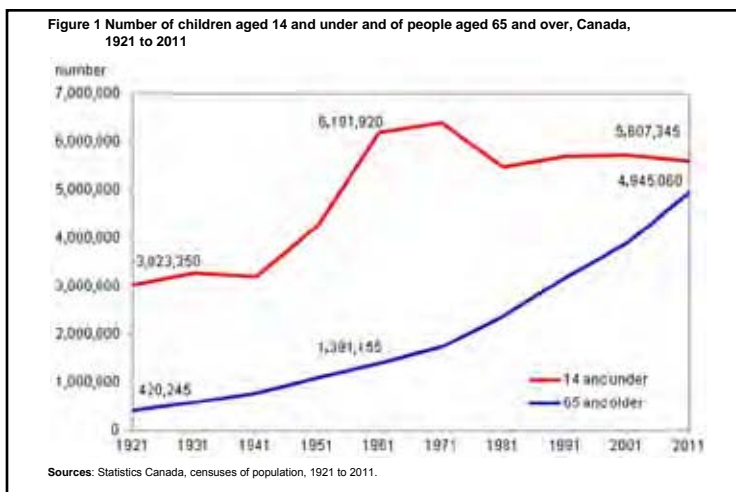


My reasons to continue using direct response as a fundraising tool backed by these six facts

Fact 1: A recent study commissioned by **Blackbaud and HJC** examined the giving habits of four generations of Canadians.

The study found that 9 in 10 Canadians give. Civics, born before 1945, are the most generous, and they are closely followed by Boomers ages 49 to 67.

Fact 2: The number of Canadians, according to **Stats Canada**, aged 65 and older is close to 5 million and growing.



Fact 3: Boomers are set to control incredible wealth— an estimated \$1 trillion from their parents over the next 20 years. Economists say it's the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in Canadian history. (**Toronto Star, January 23, 2014**)

Fact 4: According to the **2011 Stats Canada Census**, the working-age population (those aged 15 to 64) represented 68.5% of the Canadian population. This proportion was higher than in any other G8 country, except Russia.

Fact 5: Among this working-age population, 42.4% were in the age group 45 to 64, a record high proportion. Almost all people aged 45 to 64 in 2011 were baby boomers. (**Proof that many are still working and earning money**)

Fact 6: According to **Epsilon's 2012 Annual Channel Preference Study**, consumers made it very clear that their preferred channel to receive information is direct mail. They may choose to respond back in different ways today—online, by phone but, make no mistake about it; they would still rather receive a solicitation as a hard copy.

There you have it, my six reasons to continue using direct response.

Now tell me again the reasons you still believe in the ongoing debate that direct marketing is dead?

A more important question you should be asking yourself is: "How can I attract these baby boomers right now?"

For help in any one of the 4 topics in this newsletter, just contact me.

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