

REAP THE BENEFITS OF A PROPER THANK-YOU STRATEGY

By Michael Johnson April 29, 2010

According to most research, one of the biggest frustrations expressed by donors to nonprofits is that the organizations they support do not thank them enough or in an appropriate manner. How can this be addressed? The answer is simple. Develop a proper gift receiving strategy.

It is a proven fact that if you turn your gift receipts around in the mail within 24 to 48 hours after receipt of the gift, you will see a significant lift in your number of responses in the form of subsequent gifts and overall revenue. This tells the donor that you are an efficient organization with quality record-keeping, that you care about their gift, and that there is a sense of urgency in applying your gift to its intended purpose.

To further illustrate the point, Mal Warwick (direct mail guru) conducted his own research on this topic and cited the results in his book "Revolution in the Mailbox". Here are four key principles that he observed:

- **Promptness:** 24-Hour turnaround is better than 48, which is better than 72 or 96. A week or ten days pushed the limit. Three weeks is far too long for a donor to wait to be thanked. And don't even think about sending thank-you notes that take longer to get into the mail.
- **Warmth:** Show your appreciation. Acknowledge the donor's thoughtfulness, generosity, and concern. Don't send your donors a letter that could have been written by a committee of lawyers at the IRS.
- **Personalization:** Cite the amount and the date of the gift. Be specific and be personal. Hand sign the acknowledgement.
- **Accountability:** Explain what the gift will be used for what feedback the donor can expect, and when.

Indeed, the gift acknowledgment process does not simply end with a gift receipt. Personal thank you's via mail, telephone, and personal visits may be appropriate in certain cases. A recent survey conducted by Campbell Rinker indicates the following: "Sending gift receipts that double as a thank-you to donors is probably most appropriate for gifts of \$25 or less. Gifts over \$25 probably merit some additional attention to deliver the most positive impression. How much more attention is a tactical decision best left to the nonprofit but at minimum, mailing separate thank-you's and tax receipts might be a good start. More individual attention could be added to the thank-you as the gift size increases."

Bottom line, the more your donors feel appreciated, the more engaged they will become and the more they will give.

Proper Etiquette When Writing A Thank-You Note

1. Show some effort.

Always hand write your note of appreciation, don't print it out from your computer. Even if you're handwriting is "horrendous", slow down and make an effort to write legibly for this occasion. Don't use a pre-printed or pre-worded greeting card, unless you're significantly adding to the message in your own handwriting. The extra time you take will be appreciated by the person you are thanking. After all, they went out of their way to do something for you, how you choose to express your appreciation can communicate to them that you care about them or give the impression that you don't care. Be sure to write at least three sentences in the body of your note, but it doesn't have to be a novel.

2. Make it personal but don't talk about yourself.

In coming up with what to say, reference the gift or what they did for you. Even if you didn't particularly like the gift, say something descriptive about it instead of avoiding the subject. You don't have to lie, just be sure to recognize the importance of the gift — like it or not. And don't use the thank you note as a gossip column or go into a long tirade about your bad hair day. Don't say anything negative — EVER — even if you try to follow it by adding a "just kidding" and a smiley face. Your recipient may not get the joke, and in any case, a thank you note is not the proper occasion to showcase your special brand of sarcastic humor.

3. Better now than never.

Thank you's should be written "as quickly as possible". So what exactly does that mean? For most occasions such as social gatherings and birthday gifts, that means roughly 7 to 14 days. Regardless of the situation, sooner really is better. However even if it's been a year and you think it's too late, go ahead and write that note of appreciation. Maybe the person had forgotten about it - chances are they didn't forget. If you send a thank-you now, he or she will at least know that not only did you think of them when you received the gift, but you thought of them now, even after all this time, and you took the time to thank them.

4. Every deed deserves its own recognition.

Would you even think of thanking your best friend for a birthday present by writing something like: "Thank you for cute the sweater. You are so thoughtful! And thank you for all the gifts I know you will give every year for my birthday since we are BFF"? Of course not! Don't do the same thing retroactively by sending one combined thank you note for the last three gifts you received from somebody. In this case, it is totally NOT okay to "kill two birds with one stone." Can you imagine, "Hey Grandma, thank you for little Johnny's christening present and oh yeah I almost forgot to thank you for the wedding gift. I use the blender every day. And you know what, come to think of it, thanks for the money you sent me for my birthday. You really are a great grandma!" Sound ridiculous doesn't it?

5. Address with respect.

Not sure whom to thank? A good rule of thumb for birthdays, weddings and other “gift” occasions is to address your thank you note to the person who signed your gift card. Address the card to both husband and wife if both of their names were on your gift. Children living in the home of the couple should be recognized in the inside salutation or body of your thank you note. If you don’t know the address, call somebody. For business associates, job interviews, and pretty much anyone older than you that you don’t know very well — error on the side of formality. Envelopes should definitely use Mr. or Mrs. and the person’s last name. To address a business woman, if you’re not sure whether she is married or what title she prefers, it is best to use Ms. as the title. If you don’t feel comfortable with that, you may use just her first and last name together. Try not to use anyone’s first name in the salutation of your letter unless they have given you permission to do so.

So you see, proper thank you etiquette is not rocket science. For most of us, the standard manners our parents and teachers gave us should do the trick. The key is remembering those manners — and more importantly, acting on them. Whenever someone gives you a present or does something nice for you, recognize that kindness. Don’t delay. A little appreciation goes a long way!

TIPS FOR THANK YOU'S

Today, extending old-time courtesies helps you stand out. Yes, boys and girls, saying "thank you" has become a competitive advantage. So few people express appreciation — a Lenox etiquette poll found that nearly five out of every 10 people don't always say thanks.

Your takeaway: Don't underestimate the power of saying thanks.

1. **Throw a "Thank You" bash for your customers. In turn it will boost your business.**
2. **Be warm and personal. Hand-written is imperative.**
3. **Know that timing counts.**
4. **Pass along compliments.**
5. **Send "value-added" appreciation.**
6. **Consider when to send for maximum impact.**
7. **Be quirky. Be fun. Be unique. Be yourself.**
8. **Appreciate employees.**
9. **Thank your complaining customers.**
10. **Don't go over the top. Be honest about offering no-strings-attached thanks.**
11. **Feel the power. Thank you's need to be sincere.**