

Making It Interesting (Mandatory)

Let's us now praise extraordinary insights, this one courtesy of Howard Luck Gossage (1917-1969), "a man who hated advertising," it's said, yet was inducted into the Advertising Copywriters Hall of Fame. Celebrated ad pioneer David Ogilvy called Gossage, "the most articulate rebel in the advertising business," a man who felt "that advertising was too valuable...to waste on commercial products...that it justified its existence only when it was used for social purposes." I.e., for good causes.

Here's what the admirable Mr. Gossage had to say, "The real fact of the matter is that nobody reads ads. People read what interests them, and sometimes it's an ad."

And sometimes it's your direct mail solicitation ... or the cover story on your donor newsletter ... or that email alert your organization just sent.

In each case the decision to read or not to read your stuff will come down to one thing: Is a person interested in what you're saying and/or showing?

Since this is a vitally important principle, let me repeat. Your donors and prospects are under no obligation to pay attention. If you do not somehow interest them, they will not read what you send.

How to interest people: A checklist

So how *do* you interest people? Here's a brief checklist of some things I consider when I write for donors or prospects:

Am I being "donor-centric" enough?

- Have I said what amazing things the organization did (or would do) with their gifts? Did I mention worthwhile results? Real accomplishments?
- Did I link these accomplishments back to charitable giving?
- Did I celebrate the donor as the hero? (In other words, did I say in some fashion over and over, "This good work would not be possible without your help.")
- Did I talk about the organization's cost efficiency? (Donors often say in surveys that they believe charities are poorly run. And this already high level of skepticism is increasing.)

Am I taking advantage of human psychology?

- Am I telling (and showing) people things they DON'T already know? I.e., does my information have news value? Is it unique or innovative? Are my photos surprising in some way?
- Is it bold, passionate? (Not bland, predictable, or boring.)
- Am I aiming for the heart? Have I included plenty of emotional triggers? (Fear, anger, greed, exclusivity, scarcity and so on. See chapter XX.)
- Is the word "you" used often?
- Is the tone conversational rather than formal?
- Am I making it easy for skimmers, flippers and browsers to glean information? If, for instance, someone reads just the headlines, will the person still understand my key messages?
- Is the publication as a whole a quick read? Am I writing short sentences? Am I using action verbs? Have I eliminated jargon?
- Since anecdotes are the fastest way to explain anything, am I using anecdotes to illuminate our most pressing issues?
- Am I using my statistical evidence like a spear, to make a single important point?
- Can I use testimonial anywhere, to inspire the faithful and calm the doubters?
- People want to act. Have I made at least one offer they can respond to?