



## TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

Overcoming the illusion of too much mail.





## INTRODUCTION

### Why do some donors complain about direct mail?

When donors complain about too much mail, the root cause is usually something other than the mail itself. It's unlikely that the organization is over-mailing. Most likely, the organization hasn't addressed the main reasons that lead donors to think they are getting too much mail.

## 3 REASONS WHY

Here are the 3 main reasons why donors might complain they are getting too much mail.

### **Mail Timing**

Pieces arriving in close succession create the impression of over-mailing, even if the content is completely different. Sending an appeal letter, followed by a newsletter, and then a special invitation – all one week apart – is too tight of a schedule.

### **Messaging Relevancy**

Failing to match the right message to the correct audience appears irrelevant and wasteful to donors.

### **Mailing List Integrity**

Mailing list mistakes (including misspelled names, duplicate names, and incorrect addresses) cause donors

to feel undervalued by the organization. They all undermine the organization's efforts to build a deeper relationship with donors through direct mail communications.

## WHAT NOT TO DO

Organizations want happy donors, so when complaints come in, the first thought is to stop or reduce the activity that is causing the complaints. While this might be an instant reaction, it's rarely the best approach.

Donors who call to complain are also more likely to be a nonprofit's most engaged donors; complainers are often donors with the highest retention rates and longest histories with the organization.<sup>1</sup> It's imperative that an organization takes the time to fully understand the donor's concerns instead of automatically suspending direct mail.

<sup>1</sup>Hussey, J. (2006). Donor complaints: Listen and learn. Retrieved from <http://www.nonprofitpro.com/article/donor-complaints-listen-learn-35906/all/>.



When organizations respond to complaints by mailing less frequently or stopping mailings altogether, they create an entirely new problem: under-mailing, which leads to shortages in donations or memberships. It's critical organizations don't overreact to complaints, but instead, look at the underlying causes of complaints and address them head-on.

## THE RIGHT APPROACH

What should be done is to correct mail timing, improve direct mail messaging, and improve mail lists.

### Correcting Mail Timing

#### Mail Class, Destinations, and Holidays

- Build mail schedules based on when the package will arrive in the donors' mailboxes, not when it leaves the warehouse.
- How mail is sent – first class, non-profit, etc. – can drastically impact timing as well as cost.
- The final destination of a mailing also impacts the time it takes to land in the donor's mailbox.
- When mailing around holidays, consider post office volume, delivery black-out dates, and whether donors will be home to receive the piece.

#### Examine All Channels

Before setting a direct mail schedule, collect data on every channel touchpoint and evaluate the timing of mailings accordingly. Each channel should complement the other.

### Maintain Production Schedules

When deadlines slip, the timing of a mailing can be impacted, pushing the in-home date later than planned. When this happens, and the next mailing goes out on time, there may be too little time between in-home arrivals.

### Use Relevant Events to Guide Mail Timing

Tie mailings to important celebrations and dates. By timing mailings around significant dates and events, donors can easily see the relevance of a mailing and are more likely to respond positively to it.

## Improving Direct Mail Messaging

### Clarify and Customize

Constantly review all content to ensure that it is clear and concise with a unique message. Each piece should be tailored to specific donor segments as much as possible.



### Test Messages Before Deploying

If your organization lacks the database volume to effectively conduct A/B split tests, consider sending a small group of selected donors proposed messaging for direct mail, and then asking those donors how the message resonated with them. Also, the statistics-based Donor Driven Design is a very effective tool for matching messaging to segments.

### Explain to Donors Why Contact Matters

By adding copy that emphasizes the importance of each communication piece that donors receive, they begin to see the relevance of frequent contact through direct mail.



## Improving Mailing Lists

### Examine Lists for Non-Responsive Donors and Overlap

Active donors may occasionally complain, but lapsed donors can voice complaints as well. Constantly examine past performance data on response rates and donations to determine the optimal number of mailings to send to a lapsed donor before pulling their address from a file.

Pay close attention to the analytics, though – suppressing a donor too soon can prematurely cut off communication and donations. Conversely, continuing to send mail that isn't getting a response is a waste of time and money and is also likely to annoy recipients.

Comb through multiple lists (if they exist) within the organization for duplicate information so mailings aren't sent more than once to the same donor.

### Give Donors Options

Either digitally or with a direct mail reply device, ask donors for their preferred frequency of communication. This puts the donor in control and allows them to still receive mail that matters to them.

## IF THEY STILL COMPLAIN

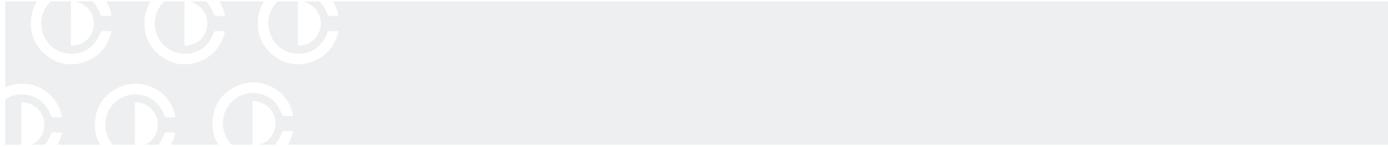
### Stay Focused on Results

Direct mail strategy should be driven by results, not by complaints. Remain focused on the desired net revenue of the entire program as well as individual mailings to determine if a direct mail program is working.

**Analyze donor segments to see which donor groups are, and are not, seeing value in certain mailings based on performance metrics for the segment.**

### Create a Donor-Complaint Strategy

Create – and communicate internally – a specific donor-complaint strategy that spells out how to not only respond to donors but also collect their feedback. Have channels in place to implement that feedback in future direct marketing planning.



## MAY WE BUY YOU A CUP OF COFFEE?

Let's chat about how we can custom-tailor strategies and solutions to help you meet your organization's most pressing goals. We cordially invite you to a **Coffee & Conversation** where we'll analyze any area of your direct response you'd like and share our recommendations in a complimentary 30-minute consultation and a one-page report that will help you take confident next steps.

Here are some popular Coffee & Conversation topics, but we're open to evaluate any area of your program. Let's chat!

### Campaign Review

Give us your best, your worst, or your most challenging fundraising campaign along with your results report and/or audience insights and we'll provide actionable suggestions on ways to enhance your results.

### Data Review

Let us uncover the hidden trends and takeaways from your program reports. We'll share our high-level insights on your trends (good and not so good) so you can make better-informed decisions.

### Website Review

Are your site visitors taking the desired next steps? Pick our brains to explore how to best optimize your site, increase engagement and help you meet your goals online.

### Production Review

Deadlines, set-ups, papers, lettershop and all things mail production. Let's explore where you can gain efficiencies and savings with your direct mail and print production.



Schedule **Coffee & Conversation** with us [here](#) or scan the QR code.  
We'll send you a virtual cup of coffee to enjoy – on us!

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## ABOUT CONCORD DIRECT

Great listeners. Great strategists. Great implementors.

Nonprofits rely on Concord Direct to advance their missions by building and activating audiences across direct mail, email, websites, online advertising and social media. Our data-driven strategies, expert creative, and efficient execution means that the investment you make in fundraising will deliver measurable impact.



To learn more, maximize engagement, and start reaching your goals, visit us at [concorddirect.com](http://concorddirect.com).

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