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CONFERENCE NOTEBOOK

## **Charities Urged to Use Marketing to Appeal to Donors' Hopes and Dreams**

By Suzanne Perry

New York

Charities that want to attract and retain donors must develop marketing materials that communicate their values, a keynote speaker told a meeting here sponsored by the Direct Marketing Association.

Kay Sprinkel Grace, an organizational consultant and author in San Francisco, said too many nonprofit organizations emphasize how much money they need rather than telling donors why their missions are important.

"I don't care how desperate an organization is," she said. "It's not about the needs you have, it's about the needs you meet."

Ms. Grace said nonprofit organizations should take a page from for-profit companies, which try to attract customers by appealing to their hopes and dreams.

She cited an advertisement by Fireman's Fund Insurance, which rather than describe its products tells readers: "Life is a tornado watch. You can hunker down in the basement, or get up on the roof, let the wind give you rock-star hair and yell: I knew you were coming. That's why I didn't rake the leaves."

Ms. Grace, who is a consultant to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's Major Giving Initiative, said nonprofit groups should avoid boring descriptions of their history and activities and let potential donors know how they can act on their values.

She praised a brochure published by the Science Museum of Minnesota, which states: "We seek to understand and mimic a world and universe in which we are newcomers, to fly with birds, to communicate at the speed of light. This scientific quest is written in the things we can touch, each of them a window to the future. At the Science Museum of Minnesota, we touch the future, hands on."

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Direct mail is not attracting gifts from as many people as it once did, according to study results presented at the meeting.

The number of people who made donations in response to a direct-mail appeal fell in 2004, according to the study of 21 groups, but the size of the average gift increased.

The response fell more for mail with premiums -- items such as labels, greeting cards, and calendars -- than for solicitations that did not include such tokens.

ParadyszMatera, a marketing-services company in New York, reviewed the results of mail sent by organizations it works with.

The participants -- all large organizations that focus on causes such as humanitarian aid, eradicating disease, and preserving nature -- together sent more than 250 million pieces of direct mail in 2004.

ParadyszMatera found that the number of people who donated money fell from 2003 to 2004 by a median of 5.8 percent for appeals with premiums -- compared with 5.2 percent for solicitations that did not have premiums.

The size of the average donation increased by a median of 2.9 percent for mail with premiums compared with 4.9 percent for other mail.

The poorer showing for mail with premiums could reflect "saturation" -- an abundance of such gifts from charities, said Amy Koop, director of account management, who presented the findings at the conference.

However, she said the increase in average donations is probably a good sign. Boards of nonprofit organizations often emphasize the importance of attracting new donors every year, but it could be more valuable in the long run to attract fewer, but more committed, supporters, she said.

"Potentially we're accessing a more mission-oriented donor that has higher long-term value."

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Another speaker at the conference, Kristin McCurry, urged charities to involve entire families in their work since many parents are looking for "teachable moments" for their children.

While organizations consider how to attract donors from different generations, they should remember that people with children most strongly identify with their roles as parents, said Ms. McCurry, president of Mindset Direct, a consulting company in Arlington, Va.

A 45-year-old mother with a toddler will behave more like a 25-year-old mother with a toddler than like a fellow baby boomer with a college-age child, she added. "Boomers and Generation Xers are looking to charities to help them teach their children," she said.

Ms. McCurry added that 31 percent of American adults are grandparents and that almost 10 percent of them live with a grandchild.

"Despite how busy our lives are," she said, "the generations are connecting."

Charities that reach out to children are making a long-term investment, she said, since studies show that people who do volunteer work when young are more likely to volunteer as adults.

She praised steps that nonprofit groups are taking to reach children, such as classroom projects, online "kids" sites, gifts of coloring books or stickers, magazines, and family sponsorships of children or families in poor countries.