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Graphic Design Issues for Marketing a Charitable Cause

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OBJECTIVE

Over the last thirty years non-profit organizations worldwide have gradually begun to adopt some of the marketing techniques more commonly used within the private sector (Hibbert and Horne, 1996). One of these is the use of glossy, four-color marketing materials such as brochures and direct-mail pieces. In a recent study, Naccarato and Neuendorf (1998) were able to empirically support the “conventional wisdom” of marketing, showing that advertisements printed in four-color engender a higher degree of recall than those printed in black-and-white. It seems possible, however, that strategies tailored in the private sector may send the wrong message to potential supporters of a charity.

Non-profits have found that marketing techniques borrowed from the private sector often have to be modified to suit their own unique situations (Hibbert and Horne, 1996). Guy and Patton (1996) have found that - similar to conventional persuasion models -- donors go through a five-step decision making process which, if completed, leads to a financial contribution. In the second step of this model, the potential donor interprets an appeal in terms of the intensity and urgency of the need (Guy & Patton). Since consumers have generally become increasingly more savvy to the innerworkings of the mass media (Severin & Tankard, 2001), it should then be considered that expensively produced marketing materials may lead to the perception that an organization is not in financial need.

This study will attempt to determine whether or not an *inexpensively* produced direct-mail piece is more effective than an expensively produced one in this type of situation. If the proposed hypothesis is supported, the significance will be twofold. First of all, it will suggest a more

effective course of action for non-profit organizations. Secondly, it will suggest a way for such organizations to save considerable amounts of money.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While no study has yet compared black-and-white, non-profit marketing materials against those in four-color, certain studies have suggested the preferential use of black-and-white images in advertising. A study conducted by Meyers-Levy and Peracchio (1995) shows that black-and-white advertising can be more persuasive when cognitive processing resources are low. Their research shows that factors such as physical fatigue and overstimulation (produced by large amounts of information within an advertisement) can undermine the use of four-color images which use up more cognitive resources. This may be an especially pertinent consideration. The current study will, in fact, utilize a direct-mail piece which is most likely to be viewed at the end of the day when physical fatigue may become a factor.

Another study shows that individual cognitive processing styles fall into one of two categories (intuiting and sensing) when interpreting visual images (LaBarbera, Weingard, and Yorkston, 1998). According to their research, people with *sensing* styles tend to respond more strongly to literal representations and generally reach conclusions based on the objective information supplied by a visual image. In contrast, people with intuiting styles tend to read beyond literal representations, attempting to gain a broader understanding of the meaning and purpose behind the visual image.

A third study by H. G. Warlaumont suggests that consumers associate black-and-white images with realism and credibility (1998). Realism and credibility may, in fact, be important issues for non-profit marketing. People generally give money to charities when they feel that their money will be well managed and used to make a tangible difference (Hibbert and Horne, 1996).

This study will attempt to build on the preceding research by supporting the following hypothesis: (H1) Households which have been mailed an inexpensively produced direct-mail piece will be more likely to pledge their financial support than households which have been mailed an *expensively* produced direct-mail piece or households which have been mailed neither.

SUBJECTS FOR STUDY

The subjects for this study will be households surrounding Outlook Nashville, a non-profit organization which provides support for developmentally disabled adults and children. Since Outlook is considered to be a community service organization, this study will target households within Outlook's zip code and will also include all of its adjacent zip codes.

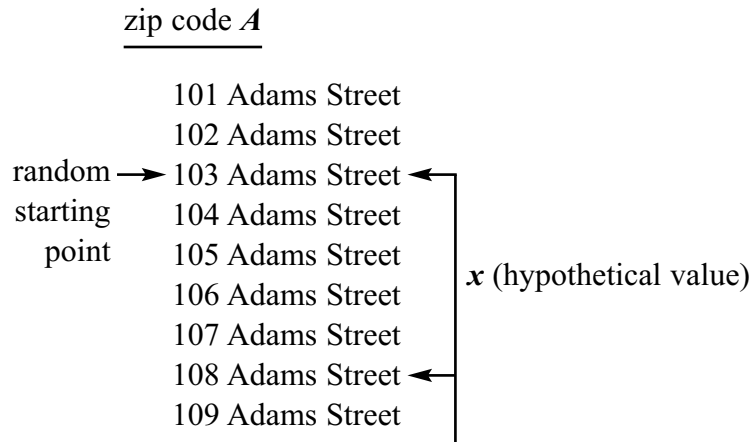
A multi-staged cluster sample will be employed in order to ensure an equally proportional distribution of subjects from each of the zip codes. The reason for doing this is due to research which shows that demographic characteristics (such as age, income, and race) have a significant impact on giving potential (Guy and Patton, 1996). The multi-stage cluster sample will ensure that any of these demographic characteristics which are directly correlated with geographic patterns will be equally represented in each of the final three samples (to be explained further in step four). The four stages will be as follows:

Stage 1 -- The zip codes to be used for the study will be identified and their population numbers will be acquired through US Census data and imported into individual SPSS files.

zip code *A* -- (population)
 zip code *B* -- (population)
 zip code *C* -- (population)
 (etc) -- (population)

Stage 2 -- Households in each sub-group will be sorted by street address and sampled systematically using a sampling interval of x (after beginning at a random starting point). In the interest

of the study's budget, the entire sample population will be restricted to 600 households, making x equal to the total population of all the zip codes divided by 600.



Stage 3 -- The samples from each sub-group will then be systematically coded with a number ranging from *1* to *3*.

- zip code A
- 103 Adams Street *1*
 - 108 Adams Street *2*
 - 113 Adams Street *3*
 - 118 Adams Street *1*
 - 123 Adams Street *2*
 - 128 Adams Street *3*
 - 133 Adams Street *1*
 - 138 Adams Street *2*
 - 143 Adams Street *3*

Stage 4 -- After step three has been performed within each of the sub-groups, all of the households will be placed into one of three SPSS files according to their number code. The result will be three cluster samples of 200 households each which will be placed into a posttest-only control group design. Two of the groups will receive stimuli (one, an expensively produced direct-mail piece and, the second, an inexpensively produced direct-mail piece) and the third will receive no stimuli (serving as the control group).

MEASUREMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The units of analysis for this study will be the households and their response to the direct-mail pieces will be measured nominally (whether or not they make a contribution at the end of the study). This response will serve as the dependent variable. The two stimuli will be in the form of identically designed direct-mail pieces. The first, however, will be printed in four-color on glossy paper and the second will be printed in black-and-white on recycled paper (see examples below). These will serve as the independent variable.

PLEASE SEE
ATTACHED EXAMPLES
IN THE APPENDIX

The front cover of a direct-mail piece in four-color (left) and a corresponding piece in black-and-white (right). Both are identical in terms of layout.

With the cooperation of Outlook, the three groups will be mailed their respective direct-mail pieces. After a period of one week (to allow for mail processing and delivery) each household will be called and asked to make a pledge. Subsequently, each will be given a nominal measure: 1 = “made a pledge,” 0 = “did not make a pledge,” and 99 = “was unable to contact.” This follow-up period will last for two weeks.

ANALYSIS

The collected data from all three groups will be combined at the end of the study. After excluding response number 99, the remaining data will be cross tabulated using Chi Squares:

	four-color piece	black-and-white piece	no piece
pledge	%	%	%
no pledge	%	%	%
	100%	100%	100%

SCHEDULE AND BUDGET

The graph on the following page outlines the proposed study’s timeline and cost.

CONCLUSION

Before being employed, it should be noted that the proposed study may lack certain comprehensive elements. First of all, since the unit of measurement is based on an action (whether or not the subjects make a pledge) and not on an amount of money, it will be difficult (if not impossible) to determine any kind of intensity level associated with a positive response. It was decided, however, that simply measuring a pledge amount without any indication of the percentage of household income which it represents may undermine the study. Secondly, it may also be useful to increase (or decrease) the size of the sample after determining what percentage

of Nashville’s population donates money to charity on a regular basis in order to ensure an adequate response rate.

In general, however, the proposed study offers a very affordable way to provide some extremely useful and generalizable information. And even if the two stimuli are equal in terms of response rates, such a result would still validate the cost-effective measure of using an inexpensively produced direct-mail piece for future marketing campaigns at Outlook.

EVENT	TIME NEEDED	COST
creating sample & mailing labels	3 weeks	N/A
printing of black-and-white pieces	2 weeks	\$325
printing of four-color pieces		\$665
postage and mailing time	1 week	\$204
follow-up phone calls	2 weeks	(done by Outlook)
data analysis	2 weeks	N/A

Total 10 weeks \$1,194

*Based on quotes from Professional Design and Printing, Nashville, TN

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