

DONOR-FOCUSED NEWSLETTERS: 101

Brad Cecil &
ASSOCIATES



REVISING YOUR NEWSLETTER TO MAXIMIZE INCOME

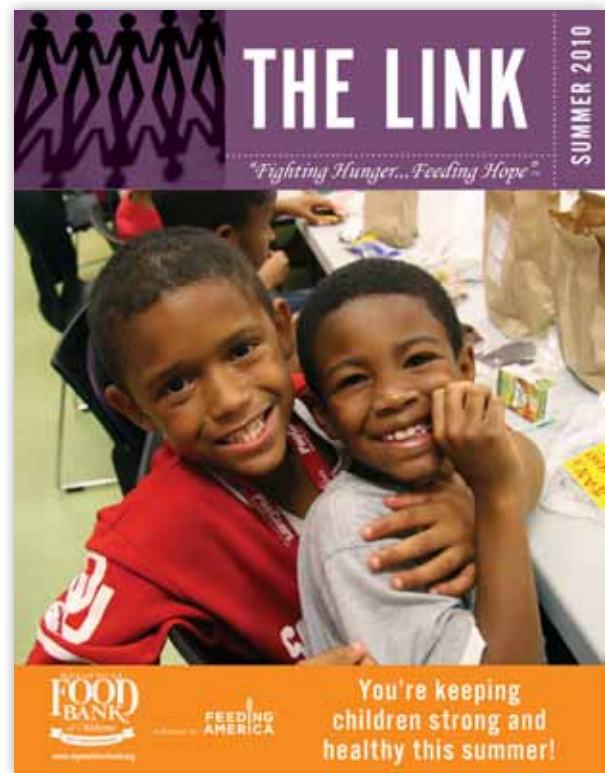
If created with the interests of the donor as the central focus, a newsletter can be a powerful fundraising tool. Not only does a donor-focused newsletter serve as a way to report back to the donor the ways in which his or her gifts are being used, it motivates the donor by sharing stories and images of lives that have been directly impacted by that person's support.

A **donor-focused** newsletter means showing the donor how he or she makes a difference rather than giving the donor "inside information" about your organization. Donors care much more about the end results of their giving (i.e., transformed lives) than they do about staff, numbers and statistics.

It's so important to share with donors that they are making a difference, not just that you are making a difference. After all, without donors, your organization couldn't live out its mission at all.



Before



After

DONOR-FOCUSED NEWSLETTERS: *the components*



THE POWER OF THE IMAGE

People have been trained to think in images, and sharing real images of those who benefit from the services you provide can do an even better job than text of showing the impact of your donors.

Even in the for-profit world, we have seen a culture-shift away from lengthy text descriptions of products and toward the use of images to convey value.



A donor-focused newsletter should capture the audience with “image-rich” pages, beginning with the cover. Other than a well-designed masthead, the only text that should appear on the cover of a donor-focused newsletter is a headline that indicates the impact of the donor and a brief teaser for what’s inside. All language should be centered around the donor, not the institution. An image of the donor’s gifts in action should take center stage.

Large images should be used throughout the newsletter to reinforce in a vibrant way that it’s real lives that are being changed by the donor’s involvement.

Images are also important in captivating your audience and motivating them to read further. In the text of the stories inside your newsletter the donor will be further validated as he or she reads about the life-change that his or her gifts have enabled.



A recent study by the Poynter Institute employed the use of equipment that can track the eye of a reader to find out which page elements draw the most attention.

The study found that large photos draw attention 50 percent of the time while small photos catch the reader’s eye enough to make him or her look more closely only 20 percent of the time. Readers looked at large headlines and photos first and these got dramatically more attention than smaller headlines and photos. And color is better than black and white if you can afford it!

DONOR-FOCUSED NEWSLETTERS: *the components*



THE POWER OF STORY

Your brand is your story and it is best understood in narrative terms, not with empirical evidence and an abundance of facts. We all want meaning in our lives and narrative provides that. Your story contributes significantly to the meaning of the lives of the individuals connected to you – your donors.

The best way to tell *your* story is by telling the stories of the people who have experienced transformation because of the work your donors make possible. True stories of real people who receive your organization's services help donors feel connected to the organization and the stories validate the donors' involvement.

For example, you may have seen or at least heard of the ABC hit show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. This show is a prime example of the use of story to reach its audience on an emotional level. The show is primarily about the story of the family whose home is being made-over, not about the reconstruction of a house. The emotional appeal and great success of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* can be credited to its ability to connect the audience to changed lives.



Another great example of how culture has shifted away from the necessity of empirical evidence to define oneself and toward an experiential mindset can be found very readily in the advertising we see every day.

This Nissan ad plays on the overwhelmingly compelling idea that a consumer doesn't just buy a car for its practical value, but because that car will enhance the consumer's personal narrative.



Tell better stories. The all new 270-hp Nissan Pathfinder has innovations like Hill Start Assist* to conquer almost any peak. And with three rows of seating for seven, it's like a virtual ski cabin on wheels. Call 800-NISSAN3 or visit NissanUSA.com. The slopes are waiting to be conquered. Priced from \$24,850. Nicely equipped at \$31,850.*

DONOR-FOCUSED NEWSLETTERS: *the components*



USING EFFECTIVE HEADLINES

Another important tool in telling your story is the effective use of headlines for each story. A good headline should be attention-grabbing, because it's the first thing the donor will read. It should also hint at the story's theme by using action verbs and conveying specific images that will resound with the donor.

Newsletter headlines differ dramatically from the newspaper headlines we read every morning. Newspaper headlines summarize each story with cold, hard facts, immediately alerting us to what the story is about. But a good newsletter headline should serve a different purpose.

Newsletter headlines should...

- **Be donor-focused.** Tell the donor what specific impact his or her gifts have made.
- **Have strong action verbs.** Use attention-grabbing verbs to form complete thoughts.
- **Incorporate an element of human interest.** Newsletter stories feature people whose lives have been impacted by the donor's gifts, so it's important to include human interest in both the story and the headline.

Here's an example of a weak headline.



While it's sometimes a good idea to use multiple elements in your headline like subheads (a secondary headline below the main headline), the main headline is uninteresting and doesn't tell the reader what the story is about. It doesn't contain any verbs, and there's no element of human interest here to tell the donor how his gifts make a difference.

This is an example of a strong headline.



This headline accomplishes all three of the above goals in a short, succinct sentence. It tells the donor exactly how his or her gifts are being used and who his or her generosity affects. Note the exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. While this form of punctuation isn't always appropriate for every headline, it helps to further illustrate the impact your donors are making.

DONOR-FOCUSED NEWSLETTERS: *the components*

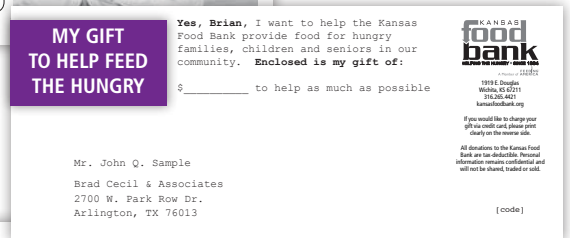
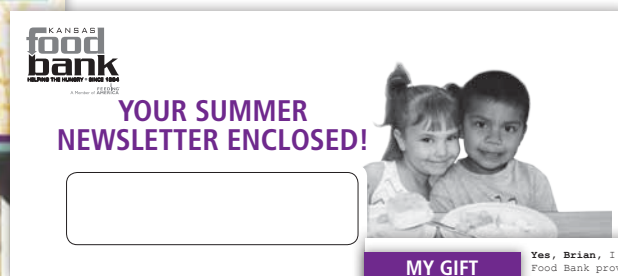


PACKAGING THAT'S PROVEN TO BE PRODUCTIVE

Many organizations send newsletters as a self-mailer with a bounce-back envelope inside similar to this one:



We have tested numerous packaging strategies and have found that the most productive newsletters are folded and mailed in a standard #10 window envelope with a headline that indicates, "Your Newsletter Enclosed." A personalized reply device and separate #9 reply envelope should also accompany the package.



DONOR-FOCUSED NEWSLETTERS: *the components*



SAMPLE FEEDING AMERICA FOOD BANK NEWSLETTER RESULTS

ANNUAL TOTALS BEFORE	ANNUAL TOTALS AFTER
2003 - \$12,144	2006 - \$239,503
2004 - \$28,632	2007 - \$234,440
2005 - \$60,679	2008 - \$254,921

As you can see, after we revised the newsletter in this example to include all of the important components of a donor-focused newsletter, the same organization has experienced drastically improved results.

BRAD CECIL & ASSOCIATES:

who we are



At Brad Cecil & Associates, our goal is to guide your nonprofit organization through the process of finding friends, cultivating them into donors, getting them involved in your organization's mission and generating lasting relationships.

We use a variety of resources to develop a comprehensive communications and fundraising strategy for each client. We pride ourselves on our commitment to customize every project for each organization we serve while providing outstanding customer service.

THE SERVICES WE OFFER INCLUDE:

STRATEGIC COUNSEL

- Customized strategies to find donors who will support your organization's work.
- Initiatives to involve these donors in your organization on a long-term scale, building mutually beneficial relationships.

DATA ANALYTICS

- Analysis of your organization's data for the purpose of segmentation and future growth.

DIRECT MAIL

- Donor-focused packages tailored specifically to your organization, which are a highly effective fundraising tool.

NEWSLETTERS

- Newsletters containing stories about those whose lives have been changed by your donors' gifts, allowing them to see the impact their gifts are making.
- Brad Cecil & Associates writes and designs custom newsletters for each organization we serve, and we do the field-work to obtain the content and images for each story from your agencies.

MAJOR DONOR CONSULTING

- Individualized programs to help develop your major donors into lifelong, trusting relationships.

NEW DONOR ACQUISITION

- Unique, customized plans involving a variety of media to help you find new donors.

WEB-BASED FUNDRAISING

- Fully-integrated email solicitations to maximize response.

PLANNED GIVING

- Planned gift marketing targeting your top prospects.

Contact us if we can help. Email info@cecilcommunication.com