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FundRaising SUCCESS

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Anatomy of a Control

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PETA

Pulling no punches, the animal-welfare group's control shocks and educates for nearly two decades

Sustaining strong results for an 18-year control package is no easy feat, even if you're an aggressive direct mailer such as the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which dropped 7 million cold-mail acquisition pieces in its last fiscal year alone.

And while it's no surprise that PETA's pack has seen myriad tweaks and tests and format changes over the years, the nexus has been a simple, straightforward questionnaire, with jarring inquiries such as: "Did you realize that the vast majority of painful animal experimentation has no relation at all to human survival or the elimination of disease?"

"Surveys have been a mainstay of direct-mail fundraising for many years," avows Scott Anderson, senior vice president for development at PETA, commenting on the concept's effectiveness and longevity for his organization. "One of the reasons why we use surveys is because we get a lot of [prospect] names of non-donor responders, who we then re-mail."

PETA's self-generated prospect file — those individuals who take the time to fill out the survey but opt not to write a check — receive acquisition

After nearly 18 years of mailing its successful coin-pack control, PETA thinks it might have blown it away with a whistle. The appeal is virtually the same, save for a new kraft-colored, 8-inch-by-10-inch, in-line-produced carrier.

mail for up to a year, as their shelf life tends to wane dramatically after several appeals with no response. Anderson reports, however, a steady 2 percent to 3 percent response rate from these non-donor prospects.

PETA is comfortably contented at the moment, at least as much as can be expected from active direct mailers, with an overall response rate of "well above 1 percent" and an average gift of \$17.

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“There are changes that are made every time we mail it, but [they] usually are minor, having to do with facts or figures or quotes,” Anderson notes. “The basic gist of the package hasn’t changed in 18 years, which is a shocking concept. A lot of people come to animal-rights [organizations] because of the issue of animal testing. Our package has always focused on, to a large degree, the issue of vivisection animal testing.”

Outrage, awe and inspire

Amid a four-page letter, sheet of name-and-address labels and questionnaire, PETA presents two reproductions of advertisements from *Lab Animal* magazine in the form of a traditional insert. One of the ads features a picture of a cuddly cat and dog, with the call-out copy: “When it Comes to Your Study, You’ll Find Our Animals Pass the Test.”

The reprints are designed to shock donors into understanding (and provocatively so). PETA has long mailed it — and advertisements like it — without coming under fire for copyright legalities.

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“Good fundraising should accomplish a couple of things, and one certainly is to motivate someone to make a donation,” Anderson says. “At the same time, I think there’s a really strong connection between motivating someone to donate and also giving them information that makes them feel connected to an issue.”

Anderson firmly stresses that the inserts, which are the only elements aside from the questionnaire that haven’t changed much through

tweaks and tests, are not something PETA manufactured or manipulated.

“It’s hard to dispute the shocking nature that there’s a whole industry out there that makes an enormous amount of money off selling animals for experiments,” Anderson says. “We ask our donors, in addition to making a contribution, to write or call or take some action to help animals in some constructive way.”

PETA’s hard-charging, gloves-off message has been delivered in numerous carriers and with varying creative and design approaches since the concept was born. In the beginning, the pack employed a No. 10, plain, gray outer with a penny jutting through a poly window. The hook then was “... a penny for your thoughts.” Not long after that creative strategy proved successful, PETA tacked on another

naire, visible through the poly window, outweigh that of a nickel — surprisingly enough. But after nearly four years of using the nickel as an attention-getting device, and seven total years of employing coins altogether, PETA thinks it might finally have beaten its control.

Whistle while you fundraise

In the mail stream this year, prospects (subscribers to publications such as *Vegetarian Times* and *Yoga Journal*, for example) will find an 8-inch-by-10-inch, in-line-produced, sans-coin(s) package that includes all the old elements, just on a slightly smaller scale. The real change here, though, is the application of a small, red-and-green plastic whistle. As one might imagine, the new device lent itself nicely to a snappy teaser: “John A. Sample. Blow the Whistle on Cruelty.”

“The genesis of putting the coin on there was the idiom about a penny for your thoughts or your two cents worth,” Anderson says, admitting that the pack’s coin-and-copy affinity has lost its panache over the years. “We started to see a fall off of the returns with the coins and felt we needed to do something else with the package.”

Anderson is quick to point out the challenges of locating 50,000 small plastic whistles for an initial launch and another million once the results proved impressive enough to roll out.

“We haven’t really been able to beat our survey pack, although results over the years have started to decline,” Anderson notes. “I don’t think it’s unusual in the direct-mail world to see the staying power of a good idea by finding things to tweak it to keep the response rate up.” ♦

