

## THE TOP 5

# Theories of Evolution

**F**or an organization that began peddling its namesake in 1934—back when peddling anything required door-to-door visitation and a whole lot of shoe leather—it's amazing to think that, over 70 years later, the Easter Seals' seal remains a mark of donor commitment. According to Chris Cleghorn, executive vice president of interactive and direct marketing for **Easter Seals**, "It's always been a core part of how we acquire new donors and also one of the main campaigns that we use to renew donors."

Although the nonprofit's annual donor drive has changed its spots numerous times since it first appeared in the mailstream, the overall theme has remained the same, and response just keeps getting better. As an acquisition piece, response rates typically are somewhere in the neighborhood of 3.8 percent to 4 percent and, in 2006, numbers were even higher than average, he says. With this year's mailing, an 8½" x 9½" in-line-produced package, the organization hopes for a repeat of past successes and perhaps even to set a new precedent for the future (Archive code 604-180006-0701).

The 2007 iteration—a highly personalized, freemium-loaded effort—is the result of conscientious testing over the past few years. "Every component of this package has been tested into. Nothing's there by chance," affirms Cleghorn. In fact, it was the results from one such test that spurred the organization to adopt the larger in-line format as its exclusive acquisition control. The change was implemented about seven years ago, he reports, along with another creative tweak: the Easter seals, the driving force behind the fundraising effort, were updated and sent as a sheet of foil stickers. "It was the format and the seals that made it a breakthrough package for us. Our average response rate was somewhere around 2.3 percent with our prior package, and now it's 3.8 [percent]," Cleghorn says.

Even so, the organization is far from complacent, as evidenced by its ever-changing, or more appropriately, ever-so-slightly changing testing initiatives. "We made the big transition six or seven years ago, and then, every year, there are other refinements that allow it to continue to pull. We get some gains because of some new thing we discover," Cleghorn says. Updates to the 2007 version included the addition of foil oc-



*The addition of foil seals as well as an ink-jetted state callout on the outer envelope are just a few of the changes made by Easter Seals to ensure the success of its 2007 Drive package. ☛ To order: 215-238-5225, Archive code #604-180006-0701.*

clusion stickers, as well as supplemental information on other services Easter Seals provides. He identifies the seals, a letter from the CEO of Easter Seals, and one from a parent whose child has benefitted from services provided by the nonprofit as the mailing's perennial core components. "The central proposition is what Easter Seals' services are and [how] we've been involved in the life of a family ... and using that as an example of what Easter Seals' work is with people of all

age across the United States," Cleghorn affirms. Other tested components that appear in the 2007 edition of the mailing include an ink-jetted image of the recipient's state (the Who's Mailing What! Archive received one for Virginia) on the outer envelope along with the copy, "Your help is needed to support vital Easter Seals programs in Virginia!" and a surprisingly heavy paper stock that, while uncommon for the format, was tested into and achieved positive results, according to Cleghorn.

While this package currently is mailing as a flat, Cleghorn does report the nonprofit is testing into other formats now that rate increases are imminent. Though, when it comes to raising a dollar, it's clear Easter Seals isn't afraid to invest in its donors. He says, "It always boils down to what's the most efficient use of a dollar in fundraising. Sometimes, spending more for a package yields a better response."

—Christen Gruebel

## IDEAS IN Action

Although the dual purpose of Easter Seals' 2007 Drive package is to both acquire new names and renew past donors, there's also a third benefit of the effort that is not so obvious. According to Chris Cleghorn, executive vice president of interactive and direct marketing, the nonprofit uses the opportunity to speak to prospects about lesser-known aspects of its mission statement. One such example of this appears on the back of the sheet of foil Easter seals in the form of a bulleted copy block entitled "Understanding Autism." Its inclusion has less to do with actually pulling response than simply informing the public about the organization's less-publicized initiatives, he affirms.