

THE TOP 4

Bigger Can Be Better

As everyone knows, the more you bring to the table, the better you usually fare. Of course, in direct mail, putting more in the package doesn't always improve your rate of success.

With that in mind, consider the recent flat from **St. Joseph's Indian School** in Chamberlain, S.D. The lumpy package catches your attention right away with its weight, and keeps it by repeating the recipient's name in bold italics, followed by the line, "four free gifts enclosed!" Above

#3

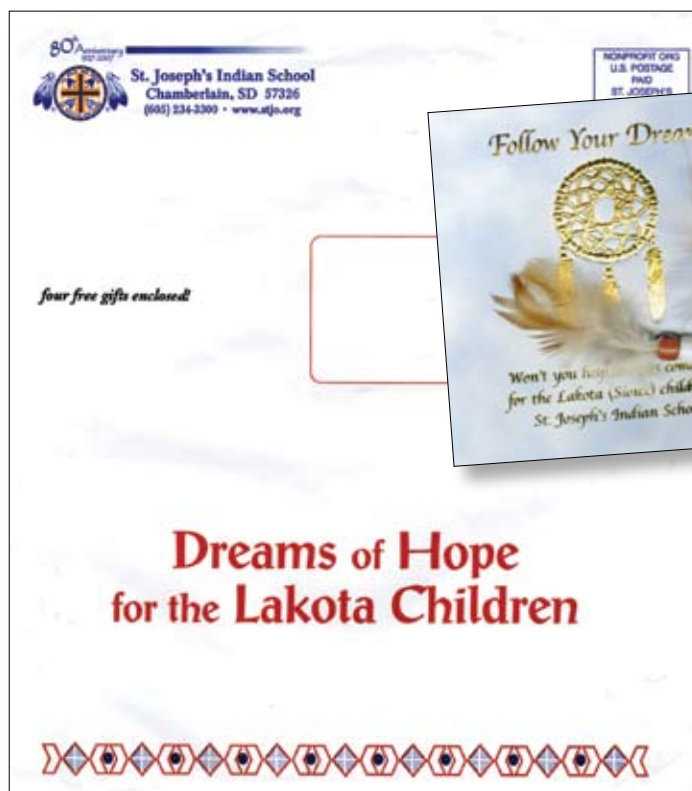
an ornate Native American design, large red type encapsulates the theme that runs throughout the mailer: "Dreams of

Hope for the Lakota Children." The final invitation to open the flat comes in the stamped words "do not bend," indicating something of import inside (Archive code #613-172751-0702).

The goods are delivered once you crack it open, with the inclusion of a notepad, stickers, calendar and two address label sheets. The highlight is a leather dream catcher (connected to a keyring) showing through the small oval window of a #7 envelope; on the back of the card, which the dream catcher is taped to, is a stirring note about the "Legend of the Dreamcatcher," from the school's director, Father Stephen Huffstetter, SCJ.

The enclosed letter details how the donor "could be a dreamcatcher" and goes on to explain the Lakota Sioux people, including their proud but trying history, and how St. Joseph's Indian School has cared for Sioux children since 1927; it's signed by Fr. Huffstetter.

"The original package predates me. It was smaller than a #10 and was very inexpensive at the time, with no front-end premiums. It was just a letter, reply form, return envelope and a back-end premium,



St. Joseph's Indian School in Chamberlain, S.D. has tested its package freemiums for over 12 years; the dream catcher and notepad rank one and two for response success. To order: 215-238-5225, Archive code #613-172751-0702.

like a brass dream catcher," says Kory Christianson, executive director of development for the St. Joseph's Indian School for the past 14 years. It had a very low response rate, at about 1 percent, and the average gift was about \$18.

Christianson sought to keep the average gift near that figure, while trying to bump up the response rate through the addition of a front-end premium. "Over about a 12-year period, after testing various premiums, it turned into what you have here. We kept adding a piece to it, and all those pieces have been tested. It went from a pendant, dream catcher pendant, front-end pin, keychain, necklace, and morphed into the keychain that you see there. As we continue to put value into the package, it performs better than the mailer previous to it without that last item. We haven't found a ceiling for it, but the post office may take care of that for us," laughs Christianson, who expects to adapt the package, perhaps significantly, when the new postal rates come into effect soon.

The outer was tested as well,

IDEAS IN Action

An easily overlooked premium in the package from St. Joseph's Indian School is the notepad. "While the dream catcher continues to be the most significant driver, we were really surprised by how much the notepad drives, as it was a huge lift over the control," says Kory Christianson, executive director of development for the nonprofit. Perhaps its effectiveness can be traced to the notepad's high quality, with leaf imprints, decorative outline, few words ("just a note" in small type, instead of littering each sheet with words about the organization) and thick cardboard backing.

including the repetition of the recipient's name, the bold italics and four free gifts. By listing the number of gifts, versus only the standard "Dreams of Hope" line, the organization got an impressive 7 percent lift on the mailer. Meanwhile, the "do not bend" stamp-like text represents the one element that wasn't tested. "We've heard anecdotally from the supplier that puts the package together for us that the phrase works well, so we've gone with it," explains Christianson.

So far, so good. In the course of their fiscal year, they mail an acquisition to 5.5 million recipients in two drops; in addition, they use this mailer for both active and lapsed donors. "It performs very well in all three slots," he says. The control this fall came in at 4.6 percent; additionally, the nonprofit sent test cells with new labels that registered 5.23 percent and a 25-page notepad (shown at right) with a 6.27 percent response rate. The average gift for these mailers ranged from \$13.80 to \$14.46.

Finally, the all-important reply card also was carefully conceived, for it makes it easy for the donor to give while offering

many bonuses that may further encourage and inform. The self-addressed reply card is perfed to a CRE, and on its flip side is an invitation to list your special prayer intentions, as well as the opportunity to receive a free educational brochure and newsletter.

"The reply card element complies with our call for action and joint cost allocation process, where we provide [prospects] opportunities to learn more about the program," explains Christianson, who admits to originally being hesitant about the credit card payment option. To his surprise, he's found that the nonprofit not

only is holding steady on the response side, but the average credit card gift is \$5 or \$6 higher.

"We aim to put together aggressive packages that have a lot of goodies in them, and we've found that they work as well as cover themselves easily," concludes Christianson.

—Ethan Boldt

