

## THE TOP 4

# Make a Statement

It is an age-old direct mail strategy to send a piece out in an official-looking envelope in order to boost open rates. It partly explains the current popularity of voucher packages and the previous penchant for designing direct mail to look like courier service flats. There have even been lawsuits filed to fight mailings that were too official-looking—misleading consumers into forced enrollment or payment.

### The National Arbor Day

#2

Foundation puts the official-looking outer tactic to positive use with its recent national renewal effort, mailed in October and November to hundreds of thousands of its 1 million total members. Formal teaser copy on the front of the 9½ x 5½ outer envelope, “Statement Enclosed,” draws the prospect inside. There is a good chance that the renewal prospect, upon seeing the National Arbor Day Foundation return address and logo, may assume this is a bill rather than a request.

Once inside, the prospect is not slapped with a bill; instead, she’s hit with a stack of elements in multiple trim sizes, colors and finishes, begging to be handled and read. The pile includes a statement of benefits, lift note, fast 50 sweepstakes reply card and sticker, sheet of personalized address labels, two gift cards with envelopes, four-color brochure and reply envelope (Archive code #603-172991-0711).

This official-looking envelope contains many of the greatest direct mail tricks in the book and boasts just about every premium under the sun. The focal point of the mailing is the statement of benefits, which lists the whopping eight premiums “included” or “free” with membership. For an annual fee of \$10, there are more than enough benefits to outweigh the dues, including two planted trees, a subscription, a book, entry into a year supply of coffee sweepstakes, discounts on trees and more. “We know that the combination of



Multiple elements and trim sizes get the prospect’s attention, and as many as eight premiums, called out on a statement of benefits, seal the deal. ☛ To order: 215-238-5225, Archive code #603-172991-0711.

things that we provide to our members is very much appreciated and valued, and the statement of benefits [format] allows us to emphasize that,” says John Rosenow, president of National Arbor Day Foundation, based in Nebraska City, Neb.

The 120-year-old foundation includes premiums with a purpose, like the fast 50 coffee sweepstakes and plant-a-tree gift cards, which show a strong correlation to the foundation’s mission. “That’s not just any coffee. That’s shade-grown in areas where they have small local farms that maintain the rainforest canopy,” Rosenow shares.

The set of two plant-a-tree gift cards signify a tree planted in a friend’s name in an area that has been affected by wildfire. “We’re very much a dirt-under-the-fingernails, participatory organization, and we’re just delighted that our members

support the cause both with their contributions and with their personal actions. These give-a-tree cards have been a very strong way of emphasizing that and engaging people in this very important work,” Rosenow explains. Also, consistent with the foundation’s environmental responsibility stance, the mailing uses recycled and recyclable paper.

Having mailed the statement of benefits as well as traditional letter packages in the past, Rosenow says that this mailing is a test against all past efforts. “We’ve found that sometimes a statement of benefits will do as well as a letter, sometimes not as well ... it’s just one of the mysteries of mail,” he notes.

While uncertain about the future format of this mailing, Rosenow says he will continue to develop communications with meaningful benefits and ways for people to get involved. “One of the philosophies of our organization is that we don’t want our members to just financially support the cause ... but also we want them to be personally involved,” explains Rosenow, who has seen the foundation’s prime prospect evolve from a homeowner with an interest in caring for and planting trees to a more general environmentally inclined citizen, who may not even own a backyard in which to plant a tree.

—Brittany Brouse

## IDEAS IN Action

Businesses and foundations alike use newsletters and communications to keep members and clients abreast of news and offers. In its recent renewal mailing, National Arbor Day Foundation refers to its bimonthly member publication as a free one-year subscription, elevating the magazine from a perk to an enticing premium. “We call it out, [saying] let’s talk about the subscription’s value,” says John Rosenow, president of National Arbor Day Foundation.