

## How to create printed materials that appeal to older donors

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It is a known fact that older people like to read. It is also known that older people are likely to make up a significant proportion of a charity's support base. They are the ardent readers of your charity's newsletters or magazines and the faithful respondents to your direct mail appeals.

You might think that you know this already but the question is: **Are your printed materials written and designed in such a way that will appeal to older donors?**

Here are some useful ideas derived from donor research and personal experience that can help you create newsletters, appeals and brochures that connect with older donors:

### **1. Use short paragraphs, sub-headings and pull out quotes**

Older supporters like to read but, like everybody else, they too are likely to get exasperated by long paragraphs of copy that look like gray blocks on a page. So, make sure you break up the copy of your newsletters, magazines or appeals into short paragraphs of five or six lines.

Make use of sub-headings and pull out quotes. Most readers are likely to scan a story first, so you can use sub-headings and pull out quotes to peak the reader's interest and to highlight key messages about your work.

### **2. Break your 'default writing' mould**

A good article or a story doesn't have to be just one or two columns of copy with a small photo thrown in at the top or in the middle. You can create interesting communications pieces by making use of bullet points that convey key ideas, numbered lists that highlight steps of involvement in a project or different reasons for giving, graphs that illustrate the financial situation or that show how a project has impacted a community, sidebars and much more.

Anything that breaks the monotony of a printed page and makes the material more interesting is likely to be read with interest and acted upon.

### **3. Increase the font size**

One common mistake in printed communications is using small font size. There are two reasons for this: first, there is often too much copy to fit in one page, second, the designer decides to squeeze the copy in by reducing the font size. The result is dense copy in small font, that is likely to turn-off older supporters, the very people who are supposed to read the material.

As a rule of thumb, when designing charity materials for older supporters font size must be larger than average. If your target audience is an older demographic you must insist that the designer uses 11 or 12 pt type rather than smaller ones.

### **4. Use serif fonts for main copy and sans serif fonts for headlines**

Years of research by Colin Wheildon, an Australian expert on readability issues, have shown that people are more likely to read blocks of copy in serif fonts rather than sans serif ones. This is because traditionally books, magazines and newspapers have used and still use serif fonts so the reader's eyes have been trained to recognise serif characters quickly.

Serif fonts are those like 'Times New Roman,' or 'Bookman Old Style' (a personal favourite) and sans serif ones are 'Arial' or 'Helvetica.'

Another thing to consider when printing materials for older supporters is using sufficient 'leading' (that is the white space around each character) so that letters don't run into each other. Readability experts recommend using a 2 point lead for mature eyes. Also, they suggest making line spacing larger than usual to avoid unnecessary visual labour.

### **5. Navigate the maze of colours and contrasts**

As people get older, their eyesight is likely to weaken so more often than not they find it harder to distinguish between certain colours. For example, colours like blue, purple and green may look alike if they are used together. While colours like red, orange and yellow are much easier to distinguish from each other. So, when you decide on the primary colours of your charity's brand or the coloured backgrounds of various communications make sure you chose the right colours.

Also, limit the use of the reverse type (*that is when you use a light coloured font on a dark background, like white font on blue background for example*). Most people, especially mature readers find it hard to read large blocks of light coloured fonts on dark backgrounds. Use reverse type sparingly for headlines or pull out quotes but not for large blocks of copy.

## **6. Increase the impact of your communications with powerful images**

Insist on creating a gallery of interesting photos that capture the essence of what you do, to share experiences of life in the communities you serve or to capture the life stories of the people your charity is helping. Make sure you use high quality images that are sharp and clear.

Whether you decide to use black and white or coloured images don't try to do artistic or clever things with them – you will only end up confusing your older readers. Avoid putting copy over a photo, you will end up spoiling both the message and the image.

## **7. Do not inconvenience your readers!**

If you want your charity's donors to engage with your printed materials make sure that you follow some basic rules like keeping the whole of the article or the story on the same page. The reader should not be inconvenienced with the task of looking for the continuation of an article from page 3 to page 8.

Another basic rule is avoiding complex foldings of your printed newsletters or brochures. Recently I have come across some eight page brochures that are not easy to navigate, in terms of following the story and the fundraising ask.

Here is a simple test for readability: photocopy a page of your newsletter or fundraising appeal and try to read it. If the photocopied page is easy to read, then the original is also readable. If not, examine what needs to change to increase the readability of that page.

## **8. Constantly evaluate your printed materials**

At a time when conversations on effective communications seem to be focused on social media it is easy to underestimate the role that printed materials play in keeping your charity's donors interested and engaged in your work.

But, you can't afford to take printed materials for granted. So, evaluate your current communications pieces and work with your designer to make sure that all your readers, especially the older donors, can easily access the information they need to stay connected to your work.

With some effort and care your charity's printed communications can be inspiring, stylish and easy to read.