



Doctors' Day Mailing: The donor's turn to express appreciation

by

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One of the central tenets of good fundraising is ensuring that donors feel appreciated. The Doctors' Day mailing turns the tables and gives grateful patient donors (and prospects) a chance to show their appreciation. They respond enthusiastically!

In 1990, a resolution was signed into law by the U.S. Congress designating March 30 as National Doctors' Day. Many nonprofit hospitals and medical centers have had success with a Doctors' Day mailing that drops several weeks prior to this day of recognition.

The annual Doctors' Day mailing offers grateful patient donors and prospects a convenient way to honor their doctor(s), add a note of appreciation if they wish, and include a charitable gift with their reply. Doctors then receive an acknowledgment letting them know who honored them (but not the amount of the gifts).

A message of gratitude—with a deadline

The Doctors' Day letter copy blends the opportunity to honor a doctor with inspiring quotes from grateful patients and a compelling case for supporting the institution. Even if a hospital has never sent a Doctors' Day mailing (which builds a library of quotations for possible future use), it is likely that notes of appreciation are already on file with doctors or the development department.



Doctors' Day Package

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Another important aspect of the Doctors' Day theme is that it is time-sensitive. Of course, patients can express gratitude at any time of year, but the nationwide designation of March 30 as Doctors' Day gives the campaign a built-in deadline, which is often a plus in direct mail fundraising.

A note about the target audience: when we talk about renewing and prospective donors, we are referring to those individuals who have been patients at some time. It is not appropriate to include non-patient donors or non-patient prospects in a Doctors' Day mailing.

An effective approach to donor renewal and new donor acquisition

A major medical foundation on the West Coast recently tested the Doctors' Day concept against its control package, one which invites the reader to honor a caregiver by joining a named donor group (implying an ongoing commitment). The Doctors' Day package substantially outperformed the Control package among both donors and prospects.

Donor Renewal	# Med	Gifts	% Rsp.	Avg. \$	Revenue	Cost	Net	ROI
Control	3,541	132	3.73%	\$89	\$11,750	\$2,195	\$9,555	\$5.35
Doctors' Day test	3,534	218	6.17%	\$130	\$28,275	\$2,544	\$25,731	\$11.11

In the donor renewal mailing (chart above), *the Doctors' Day test package produced a return on investment of more than double the Control* (\$11.11 to \$5.35). Further, according to a statistical measure known as the Response Significance Calculator¹, the variance in percent response was wide enough to declare the Doctors' Day test package as the more effective package with a 99% degree of confidence. In fact, the Doctors' Day package won in all segments: high, middle, low, and lapsed donors.

In a coinciding new donor acquisition effort (chart below), the outcome of the test was even more striking:

Acquisition	# Mailed	Gifts	% Rsp.	Avg. \$	Revenue	Cost	Net	ROI
Control	38,123	179	0.47%	\$78	\$13,929	\$23,636	(\$9,707)	\$0.59
Doctors' Day test	38,140	448	1.17%	\$63	\$28,246	\$27,461	\$785	\$1.03

Whereas the primary goal of a donor renewal mailing is to maximize ROI, the primary goal in acquisition or prospect mailings is to acquire as many new donors as possible. In this regard, *the Doctors' Day test package achieved more than twice the percent response of the test package*, winning the test with a 99% degree of confidence. In addition, the Doctors' Day package achieved a positive ROI—an extremely rare outcome in an era when the vast majority of acquisition mailings result in a net loss (to be recouped in renewals).

In the following year, the organization rolled out the Doctors' Day package as its new control, and results were equally strong.

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Doctors' Day wins again

Recently, a major medical center in Southern California tested a Doctors' Day package against its customary approach to converting patients to donors—an economical #10 package featuring an in-depth patient story and an invitation to honor their caregiver by joining a named donor group. The Doctors' Day package outperformed the Control on all levels:

- ROI improved by 18%.
- Percent response improved by 45%, enough to declare the Doctors' Day package as the winner with a 99% degree of confidence.

The following year, the medical center rolled out the Doctors' Day package as the new Control in its winter acquisition campaign.

Conclusion

The Doctors' Day mailing is a valuable addition to a comprehensive year-round strategy. It can improve ROI and maximize response—among grateful patient donors and prospects alike—in the early months of your annual direct mail fundraising calendar.

¹<http://malwarwick.com/confidence-level-calculator/>

About the Author

Shawnda Lembke represents C.I. Partners Direct with clients requiring high level fundraising strategy. She specializes in program planning and results analysis with an emphasis on achieving targeted response and ROI goals for donor and membership acquisition and retention programs. Shawnda's clients include University of Southern California, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Dignity Health System, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, Mills-Peninsula Hospital Foundation, Children's Hospital of Orange County and Arkansas Children's Hospital. She is also a requested guest speaker for Association of Fundraising Professionals, Annual Giving Professional Network, Council for Advancement and Support of Education and Southern California Association for Healthcare Development.

About C.I. Partners Direct

C.I. Partners Direct was formed to provide our clients with exceptional results along with an excellent customer service experience. We have a staff that is highly experienced in nonprofit direct response fundraising. We focus exclusively on the Healthcare, Children's Hospitals, Higher Education, Social Service and Cultural nonprofit markets. We partner with our clients to provide customized strategy and long term planning to achieve your fundraising goals.



C.I. Partners Direct is a member of the Association of Direct Response Fundraising Counsel.

