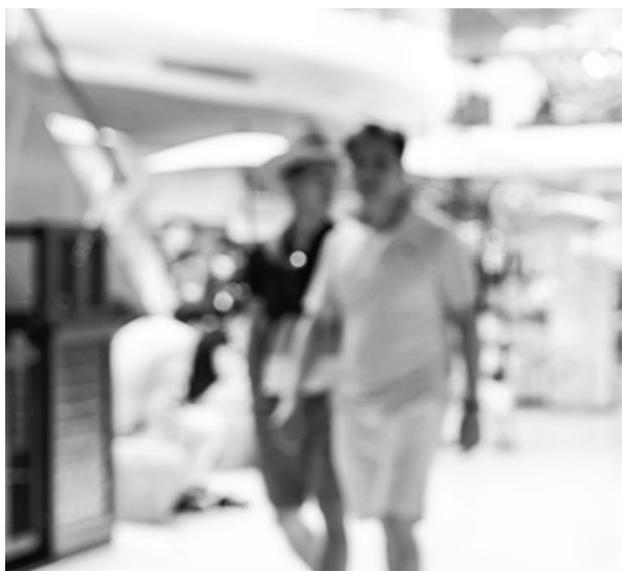


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GuideStar **Blog**

The Offer in Fundraising Appeals, and Why We Should Take Our Cue from Commercial Marketing

by [George Crankovic](#), on 6/19/19 8:00 AM



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In direct response, whether it's fundraising or commercial marketing, the offer is one of the most important elements for success. Arguably the most important. And yet it's often one of the most misunderstood.

In commercial direct marketing, for example, the offer is the key to selling everything from art supplies to car insurance to leopard-print shirts to stuffed zebras. The more specific and targeted the offer is, the more enticing it will be to prospects. It's the same in fundraising.

So, what's an offer? There are various definitions, but the simplest is probably the best. The offer is the presentation of what your prospect gets and what he or she has to do to get it. And yes, the same definition works for fundraising as well as for commercial marketing. First, marketing.

Let's say you're surfing the Internet on a lazy Saturday afternoon, and an ad pops up for a leopard-print shirt. The ad says, "Let your fashion sense go wild—now with free shipping when you order by April 23."

You think, "It's true—I do have a unique fashion sense, and I think more people should know about it. Plus, I hate paying for shipping. Sold!" What you get is free shipping, the leopard-print shirt, and everything that wearing it will say about you. What you have to do to get it is to order by the deadline.

There you have it—an offer. It's the quid pro quo. It's the handshake. It's the deal between prospect and seller. Even more than that, it's the connection, the link, between prospect and seller. When a prospect accepts a seller's offer, there's an implied level of trust that both parties will live up to the agreement and treat each other fairly. In fact, it's this kind of agreement that all of commerce and even much of civilized society is based on. We expect people to honor their word, and we expect that we will do the same for them.

All this relates directly to fundraising. Just as in commercial direct marketing, where you're not going to make many sales without a strong offer, you're not going to entice many donors to give if you fail to present them with an offer that motivates them.

But, wait a second—does the whole idea of the offer even apply in fundraising? After all, we're asking people to donate their money—just give it away—to a charity, and then who knows what happens to it after that? Isn't it fundamentally different from buying something?

The offer does apply to fundraising, and it works in much the same way as it does in commercial direct marketing. When you go to your donor with an offer, you're setting up an agreement between that donor and your nonprofit. You're going to show what your donor gets and what he or she has to do to get it. Although the offer for fundraising may not be a transaction in the commercial-marketing sense, it's definitely a transaction, and it's definitely grounded in mutual trust and honesty.

Let's say you get an appeal in the mail from a local homeless shelter, and it says, "\$1.65 provides a meal for someone who's homeless and hurting." That's a clear, strong offer, admittedly in encapsulated form.

Part of what makes this offer strong is that it's simple and specific, and it includes the problem and the solution. These things are motivating for donors to the point of inspiring them to give.

Now, here's what the donor gets:

- › Direct action on two of society's most pernicious ills—hunger and homelessness.
- › Knowledge that people in need will be fed and housed, instead of left to fend for themselves on the streets.

- › Knowledge that less hunger and homelessness will make the whole community better and safer, which will make it a nicer place to live and raise a family.
- › The personal satisfaction of taking action to address a problem. It feels good just to do ... something.
- › The satisfaction of carrying out a selfless act for another human being.
- › Fulfilling a religious obligation, perhaps, or simply fulfilling the obligations involved in being a caring member of society.
- › The satisfaction of being part of a group of donors who are also good, caring people. A sense of community is an important part of donating.
- › Association with a well-known nonprofit that's recognized for doing good work.
- › The benefits that come from donating itself, regardless of the cause. These include better physical and emotional health and greater prosperity—all of which have been widely documented.

That's a lot, and it's not even an exhaustive list. Now, here's what your donor has to do to get all this:

- › Donate

Compare the first list—what the donor gets—with the second list—what the donor has to do to get it—and you can't help thinking, "Hey, that's a pretty good deal."

This is just one example. There's no limit to the variety of potential offers you can make to donors—especially when you consider proven winners like matching grant offers, no- or low-overhead offers, and multiplier offers. Not to mention premium offers, freemium offers, bounce back cards, surveys, pledges, urgency-inducing deadlines, and much more. These and many others are the ways to make your offer sing. That's the goal. You want to come up with the strongest, most enticing offer you can. You want to make your offer seem like such a good deal that it's all but impossible for your donors to resist.



George Crankovic is an experienced, award-winning fundraising copywriter and strategist. He helps nonprofits engage their donors through multichannel direct response, combining strategy, messaging, offer, and audience to maximize results. An in-demand writer, George has published articles in Fundraising Success magazine, Nonprofit Pro magazine, and other national publications. He is a guest blogger at Jeff Brooks's Future Fundraising Now site, and he blogs at www.marketing-fundraising.com.

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