

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL DONORS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Background: The monies donated by individual donors to Healthy Minds Canada (HMC), a national charitable organization, have been decreasing since 2006. This Major Research Paper provides HMC with communication strategies to increase its funding. The strategies are based on the literature and on best practices. The literature review explores rhetoric as a method to appeal to donors. Other strategies that are examined include appeal letters, websites, and other communications such as providing donors with communication options and thanking donors. In addition, a comparative analysis is conducted between HMC and two other organizations, the Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada (TSFC) and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Ontario (ALS Ontario).

Conclusions: The analysis of rhetorical appeals determined that communications with donors should apply all three methods of Aristotle's rhetorical theory of persuasion. These modes include the appeal to emotions (pathos), the appeal to reason (logos), and the appeal of personality or character (ethos). The exploration of appeal letters showed that HMC should thank donors for past or anticipated support, conclude with pleasantries, use negatively framed local mental health statistics, and include positive and moving stories. Moreover, images should be included where possible. Many recommendations are made for HMC's website but in particular, engaging in social media is emphasized. Furthermore, in all communications to individual donors, HMC should provide these supporters with choices to receive direct mail or electronic mail, and offer opt-out options. Personal accounts can also be set up on HMC's website that allow donors to select their communication preferences. It is also suggested that there be four mail-outs per year, the newsletter be recommenced, and thank-you letters be sent out within 24 hours of receiving a donation. Lastly, it is recommended that HMC hire another full-time employee to help with its donor communications.

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Introduction

What are the most effective communication strategies, directed towards individual donors, that Healthy Minds Canada (HMC) can implement to increase its funding? The following Major Research Paper will answer this question. The focus on individual donors is deliberate because according to the literature, individuals are the most generous, even more so than foundations and corporations (Sargeant, Shang and Associates, 2010). In other words, by focusing on individual donor communications, the chances of increasing funds are improved.

Healthy Minds Canada is a national charitable organization, located in Toronto, Ontario, dedicated to funding mental health and addiction research and educating communities on the same. The organization was founded in 1980 and since this time has funded close to 400 research projects at 42 universities and teaching hospitals across Canada (Healthy Minds Canada, 2011). The organization is composed of two full-time employees, the Executive Director and the Event Coordinator, and one part-time employee, the Project Coordinator. I occupy the role of Project Coordinator and have since July 2010. For this reason, I have a vested interest in the organization and am also in a position to conduct the needed research.

Individual donations have been decreasing since 2006 (Healthy Minds Canada, 2011), which affects HMC's revenue and consequently its contribution to research. In fact, the organization has stopped funding research projects altogether, a violation of its mission. In 2006, individuals donated \$417,176, which includes legacies and bequests (Healthy Minds Canada, 2011). In 2010, individuals contributed \$115,862, which includes legacies and bequests (Healthy Minds Canada, 2011). In simpler terms, from 2006 to 2010, HMC's individual donations decreased by \$301,314. In prior years, there was an employee dedicated to donor

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communications but she is no longer with the organization and has not been replaced because of lack of funding. The absence of a donor communications specialist is one explanation for the decline in HMC's funding base. Moreover, the current employees have little time for donor related tasks due to other priorities. However, there needs to be a focus on donor communications if HMC is to succeed. This Major Research Paper will help HMC improve its donor communications, thus increasing its funding base, by making recommendations based on the literature and based on best practices. The literature review explores rhetoric as a method to appeal to donors. Other strategies that are examined include appeal letters, websites, and other communications such as providing donors with communication options and thanking donors. In addition, HMC is compared to two other organizations. Specifically, document analysis and interviews are conducted. These two organizations are similar in terms of mandate, years of experience, revenue, and human resources. The difference, however, is that these organizations' donations are increasing.

Healthy Minds Canada has been compared to the Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada (TSFC) and ALS Ontario. The former is a national voluntary organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for those with or affected by Tourette Syndrome through programs of education, advocacy, self-help and the promotion of research (Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, 2011). Established in 1976, it has a staff of five employees (Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, 2011). In 2006, individuals donated \$144,048 and in 2009, individuals contributed \$271,073 (Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, 2011). Therefore, between 2006 and 2009, the organization's donations have increased by \$127,025 (Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, 2011).

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ALS Ontario is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing the necessary equipment and support services to those living with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis well as to provide funding to ALS Ontario towards research for a cure (ALS Ontario, 2011). The organization was founded in 1989 and comprises 17 core staff members (ALS Ontario, 2011). In 2006, the organization received \$523,994 from individual donations and in 2010, the organization received \$771,724 from the same. Therefore, the organization's donations increased by \$247,730 between 2006 and 2010 (ALS Ontario, 2011).

All three organizations, Healthy Minds Canada, Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada and ALS Ontario, either promote or fund research for their specific cause. Moreover, all three organizations' support mental or physical health.

Literature Review

In order to advise Healthy Minds Canada on the most effective communication strategies, a review of the literature is necessary. The following literature review is divided into four sections: Appealing to Donors through Rhetoric, Appeal Letters, Websites, and Other Communications.

Appealing to Donors through Rhetoric

Fundraisers must influence donors in order to secure donations. Influencing is defined as “the managed relationship of helping others to understand, accept, and act on your point of view” (Ross, 2009). Influencing donors in today's market is important for three reasons. First, today's donors are more sophisticated and demanding and want to make informed choices with definite impacts (Ross, 2009). Many years ago, fundraisers could simply ask people to help “the poor”

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or “the sick” but with so many charities in existence, this is no longer an option (Ross, 2009). Donors now want communications to be faster and easily comprehensible (Ross, 2009). Therefore, fundraisers need to influence donors by providing information in a targeted and appropriate way (Ross, 2009). Second, many people become upset when they receive wasteful direct mail, intrusive fundraising telephone calls, and spam-like emails (Ross, 2009). Donors do not want to feel like they’re part of a mass-marketing campaign and consequently fundraisers need to influence donors by personalizing and adapting basic messages to make donors feel important and valued (Ross, 2009). Third, the world now has more wealthy philanthropic people than it ever has (Ross, 2009). By being influential, fundraisers can engage and enthuse mega-donors (Ross, 2009). Ross (2009) argues that to influence donors, fundraisers must persuade donors through rapport (understanding the main communication channels and being cognisant of body language and voice), language (knowing the language preferences of the charity and of the donors), and perception (reforming the appeal to match the donor’s point of view).

The art of persuasive speech or writing is also known as rhetoric (McLaughlin & Coleman, 2005). Persuading others, according to Aristotle, occurs by 1) appealing to emotions (pathos), 2) appealing to reason (logos), and 3) appealing to personality or character (ethos) (Corbett, 1965). Sargeant et al. (2010) apply Aristotle’s rhetorical theory of persuasion to the fundraising field. First, a fundraiser can appeal to donors’ emotions by “making them believe passionately that supporting your organization is the right thing to do.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 197). Testimonials and photos of clients of an organization are examples of these appeals (Sargeant et al., 2010). Moreover, affective requests appeal to the audience’s views, create a vivid picture, and use charged language (Connor & Gladkov, 2004). Second, appealing to the funders’ reason can be done by “convincing them intellectually that supporting your organization

is the logical thing to do.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 197). For example, statistics showing the success of programs would be an appeal to reason (Sargeant et al., 2010). Connor and Gladkov (2004) describe the various types of rational appeals: arguing by descriptive example, narrative example, classification, comparison, contrast, degree, authority, cause/effect – means/end – consequences, model, stage in process, ideal or principle, and information. Third, appealing to the credibility of the organization can be accomplished by “showing donors that your organization has the ability to keep its promises and complete the work it sets out to do.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 197). Providing the organization’s track record of success is one way to appear credible (Sargeant et al., 2010). The types of credibility appeals include firsthand experience, showing the writer’s respect for the audience’s interests and points of view, and showing the writer’s good character and/or judgement (Connor & Gladkov, 2004).

Some researchers believe appealing to donors’ emotions is the most effective method of persuasion. Ritzenhein (1998) found that fundraisers use emotional arguments (60 per cent of the time) more than logical ones (40 per cent of the time), but they rely on both. Similarly, according to Ahern and Joyaux (2008), “emotions move cash” (p. 122). In other words, the authors feel that effective persuasion lies in emotions and highlight seven emotional triggers that lead to higher response rates in fundraising appeals: anger, exclusivity, fear, flattery, greed, guilt, and salvation (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008). Of these, they note that fear is the most potent (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008). Myers (2007) also argues that most donors seem to be moved to contribute by pathos. However, Myers (2007) believes that pity is what motivates donors to contribute as opposed to fear. Additionally, Myers (2007) argues that elements of style are common rhetorical strategies used in fundraising letters. Style includes the quality of the writing, the tone used to convey the message, and also embraces the use of visual rhetoric

(Myers, 2007). Letters with visual rhetoric not only contain black and white or colour images, but also include typographical bullets, text underlining, different colours of paper and print, and bolding (Myers, 2007). In fact, in the study conducted by Myers (2007), almost every fundraising letter contained an image as part of its pathetic appeal. *The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* also states that images are an important component of rhetoric: “Images are particularly effective in arousing emotions, whether those images are visual or direct as sensations, or cognitive and indirect as memory or imagination, and part of a rhetor’s task is to associate the subject with such images.” (Sloane, 2001, p. 555). Lastly, Corbett and Connors believe that emotions are a strong influencer of our actions (i.e. donating to a charity): “Since it is our will ultimately that moves us to action and since the emotions have a powerful influence on the will, many of our actions are prompted by the stimulus of our emotions” (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 77).

Other researchers believe that appealing to the donors’ reason is the way to secure contributions. Connor and Gladkov (2004) discovered that rational appeals rank over the other appeals in frequency. This is especially notable as we typically associate fundraising discourse with appeals to emotions (Connor and Gladkov, 2004). The researchers also found that the rational appeals that were more frequent than some other appeals include the use of statistics and information, showing the writer’s respect for the audience’s interests and point of view, and appealing to the audience’s views (Connor and Upton, 2004). Similarly, Biber, Connor, and Upton (2007b) found that rational appeals are by far the most common type of appeal. In some nonprofit fields, rational appeals are used almost twice as often as credibility and affective appeals combined (Biber et al., 2007b). The high use of rational appeals in the health science (55 per cent of the time) and environment fields (47 per cent of the time) was a surprising find as it

goes against conventional wisdom that suggests emotional appeals would be most effective (Biber et al., 2007b). The most common rational appeals used are the ones that explain the beneficial results or consequences of a particular philanthropic program (cause/effect), and those appeals that provide the reader with information about the organization (Biber et al., 2007b). Rational appeals also tend to dominate the early parts of the letter, establishing the credentials of the nonprofit organization and making a pitch for support of some kind (Biber et al., 2007b).

Finally, donations can be obtained by appealing to the credibility of an organization. Although Goering, Connor, Nagelhout, and Steinberg (2009) believe all three persuasion categories are important, “credibility appeals may be the most influential because of the importance of donor trust” (Goering et al., 2009, p. 232). Handy (2000) describes a variety of cues to use in letters to build trust such as “highlighting the charitable status of the organization, noting the longevity of the organization, using celebrity endorsement, or sharing with the reader the percentage of funds spent on administration.” Handy further argues that charities must be accountable because donors may not donate to charities that are untrustworthy (Handy, 2000).

According to Crismore (2004), all three types of rhetorical appeals are at the heart of effective fundraising letters. However, a relationship needs to be developed between the writer and the readers, and between and among the ideas and issues (Crismore, 2004). These relationships can be accomplished through interpersonal pronouns and metadiscourse (Crismore, 2004). Interpersonal pronouns are those pronouns we refer to as first and second pronouns, both singular and plural, such as *I, me, my, myself, mine, we, us, our, ourselves, you, your, yours, and yourself* (Crismore, 2004). In Crismore’s study (2004), writers of fundraising letters used the first person singular pronoun at times for credibility, personal style, and interest, and also used the first person plural and second person pronouns more frequently for reader inclusiveness,

engagement, and interaction (Crismore, 2004). Metadiscourse, on the other hand, is “words, phrases, or clauses that do not add propositional material but help our readers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react to such material.” (Crismore, 2004, p. 311). Using interpersonal pronouns and metadiscourse in a way that allows readers to clearly see the relationships between writer and reader and between ideas will produce rhetorically effective appeal letters (Crismore, 2004). Like Crismore, Corbett (1965) also believes that all three appeals are effective depending on what we are arguing, the circumstances, and the audience we are addressing.

Appeal Letters

Appeal letters are an important part of a fundraising campaign. According to Bhatia (1998), these letters have a six-move discourse structure, although only four of them are most often used. One of the four moves is establishing credentials. This first move incorporates one or more of the following strategies: “celebrity endorsement, referring to community needs, referring to mission statements, using an image of the trustees, invoking frameworks of consciousness, and invoking community involvement.” (Bhatia, 1998, p. 103). Ritzenhein (1998) argues that establishing credentials is the most important move. Specifically, he discovered the importance of “quality” and “need” arguments in fundraising letters (Ritzenhein, 1998). For example, fundraisers primarily use arguments that stress the quality of the institution, suggest the donor’s gift matters and will allow the organization to reach its goals, highlight the needs of the organization, and simply ask for a gift. (Ritzenhein, 1998). Biber et al. (2007a) concur that establishing credentials or introducing the cause is one of two moves which is the most important; the other move is “soliciting response” (Biber et al., 2007a). Therefore, these moves are considered nearly obligatory while others such as “getting attention” and “concluding with pleasantries” are optional (Biber et al., 2007a).

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Introducing the cause is the second move. This move not only introduces the cause but also describes the cause, indicates the value of the cause, specifies the potential value of solicited support, and establishes a track record (Bhatia, 1998). Soliciting support is the third move and is executed by asking for a donation. Expressing gratitude is the fourth and final most common move. This move is “expressed by giving thanks for past or anticipated support, by reaffirming mission statements, and by soliciting response to the appeal.” (Bhatia, 1998, p. 104). Offering incentives and enclosing brochures, the other two moves, are less commonly used (Bhatia, 1998).

Biber et al. (2007a), on the other hand, claims there are seven moves in the discourse structure of a fundraising letter. The moves in this structure start by getting attention, then introducing the cause and/or establish credentials, followed by soliciting response, offering incentives, inserting a reference (i.e. I have enclosed a brochure, pledge form, or return envelope), expressing gratitude, and concluding with pleasantries (Biber et al., 2007a). Biber’s discourse structure differs from Bhatia’s (1998) in that it additionally suggests “getting attention” and “concluding with pleasantries”.

According to Das, Kerkhof, and Kuiper, “effective fundraising messages should combine abstract, statistical information with a negative message frame and anecdotal evidence with a positive message frame.” (Das et al, 2008, p. 161). Messages with a positive frame highlight the positive consequences of donating money (Das et al., 2008). An example of this type of message would be, “With your support, the quality of life for the one in five Canadians who suffer from mental illness can be improved.” A negative frame would be, “Without your support, the one in five Canadians who suffers from mental illness will be ostracized and face a life time of hopelessness.” As well, Das et al. discovered that “donation intentions were higher for messages

that addressed charity goal attainment issues.” (Das et al, 2008, p. 161). Similarly, Smith and Berger (1996) noticed a positive impact on the quantity of donations when letters included factual/statistical and when letters included narrative/experiential information. They further revealed that there is not much difference in the effects of these two types of letters (Smith & Berger, 1996). However, Ahern and Joyaux (2008) argue that anecdotes are more effective than statistics when building donor relationships because the former are inclusive and the latter are exclusive. The authors claim anecdotes are “warm, revealing, intimate, understood by anyone instantly, and easy to visualize because they are flush with concrete details, dramatic, and show rather than tell.” (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008, p. 232). Conversely, statistics are “cold, distant, unyielding, hard to know because only program professionals understand their full significance, and hard to visualize because they are numbers, abstract quantifications, and tell rather than show.” (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008, p. 232).

Storytelling is a type of anecdote. According to Yong, Wyman, and Swaigen (2002) fundraising is and always will be all about storytelling: human interest stories, engaging stories, touching stories, involving stories, and moving stories. Bray (2005) encourages storytelling in newsletters. He guarantees that more people will read a story about people or animals than they will a well-researched and highly informative article about a global warming campaign for example (Bray, 2005). Bray (2005) also suggests including stories in newsletters that follow up on any plans, projects, or emergencies that have already been described in a mail appeal. Moreover, stories should be interesting, timely, and appropriate (Bray, 2005). Weinstein also argues that moving stories in newsletters are more effective than a bland recitation of statistics (Weinstein, 2002). Furthermore, storytelling to Ahern and Joyaux (2008) is “essential for effective fund development; essential, not optional”. (p. 239). A well-told story can inspire

donors and have an uplifting effect (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008). Bray (2005) claims that an opening paragraph with a personal story is the most effective in drawing people in. She continues to argue that the reason a personal story is so effective is that human nature makes people interested in other humans (Bray, 2005). Bray provides an example of a story: A description of why one volunteer has devoted every Saturday afternoon for the last several years to an organization's cause (Bray, 2005). Lastly, storytelling is important because it is also a method of persuasion.

A study by Vriens, van der Scheer, Hoekstra, and Bult (1998) which examined techniques to increase donations discovered that optimal letters contain no brochures or illustrations, do not use bold print to highlight certain aspects, contain a postscript summary, and are signed by a very highly respected individual. In the study, these techniques resulted in a 9.8% response rate increase and a 5% average donation increase (Vriens et al., 1998). With regard to letters containing a postscript summary, according to Siegfried Vogele, a German professor who conducted eye-camera tests in the 1980s to examine how a reader reads a fundraising package, the P.S. in a letter is vital as it will be read by more than 90 percent of recipients (who open the envelope) (Sargeant et al., 2010). However, not all researchers agree with the findings of Vriens et al. (1998). Myers (2007), as previously discussed, argues that images are an important part of pathetic appeals. Ahern and Joyaux (2008) maintain that highlighting techniques are safe to use provided they are used sparingly.

Further research by Vogele showed that appeal letters that engage the reader in a dialogue, answering the donors' questions in the letter, will be the most successful (Dixon, 2008). Vogele discovered that it takes a reader 20 seconds to reject a letter (Dixon, 2008). The reader first opens the envelope which takes eight seconds; then in the second phase, the reader looks at the contents of the envelope which takes four seconds; and finally in the third phase, the

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donor scans headlines and highlighted text which takes another eight seconds (Dixon, 2008). Therefore, the faster you can engage a donor and get him or her to respond, the better chance you have at securing a donation (Dixon, 2008).

With regard to layout design, Georing (2009) found that highlighting techniques such as bullets to break the monotony of unbroken text do not have a statistically significant effect. However, participants in the study did note that the bullets made the letters “easier to read, helped to draw attention to the kinds of things that support is needed for, and made the letter friendlier.” (Georing, 2009, p. 242). Sargeant et al. (2010) argue that typeface is important because the use of incorrect typeface “can reduce comprehension of a communication by over a fifth” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 271). Specifically, fundraisers should use serif type font with an appropriate leading (the spaces between the lines) (Sargeant et al., 2010). Spears argues that to grab a donor’s attention before the salutation, a headline can be included such as a startling statement, a question, a quote about the problem the organization faces, a story illustrating the problem the charity addresses, a celebrity endorsement, or a personalized tactic (Spears, 2002, p. 248). Spears’ argument makes sense in light of Vogele’s research results. In terms of linguistic elements, Georing (2009) found that letters of higher readability are more successful in terms of receiving donations. On the other hand, Ahern and Joyaux (2008) suggest that when writing the case for support, language should be easily understood by anyone and jargon should be avoided. Ahern and Joyaux (2008) further argue that the faster the reader experience, the better and consequently, a lower grade level prose should be applied. In fact, direct mail letters should aim for the sixth-grade level and have on average, three sentences per paragraph, 13 words per sentence, and five characters per word (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008).

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Some people wonder what the future of direct mailings will be, especially in a time when information is readily available at our finger tips through the Internet. Goering et al. argue that “despite the growth of the Internet, most nonprofit organizations continue to use direct-mail in some way.” (Goering et al., 2009, p.230). Weinstein (2002) states that direct mail can still be effective but a nonprofit must know what works and what does not. However, Weinstein recognizes that direct mail has become harder in the last few years because of rising mailing costs and many people are throwing mail away without opening the envelope (Weinstein, 2002). Sargeant et al. (2010), argue that direct mail remains the most common form of donor recruitment because its costs are similar to those in other media and because many donors who are recruited via direct mail letters are likely to give multiple donations. Losses can occur after the first mailing; organizations usually breakeven anywhere from nine to eighteen months into a relationship (Sargeant et al., 2010). Yong et al. (2002) tend to disagree with the effectiveness of direct mail because most donors do not like nonprofit direct marketing. In a 1997 study among donors, 57 percent claimed they welcome a nonprofit’s newsletters, but just 2 percent said they were happy to receive fundraising direct mail (Yong et al, 2002). Bray (2005) articulates it best by saying most everyone has mixed feelings about direct mail fundraising. However, Bray (2005) concludes by indicating that despite the trend of unwelcomed direct mail, it “can still be a cost-effective way to reach donors who might not hear of your organization by any other means.” (Bray, 2005, ch. 4, p. 33).

Websites

Today, websites are also an effective means of convincing donors to support an organization. But what elements must be incorporated into a website to get that donation? According to Sargeant et al. (2010), there are five characteristics that attract higher numbers of

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donors online. These are accessibility, accountability, education, interaction/sense of community, and empowerment (Sargeant et al., 2010). Other components which researchers stressed as important are customization (Sargeant, West, & Jay, 2007; Wenham, Stephens, and Hardy, 2003; Hooper and Stobart, 2002), organization and ease of use (Wenham et al., 2003; Hart, 2002; Long & Chiagouris, 2006), and content (Sargeant et al., 2010; Bray, 2005; Waters, 2007). These characteristics and others will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Accessibility is defined as “the extent to which the site makes it easy for individuals to make a donation when they are motivated to do so.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 281). Bray (2005) also stresses the importance of a website which leads viewers easily to information on how to donate or get involved.

Accountability is “the extent to which the site indicates it is accountable to supporters for the way in which it will use resources such as donated funds and personal data.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 281). Burnett (2006) claims that a successful nonprofit organization is one that is accountable. He states, “Transparent accountability isn’t just a duty, it’s an opportunity. Demonstrated good governance and open, proactive accountability will be hallmarks of the successful fundraising organization of the future.” (Burnett, 2006, p. 20). Moreover, Das et al. (2008) argue that effective fundraising messages should include information about donations being spent wisely. Furthermore, statements should be included that tell donors how donations have been and will be used (Bray, 2005).

Education refers to “the extent to which the site provides an appropriate resource for the donor to learn about the cause.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 281).

According to Sargeant et al. (2010), interaction is “the extent to which the site offers users the ability to interact with the organization in a variety of ways.” (p. 281). Wenham et al.

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(2003) found that websites need to provide opportunities for donors to get involved and support an organization in order to build a sense of online community. Moreover, to encourage repeat visits, Hooper & Stobart (2002) believe websites should increase content and foster a sense of community. Additionally, websites that possess a sense of community have “discussions, forums, “ask the expert” pages, and blogs” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 280). In fact, “many organizations have now established blogs to demonstrate credibility and to more fully engage with their audience.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 288). With blogs, come Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds in which users can opt to have blogs, videos, and news of any type sent directly to their computer (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 288).

Empowerment is “the extent to which the site allows donors to feel they have taken action or had an impact on the cause.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 282).

Customization refers to “the extent to which the donor may tailor the site or communications received to reflect his or her own interests or needs.” (Seargeant et al., 2007). Wenham et al. (2003) argue that organizations must find out about donors in order to target and personalize the content of a website. Search capabilities, a “shopping cart”, and a personal account are all examples of customization.

Hart (2002) found that successful websites are ones that are well-organized and informative. Wenham et al. (2003) argue that websites need to be easy to use. Long et al. (2006) further stresses the importance of websites being arranged in a way that makes sense and are easy to browse for information. Bray (2005) suggests that charity websites follow the standard look and feel of other nonprofit home pages such as placing a set of tabs across or alongside the home page “with links to such topics as “About Us”, “Contact Us”, “News”, “Upcoming Events”, “Publications”, and “Support Us”. (Bray, 2005, ch. 12, p. 13).

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Additionally, for donors that want to donate instantly, there should be a button saying “Give Now!” or something similar (Bray, 2005). Moreover, no matter where a donor is on the website, “the pages should either repeat the homepage tabs, contain a “donate” button, or provide another link to opportunities to get involved.” (Bray, 2005, ch. 12, p. 16). Furthermore, Ahern and Joyaux (2008) discuss the work of Siegfried Vogele and his eye-motion research. The eye generally follows a downward arc starting at the upper right-hand corner of the page (which is why many “donate” buttons are situated here) and zips instantly and involuntarily to the largest graphic on the page (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008). The eye finishes by exiting at the lower right-hand corner. Dr. Vogele’s research also discovered the eyes go to:

- “Photographs or drawings first, before they go to text
- Big text (i.e. headlines) first, before they go to small text
- Short words, short lines, and short paragraphs first (i.e., headlines, captions, pull quotes)” (Ahern & Joyaux, 2008, p. 371).

With regard to pictures, Vogele discovered:

- “Large pictures gain attention before smaller pictures.
- Colour pictures are noted before black-and-white pictures.
- Warm colours attract attention before middle tones or cooler colours.
- A sequence of pictures is noted before individual pictures.
- Action illustrations are seen before still pictures.
- Pictures with people are looked at before pictures of products.
- Children attract attention before adults.
- Portraits gain attention before full pictures of people.
- Eyes are the first item that people focus on.
- Most often a large group of people gains attention before a small group.
- Outline illustrations are generally noted before square halftones.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 271).

The implication of this research is that organizations can have more control over their donors than they originally thought. According to Ahern and Joyaux, “you can drag the reader’s eye (and mind and heart) around on a leash, if you know what you’re doing.” (Ahern and Joyaux, 2008, p. 371).

Content is an important component of websites. Sargeant et al. argue that “nonprofits need to bring their information online by posting forms, manuals, documents, briefings, annual reports, in short, anything that might add value for one or more groups of stakeholders.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 280). According to Bray (2005), “studies have shown that readers place substantive content number one in importance when evaluating a nonprofit’s website.” (Bray, 2005, ch. 12, p. 11). Content can take the form of current activities or information that does not derive directly from the nonprofit organization. Examples include email newsletters and news alerts (Bray, 2005). According to Waters (2007), “organizations that raised the most donations were more likely to provide potential donors with copies of their annual reports and yearly goals, information about their stated mission, and immediate electronic receipts for charitable gifts.”

Search engine optimization is “the process of choosing targeted keyword phrases related to a site, and ensuring that the site places well when those keyword phrases are part of a Web search.” (Marketing Terms, 2011). Search engine optimization is another effective method of attracting donors (Sargeant et al., 2010). As well, a good network of links should be developed in which nonprofits can exploit potential partnerships and encourage reciprocal links (that is, in which each site agrees to a two-way link).” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 292). In addition, Bray (2005) emphasizes the magnitude of freshness and publicly thanking donors (provided donors want to be publicly thanked). Finally, opt-in email facilities should be placed near the top of every page (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 294). The sign-up form should be short and simple and only ask for what is necessary such as an email address (Sargeant et al., 2010).

Other Communications

Donor loyalty can have a huge impact on the returns a charity is able to generate from its fundraising (Sargeant et al., 2010). Moreover, donor satisfaction is the single biggest driver of loyalty towards an organization (Sargeant et al., 2010). Not surprisingly, “donors who are very satisfied are twice as likely to donate as those who are merely satisfied to give the next year.” (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 322). So how can we satisfy donors? According to Burnett, donors will always be more responsive when what we send them is what they want to receive; “Which do you think will work best: if we send donors what we want them to have or what they would like to receive?” (Burnett, 2002, p. 136). Burnett (2002) also argues that organizations can treat donors how they want to be treated by segmenting the organization’s database by choice: how and when donors choose to hear about an organization and what they wish to hear about. Bray (2005) takes this notion one step further and argues that it is a good idea to ask donors their preferences about how often they’ll receive mailings.

Although asking donors their preferences is recommended, the following guidelines surrounding the quantity of mailings are suggested. Sargeant and Hudson (2008) recommend four mail-outs per year. Likewise, Weinstein (2002) feels that four mailings per year, especially when the approach varies, are rarely offensive to most donors. The author believes that the best time to conduct a campaign is September to November, followed by February to May (Weinstein, 2002). As well, mailings a month or two before Christmas will usually do very well (Weinstein, 2002). In relation to newsletters, Bray (2005) recommends sending a newsletter two to four times per year and an annual report near the end of the year. He further suggests that the newsletter and annual report schedule be kept in mind as other mailings are planned (Bray, 2005). Ahern and Joyaux (2008) suggest mailing newsletters in March, September, and

December, and mailing the annual report in June. Weinstein also believes that two, three, or four newsletters per year may be enough but he cautions that newsletters rarely if ever achieve as high a response rate as a direct-mail appeal (Weinstein, 2002).

Thanking donors is one of the most significant strategies in building relationships and securing loyal donors. In 2001, Sargeant conducted a study of why donors stopped giving to a particular non-profit organization; in the study, 13.2% of people stopped donating because the charity did not acknowledge their support (Sargeant et al., 2010). Bray (2005) argues that anyone who makes more than a token pledge or gift to an organization should receive a prompt, written thank-you letter. The letter should be sent out no later than 24 hours or a few days (Bray, 2005). In addition, for larger gifts, a phone call is a nice added personal touch (Bray, 2005). Moreover, for major donors, the “big-name” person at the organization, such as the Executive Director or a Board Member, should be the one to call (Bray, 2005). Young et al. (2002) concur that it is safe to call to say thanks within 48 hours of receiving a gift but any longer than that, donors will think that the organization is calling to ask for another donation.

Methodology

I used triangulation to conduct my analysis because I used multiple methods to gather my data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Specifically, I conducted a review of the literature, a comparison of the three organizations’ appeal letters and websites, and I interviewed personnel at Healthy Minds Canada, the Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, and ALS Ontario.

Many sources were consulted for the literature review. Although there is much more literature that I could have used, I started to discover that no new conceptual insights were being generated, also known as theoretical saturation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Moreover, as the

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length requirements for this paper are small, I had to draw a line at the number of sources I examined.

I created a set of operational definitions in order to analyze the appeal letters and websites (see Appendix A). For the appeal letters, I specifically wanted to know how the organizations appealed to their donors, so my first set of operational definitions were based on rhetorical appeals: pathos, logos, and ethos. I analyzed three fundraising letters, one from each organization, and highlighted parts that used one or all of the three persuasive modes. As expected, the organizations provided me with the most recent appeal letters. Please see Appendix B for the letters and letter analysis. My second set of operational definitions was based on the patterns that emerged from the review of the literature surrounding websites. I used these definitions to analyze each organization's website. The definitions include accessibility, accountability, education, interaction/sense of community, empowerment, customization, organization/ease of use, and content. Essentially, I used the first operational definition (accessibility) and looked through one organization's entire website for parts that demonstrated accessibility. Then, I moved on to the second operational definition (customization) and searched the same website looking for customization components. I continued down the list and once I had reached the bottom, I started the process over on another website until I had analyzed all three websites.

The interviews were conducted in-person at the organizations' offices. At Healthy Minds Canada, I interviewed the Executive Director; at the Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada I interviewed the Executive Director and the Marketing and Communications Coordinator / It's Your Move Project Marketing Coordinator; and at ALS Ontario, I interviewed the Director of Leadership Giving and the Manager of Communications. Before starting my line of questioning, I

asked the organizations to review and sign the Consent Form (see Appendix C) as approved by the Ryerson University Ethics Board. Each organization was in agreement and therefore signed the form. Each interview did not last more than half of an hour and the documents I requested were gathered in less than five minutes. The interview questions surrounded the individual donor communication strategies currently being used with new and existing donors. I audio recorded each interview with each organization's permission and later transcribed the questions and answers provided (see Appendix D) which took about one and a half days. The documents I collected were appeal letters, thank you letters, newsletters, and annual reports dating back to 2006.

Analysis and Interpretation

Appealing to Donors through Rhetoric

One goal of the interviews was to determine what method of persuasion is most effective: 1) the appeal to emotions (pathos), 2) the appeal to reason (logos), and 3) the appeal of personality or character (ethos). The literature had mixed results as to which method is most effective, so the hope was that the interviews would be able to provide some clarity. Unfortunately, they did not.

Healthy Minds Canada's Executive Director said that historically the organization's appeal letters have emphasized the credibility of the organization, and the need and demand (the state of mental health illness and the need for funds). In the analysis of HMC's latest appeal letter, it was discovered that rational appeals are primarily used. Emotional appeals and credibility appeals are used much less. Specifically, the letter centers around a story about

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research conducted. The story is appealing to donors' logic because it is showing donors that their contributions are being successfully spent and consequently, future donations would likely yield similar results. The specific technique used is known as a narrative example appeal.

The Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada's current appeal letter has taken a creative approach. The Foundation addresses its letter to Santa Clause who forwards the letter to donors, encouraging them to contribute. The TSFC stated they used a combination of all three appeals, but after analysis of the letter, the results show that the organization's letter, like HMC's, primarily relies on rational appeals. Emotional appeals are marginally used and credibility appeals are not used at all. The letter is asking for donations to fund operational costs such as salaries for full-time staff and Public Service Announcements along with airtime and newspaper space. The letter does not address the difficulties faced by those with Tourette Syndrome but it does make it clear that the organization is in desperate need of funding. As discovered in the interview, the organization does not want to focus on the struggles faced by persons with Tourette Syndrome. In fact, the organization tries to avoid the victim mentality because there are so many stigmas about the disorder that they have to be careful not to feed into them. In other words, if an organization like the TSFC depicts persons with Tourette Syndrome as victims, then it is feeding into the beliefs that already exist, the beliefs that the organization is trying so hard to dispel. Tourette Syndrome is a mental health disorder; HMC focuses on mental health disorders and therefore must also stay away from the victim mentality.

In the interview with ALS Ontario, emotion was cited as the appeal used most often. I was fascinated to hear that ALS Ontario thought that one of the most powerful emotions was fear, an opinion echoed by Ahern and Joyaux (2008) as previously stated. In my analysis of their current fundraising letter, I discovered that it is true that emotional appeals are mainly used,

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however, appeals to reason and to the credibility of the organization are also used. The appeal to emotion is reflected in the personal story of Steve Wells. A vivid picture is created and charged language is used. The story is framed positively, as it should be, according to Das et al (2008). Specifically, the organization uses emotional techniques such as a picture of Mr. Wells and statistics that inform donors that ALS claims the lives of two to three Canadians per day and eighty percent of people living with ALS die within two to five years of diagnosis. Furthermore, the very first sentence of the letter is an emotional appeal: “While ALS robs those afflicted of their body functions, speech and ability to breathe, it does not take the mind and spirit of a person.” The fundraising letter also uses rational appeals by indicating that medical equipment costs more than \$140,000 over the span of the disease and that most families cannot afford this expense even in the best financial times. As well, ALS Ontario does not receive government funding and therefore relies on its donors for support. Lastly, ALS Ontario has used appeals in establishing credibility. For example, Mr. Wells has been a member of ALS Ontario since the late 80’s and claims that “the equipment pool has been a phenomenal resource over the years.” On another note, it is interesting that the letter uses a lot of quantifiable information (statistics and costs), in addition to telling a story.

To sum, Healthy Minds Canada and the Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada predominantly rely on rational appeals. ALS Ontario mainly uses emotional appeals. HMC and ALS Ontario use all three appeals, albeit not equally. It is thought-provoking that both HMC and the TSFC primarily use rational appeals and minimally use emotional appeals whereas ALS Ontario uses emotional appeals regularly. This difference is hypothesized to be attributed to the difference in the organizations’ mandates. HMC and the TSFC focus on mental health whereas ALS Ontario focuses on physical health and on a disease with an average life span of two to five

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years. Based on the literature and on the analysis of the letters, a conclusion cannot be drawn as to what method of appeal is most effective. For this reason, Corbett's (1965) argument prevails: all three appeals are effective depending on what we are arguing, the circumstances, and the audience we are addressing.

One of the questions posed to the organizations surrounded appealing to new donors. Both the Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada and ALS Ontario said the recruitment of new donors is mostly accomplished through the cause itself. One of the interviewees at TSFC said, "There's very little in the way of going after new donors who haven't already come to us. Once they're interested in us as an organization, we hit them up." Likewise, an employee of ALS Ontario said, "A large number of our donors are recruited by the disease itself, in all honesty. If someone is newly diagnosed, there's a ripple effect of the people around them that want to do something because it's an awful disease...So the majority of donors come from the disease itself and those people know ten people who know ten people who know ten people who know ten people." Interestingly, HMC also discussed the importance of social networks. The Executive Director said, "We still use our old Board Members who are connected with [former HMC supporters]. Because of our limited human resources, we strategically keep a few people up to date and rely on them to spread the word. We really have to rely on a word of mouth network." It is true that with limited human resources it is difficult to recruit new donors, but with a donor base of only 400 individuals (according to the Executive Director at HMC), it is necessary to appeal to new supporters.

Appeal Letters

Healthy Minds Canada's appeal letter follows Bhatia's (1998) six-move discourse structure. HMC's appeal letter starts off by establishing credentials, the first move, through a sentence outlining the organization's mission. Then the letter introduces the cause, the second move, by indicating the value of support. In other words, donors are informed that their dollars are spent on useful research that is finding better treatments and services for those affected by mental health issues. The story about Dr. Vernor Knott's research is an example of the value of support. Dr. Knott's study revealed that nicotine can help prevent the onset of depression. The letter then solicits support, the third move, and offers an incentive, the fourth move, of a tax-deductible donation. Following these moves, is the fifth move, "enclosing brochures". HMC encloses its annual report once per annum and additionally includes a reply card for the donation, which is considered a "brochure" according to Bhatia (1998). Finally, the letter expresses gratitude, the sixth move, by reaffirming HMC's mission statement. Surprisingly, HMC does not thank donors for past or anticipated support in its appeal letter, which according to Bhatia (1998) is a component of expressing gratitude. In fact, neither does the TSFC or ALS Ontario. Not having asked the organizations the reason for such, I can only speculate that they do not thank their donors because they do not want to be presumptuous in their expectations about a gift. Or perhaps the organizations feel that they will be thanking the donors after the donation has been received so it is not necessary to thank in the appeal letter. Whatever the reason, according to Bieber et al. (2007a) expressing gratitude is realized by actually thanking donors for past financial or other support and/or thanking donors for current and future financial or other support. Therefore, I recommend that HMC thank donors for past or anticipated support in its appeal letters.

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Healthy Minds Canada's appeal letter also grabs attention, which is one of the moves in the discourse structure designed by Biber et al. (2007a). Specifically, HMC grabs attention through an opening headline: "Because of your support CPRF funded research is finding better treatments for depression (CPRF stands for the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation which is HMC's former name)." Concluding with pleasantries is another move according to Biber et al. (2007a). HMC's appeal letter does not conclude with pleasantries; the final paragraph is an appeal for funds. For this reason, it is recommended that HMC conclude its letters with pleasantries such as "We hope you have a nice summer" or "Happy Holidays".

The statistics used in Healthy Minds Canada's appeal letter (one in five Canadians suffers from mental illness) have not been used in a negative frame but should be according to the literature. This specific statistic was used four times throughout the letter. I could not find literature about using the same statistic repeatedly but I question the effectiveness of this technique. Moreover, I also speculate about the effectiveness of the statistic itself. This number has been floating around for many years, as witnessed in earlier documents, so I wonder if 1) it is accurate and, 2) does it still have an effect on donors. Although national statistics inform the audience of the enormity of the problem, I believe they are not personalized enough and almost encourage donors to think 1) how can my dollars make a difference in such large numbers, and 2) since it is a national problem, other people will donate so I do not have to. I believe HMC should use local statistics, negatively framed. For example, if a donor lives in Toronto, send him/her the statistics about mental health disorders in Toronto and highlight the consequences that will arise without donations. Likewise, if a donor lives in Ottawa, include statistics in the appeal letter about mental health issues in Ottawa and the negative outcomes that will occur without support.

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As discussed, Healthy Minds Canada's previous fundraising letter included a story about research conducted. In the interview with HMC's Executive Director, I asked what kind of stories can be recounted in current fundraising letters now that HMC is not funding research. The Executive Director said that although the organization is not funding new research, there is still research coming in and she suggested ideas for stories such as the story of one researcher who was looking at the brain function of individuals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anti-stigma stories gathered through the new anti-stigma tool for parents, and a story about John Tory, the creator of HMC. While I agree with all of these ideas, I am also putting forth a future idea: I recommend that HMC ask its supporters and workshop attendees for their mental health stories to share with the world. This can be accomplished through the Internet via social media or a blog (which would help with establishing a sense of online community) or through workshop surveys. HMC can then use one of the stories in a direct mail appeal letter and make the connection to itself by indicating that HMC funds research and educates the public to help those with mental illness. It is important, however, that these stories are told in a positive and moving message frame.

The importance of images has been emphasized throughout this paper and an image is included in ALS Ontario's appeal letter. Therefore, it is recommended that HMC include an image in its appeal letter where possible, provided the image does not fuel the victim mentality. HMC's appeal letter uses highlighting techniques sparingly, includes a postscript summary, and is signed by a very highly respected individual, the Executive Director. According to the literature, HMC should continue to include these components.

Healthy Minds Canada's appeal letter also uses a serif type font which accords with the literature's recommendation. The letter also has an appropriate number of sentences per

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paragraph (on average three sentences per paragraph) according to the research results. Lastly, the readability of HMC's appeal letter is at a lower grade level, like the TSFC's letter and ALS Ontario's letter.

Websites

Healthy Mind Canada's website is partially accessible, based on the literature and in comparison to the Tourette Syndrome Foundation Canada's website and ALS Ontario's website. The TSFC and ALS Ontario sites, on the other hand, are accessible. On HMC's site, there is a "Donate Now!" button at the top left hand of every page but it does not stand out as it is the same colour as other text on the website. Both the TSFC and ALS Ontario have their "donate" buttons at the top right hand of every page. Once the user clicks the button, he/she is redirected to www.canadahelps.org (Canada Helps), a third party donation-gathering website, where a straight forward donation can be made. The donor has the option of making a one-time only donation or a recurring donation deducted monthly from his/her credit card. As well, the donor has the choice of making his/her donation a dedication. The TSFC and ALS Ontario both handle their own donations but this may be due to both organizations having marginally more manpower than HMC. If HMC was to hire more employees, it could consider handling its own donations. Additionally, there is a menu along the left of all pages and one of the menu items is titled "Fundraising at CPRF". Once clicked, a page appears that lists all the methods of donating. In summary, HMC's website requires slight improvements with regard to accessibility such as the "Donate Now!" button needs be emphasized and additionally on the top right hand side of every page.

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Healthy Minds Canada is accountable to some extent but improvements are necessary. The TSFC and ALS Ontario websites are much more accountable. HMC does not have a privacy statement related to donations on its website which indicates how personal information will be used but the third party donation-gathering website does have one. Specifically, it states “Your personal information will never be shared, traded, sold or used in any manner not explicitly approved by you. We do not swap mailing lists, share donor information or sell (or even collect) phone numbers.” (Canada Helps, 2000-2010). However, the HMC website contains a privacy statement as it pertains to the purchasing of handbooks: “CPRF utilizes the *eSelect Plus Secure Connection Hosted Paypage Software* from Moneris Solutions Inc., to insure privacy on instant transactions.” (Healthy Minds Canada, 2011). Since the TSFC and ALS Ontario handle their own donations, they cannot rely on a third party donation-gathering website for their privacy statements. On the TSFC website, there is a note indicating that donations are processed through a secured donation program to ensure donors that their credit card and personal information will be safe. Specifically, the note reads, “The TSFC is accredited as an adherent to Imagine Canada’s Ethical Fundraising and Financial Accountability Code. All information is used specifically for each transaction in accordance with the Privacy Legislation of Canada.” (Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, 2011). ALS Ontario has adopted the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (CCP) Ethical Fundraising and Accountability Code. This code ensures that the ALS Society of Ontario respects the donor’s right to privacy and manages responsibly the funds donated in order to help those living with ALS (ALS Society of Ontario, 2011).

Furthermore, HMC’s website informs donors how their monies will be spent: “Donations can be directed towards CPRF's greatest needs, or you can request that donations and

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sponsorships be designated towards specific projects like general research, a specific research topic (e.g., PTSD, Depression, Schizophrenia, etc.), or our educational activities - like our *When Something's Wrong* handbooks and conferences.” (Healthy Minds Canada, 2011). ALS Ontario is extremely accountable on this front, providing the costs for various equipment so donors know exactly how their monies are spent. HMC posts its annual reports online which is a sure sign of accountability; however, the last report posted was from the 2007-2008 fiscal year (Healthy Minds Canada, 2011). Copies of the current annual report exist but only in hard copy. HMC needs to post its most current annual reports online. The lack of current information will be discussed further in a later paragraph.

The website has a section titled “Education and Awareness” which highlights all the education and awareness projects that HMC is carrying out. As well, links to other mental health organizations are listed. The TSFC and ALS Ontario also have sections dedicated to education. In fact, the TSFC’s site even has a public service announcement endorsed by Neve Campbell, a Canadian actress. As well, the TSFC recently launched its “@Random” campaign, a unique documentary project which was created to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding Tourette Syndrome (At Random, 2011). Moreover, ALS Ontario posts a fact sheet on its website titled, “10 Facts about ALS”, that is educational based. HMC’s education section is adequate but value could be added if there was a page in the Education and Awareness section which listed and defined the most common mental health disorders to allow donors to learn more about the cause.

Unfortunately, donors are not able to interact with Healthy Minds Canada in a variety of ways. The site does not possess any social media components. The TSFC’s website allows individuals to join a discussion forum, join the Facebook group, subscribe to their YouTube

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page, and follow them on Twitter. The discussion forum has multiple categories from general to more specific topics and even has categories for different demographics such as teens, parents, and adults (The Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, 2011). Through the ALS Ontario website, donors can join the Facebook group, subscribe to their YouTube page, and follow the organization on Twitter. I highly recommend that HMC obtain a Facebook and Twitter account and set up a discussion forum urgently. HMC could acquire a YouTube page in the future if it desires. Most of the videos shown on YouTube by the TSFC and ALS Ontario are ones of personal stories that have an underlying theme of support and education. It is a rather large project for HMC to gather videos of individuals with mental health stories which is why this is something that could be set up in the future. However, the TSFC and ALS Ontario websites also contain personal stories in written format. HMC should immediately start to gather written stories for its website. None of the organizations have a blog but it is recommended that HMC set up a blog based on the literature. Of course, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds go hand-in-hand with blogs and therefore HMC would additionally have to set up an RSS feed.

The websites of Healthy Minds Canada, the Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, and ALS Ontario all allow donors to feel empowered. HMC's site allows donors to feel empowered by supporting the organization in multiple ways such as through a donation, volunteering, attending the annual Silver Dinner and/or the annual Open Minds Across Canada Mental Health Symposium. Moreover, there are multiple donation options available such as annual giving, gifts in-kind, memorial donations, bequests, life insurance, charitable annuities, and charitable remainder trusts. The TSFC has multiple donation categories as well, including the "Grandparents Club" in which grandparents can donate photos and stories.

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Healthy Minds Canada's website needs one major improvement concerning customization. The site does not offer search capabilities which are a popular component of customization and therefore it is recommended that this aspect be added. The third party organization, Canada Helps, which handles HMC's donations, has numerous customization components. The site allows users to have their own account, "giving pages", "giving basket" (like a "shopping cart"), and permits users to bookmark charities through the "favourites" option. Both the TSFC and ALS Ontario offer search capabilities on their websites.

Healthy Minds Canada's website is relatively organized and easy to use. The site contains tabs along the top of each page so the donor can quickly jump to whichever section he/she wishes. Within each tab, sub-tabs appear underneath allowing the user to explore the section further. As well, there is another menu along the left side of every page. The top and side menus are generally organized in a way that the former contains more general items whereas the latter comprises more specific items. The TSFC and ALS Ontario are set up similarly. One recommendation is that HMC add more pictures to its website based on Siegfried Vogele's discovery that people are drawn to pictures before text.

Healthy Minds Canada's website has a sufficient amount of content. Its content includes newsletters, *When Something's Wrong* handbooks, handbooks survey, lists of activities and events, press releases, print advertisements, and a television commercial. As well, HMC's site possesses content which is more likely to raise donations such as its annual reports, its mission statement, and an immediate electronic donation receipt. However, as previously mentioned, the annual report is out dated. Moreover, HMC has not listed its yearly goals on its website and needs to do so.

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The organization's search engine optimization is not effective. If a user types the words "mental health and Canada" on google.ca, links do not appear for HMC. If a user types the words "healthy minds" or "Healthy Minds Canada" in the same search engine, HMC's website is the first link which appears. However, if a donor is interested in mental health and is not familiar with HMC, they likely will not type "healthy minds" but would rather type "mental health and Canada". Therefore, it is recommended that HMC improve its search engine optimization techniques. Furthermore, the site provides a few links for users. However, these links are not reciprocal (that is, the organizations do not have links to HMC). For this reason, I suggest that HMC establish reciprocal links. Another recommendation is that HMC needs to have more up-to-date annual reports, newsletters, and event announcements. Freshness is an issue for HMC because a lot of the website refers to its previous name, the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation. As well, there are broken links on the site which need to be repaired (i.e. latest news and member access FTP link). Moreover, HMC must ensure that in every annual report, it thanks its individual donors (provided the donors want to be publicly thanked). The 2007-2008 annual report did not thank individual donors. Finally, HMC needs to set up opt-in email facilities so donors can choose to have communications emailed to them such as the annual report, newsletters, and news alerts. These facilities should be placed near the top of every page. As indicated in the literature review, the sign-up form should be short and simple and only ask for what is necessary like an email address.

Other Communications

The importance of communicating with donors as they prefer to be communicated with has been emphasized in the literature review. Oddly, not one of the three organizations has ever asked their donors how often and by what method they want to be communicated with.

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Organizations can easily do this by adding a statement to each piece of communications that gives donors communication options. For example, for every direct mail piece, the reply card can include a statement such as “Please tick this box if you would prefer to have our communications sent to you by electronic mail.” Similarly, for every email piece, the statement can read, “Please tick this box if you would prefer to have our communications sent to you by direct mail (“snail mail”).” There should also be opt-out options on every piece so the donor has the option of ceasing the communications from the organization. In my interview with HMC, the organization was not entirely sure if opt-out options were included in all appeal letters. Alternatively, a personal account can be set up on HMC’s website that allows donors to select their communication preferences. Donors could choose if they wanted to be contacted by direct mail or by email and if they wanted to be contacted quarterly, semi-annually, or annually. For this reason, it is my recommendation that HMC include in every piece of donor communication, options for preference of direct mail versus electronic mail, and opt-out options.

The literature generally recommended that direct mail be sent out four times per year. This includes appeal letters and newsletters so it can be assumed that one would accompany the other so as not to exceed the recommended amount of mail-outs. However, deciding how many times to mail is based on organization preference and on what works or does not work for that organization. Currently, HMC has two mail-outs per year asking for support, one in the spring and one in the fall which also contains the annual report (HMC hasn’t had a newsletter since 2006). However, the Executive Director said she would like to increase the mail-outs to four appeal letters per year. The TSFC said they presently send donors direct mail appeal letters once per year and generally ask for support by email about two to three times per year. Therefore, the TSFC generally appeals for support about three to four times per year. The direct mail letter is

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sent out in the first quarter of the year because it asks for support for their event, the Trek for Tourette which culminates in the last week or last Sunday of March every year. The TSFC recently launched a blog which they said they can use for asks, along with their social media groups. Moreover, they send out hard copies of their newsletters quarterly to their members and to those on the complimentary subscription list such as doctors' offices. As well, their annual report is provided to members at the annual general meeting. ALS Ontario, on the other hand, sends three hard copies of their newsletter out per year; each contains an appeal section on the very last page. The organization is in the midst of revisiting their direct mail program but in the past, there was one appeal letter which accompanied the holiday season newsletter. At the time of writing this paper, they have already sent out two letters. They would like to gradually move toward six appeal letters per year. The mailings would start in January or February with a follow up about three weeks later. The next mailing would be April or May and again, a letter would follow later as a reminder. The final mailing would go out in October with a follow up before the end of the year. To sum up, both the TSFC and ALS Ontario communicate with their donors more than HMC, albeit not by much. Both communicate with their donors and ask for donations at least three times per year whereas HMC only communicates with donors twice per year. However, HMC wants to increase the number of direct mailings to four times per year and I concur with this increase based on the literature and on the responses from the TSFC and ALS Ontario. I also recommend that HMC recommence its newsletter.

The literature emphasizes sending thank you letters within 24 hours after receiving a gift. The Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada excels in this area and sends thank you letters with one day or so. Conversely, Healthy Minds Canada and ALS Ontario are behind on this. In fact, HMC claims it takes about one month to send a thank you letter. However, all three

organizations treat their major donors in a significant way either through phone calls or face-to-face meetings. This type of treatment to major donors should be continued. With regard to thank you letters, I recommend that HMC mail them within 24 hours after receiving a donation.

Conclusion

My research has provided Healthy Minds Canada with a plethora of recommendations surrounding rhetorical appeals, appeal letters, general communications, and websites.

With regard to rhetorical appeals, it was surprising to discover that neither the literature nor the organizations could make a determination as to what method of rhetorical appeal is the most effective, the appeal to emotions (pathos), the appeal to reason (logos), or the appeal of personality or character (ethos). It appears all methods are used and consequently, HMC should continue to use all three methods. As well, it was noted that it is necessary for HMC to appeal to new donors.

In my exploration of appeal letters, I recommended that Healthy Minds Canada thank donors for past or anticipated support, conclude with pleasantries, use negatively framed local mental health statistics, and include positive and moving stories. Furthermore, I recommended that images be included where possible.

With regard to websites, multiple recommendations were made to Healthy Minds Canada, such as:

- The donate button needs to be emphasized and located on the top right of every page
- The education section should include information about the most common mental health disorders
- Facebook and Twitter accounts need to be created immediately, along with a discussion forum
- A YouTube account could be created in the future
- The website should include personal mental health stories

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- A blog should be established
- The site needs to have search capabilities
- There should be more images
- The organization's yearly goals should be stated
- HMC should improve its search engine optimization techniques
- Reciprocal links should be created
- Updating the annual reports, newsletters, event announcements and changing the organization's name from CPRF to HMC
- Thanking donors in the annual reports (provided the donors want to be thanked)
- Having opt-in email facilities at the top of every page

With many recommendations surrounding Healthy Minds Canada's website, it is clear that improvement is needed and that immediate action is necessary.

In the other communications section, I recommended that in every piece of communications to individual donors, Healthy Minds Canada include choices to receive direct mail or electronic mail, and offer opt-out options. Alternatively, I suggested that HMC set up personal accounts for donors on its website that allows donors to select their communication preferences. Also, I recommended that there be four mail-outs per year, the newsletter be recommenced, and thank you letters be sent out within 24 hours of receiving a donation.

With a lack of human resources (only two full-time employees), it is difficult for HMC to maintain the daily work attached to individual donor communications. Therefore, I recommend that HMC hire another full-time employee to help with its donor communications.

I think my research could go much deeper if I were to continue with it. I focused my research on rhetorical appeals, appeal letters, general communications, and websites. Within the general communications section, I mainly touched on donor communication options and on thanking donors. Future research could elaborate this section by conducting an in depth examination of thank you letters, newsletters, and annual reports. These documents are important to effective donor communications, in addition to the areas I explored.

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I compared Healthy Minds Canada with two successful comparable organizations in terms of mandate, years of experience, revenue, and human resources. However, future research could compare HMC to organizations with the same cause. Because I compared HMC with organizations that deal with Tourette Syndrome and ALS, I cannot be sure if those organizations are more successful because of their communication techniques or because of the disorder/disease itself or because of both. I originally looked at organizations with the same cause as HMC such as the Centre for Mental Health and Addiction (CAMH) and The Brain and Behavior Research Foundation but these organizations have a much larger budget and much more staff. HMC simply does not have the funding or employees to deliver the same communications as these organizations. For this reason, I didn't select these organizations for comparison. However, these organizations were once budding charities so it would be interesting for future research to determine how these nonprofits grew into the giants they are.

Appendix A – Operational Definitions

Table 1.1 – Operational definitions for analysis of direct mail fundraising letters

Category	Definition	Example
Pathos	Appeal to donors' emotions	Testimonials and photos of clients of an organization
Logos	Appeal to funders' reason	Statistics showing the success of programs
Ethos	Appeal to the credibility of the organization	The organization's track record of success

Table 1.2 – Operational definitions for analysis of websites

Category	Definition	Examples
Accessibility	Easily navigable and organized in such a way that is easy to offer a donation	On every page of The Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada’s website, there is a large orange box in the top right hand corner with the words “donate”
Accountability	The extent to which the site indicates it is accountable to supporters for the way in which it will use resources such as donated funds and personal data (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 281)	Statements that tell donors how donations have been and will be used (Bray, 2005)
Education	The extent to which the site provides an appropriate resource for the donor to learn about the cause (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 281)	ALS Ontario posts a fact sheet on its website titled, “10 Facts about ALS”, that is educational based
Interaction/Sense of Community	The extent to which the site offers users the ability to interact with the organization in a variety of ways (Sargeant et al, 2007), including establishing a sense of online community	Chat forum, links to Facebook, Twitter
Empowerment	The extent to which the site allows donors to feel they have taken action or had an impact on the cause (Sargeant et al., 2010, p. 282)	Supporting the organization in multiple ways such as through a donation, volunteering, attending an event
Customization	The extent to which the donor may tailor the site or the communications received to reflect his or her own interests or needs (Sargeant et al., 2007)	Search capabilities, shopping carts, personal accounts
Organization/Ease of Use	A website which is arranged in a way that makes sense and is easy to browse for information (Long et al., 2006)	Bray (2005) suggests that charity websites follow the standard look and feel of other non-profit home pages such as placing a set of tabs across or alongside the home page “with

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		links to such topics as “About Us”, “Contact Us”, “News”, “Upcoming Events”, “Publications”, and “Support Us”
Content	The extent to which the “meat and potatoes” of the website is sufficient, relevant, and up-to-date (the information surrounding what the organization and cause are all about)	Copies of their annual reports and yearly goals, information about their stated mission

Appendix B – Appeal Letters and Analysis

Key:

Appeal to pathos – Appealing to emotions can be accomplished by “making [donors] believe passionately that supporting your organization in the right thing to do” and includes “appealing to the audience’s views, creating a vivid picture, and using charged language.”

Appeal to logos – Appealing to reason or logic is achieved by “convincing [donors] intellectually that supporting your organization is the logical thing to do.” For example, “statistics showing the success of programs would be an appeal to reason.”

Appeal to ethos – Appealing to the credibility of the organization can be carried out by “showing donors that your organization has the ability to keep its promises and complete the work it sets out to do.” Credibility includes but is not limited to “highlighting the charitable status of the organization, noting the longevity of the organization, using celebrity endorsement, or sharing with the reader the percentage of funds spent on administration.”

Healthy Minds Canada Appeal Letter
(Original format altered for purposes of this paper)

Date

Salutation

**Because of your support CPRF funded research
is finding better treatments for depression.**

Dear,

Research funded by the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation (CPRF) is finding better treatments and services for the **one in five Canadians affected by mental health issues each year.** We'd like to take this opportunity to show you how CPRF puts your donor dollars to work.

Dr. Vernor Knott is a senior scientist at the University of Ottawa and Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre who is exploring why 50% of the people diagnosed with depression smoke cigarettes. Dr. Knott is a recipient of CPRF's **Neurobiology of Psychiatric Disorders and Addictions Program.**

Dr. Knott's study revealed that nicotine can help prevent the onset of depression. Dr. Knott monitored the brain activity and mood of a group of people wearing a nicotine patch and a group wearing a placebo patch. The group with the placebo patch experienced a change in mood and brain activity as seen in someone with depression. The group with the nicotine patch did not experience any changes in mood or brain activity.

These results indicate that nicotine can act like an antidepressant explaining why there is such a high incidence of smoking amongst people diagnosed with depression. These findings support the development of new treatments that mimic the effects of nicotine without the negative impact of smoking. Please see the enclosed summary or **visit our website at www.cprf.ca** for more details.

So why are we telling you about Dr. Knott's research project? First and foremost, **we want you to be aware of the types of research that your past donations have funded and show you that your investment into mental illness and addiction research is yielding useful results that are finding better treatments and services for the millions of Canadians affected by mental health issues each year.**

And secondly, we want to ask you to seriously consider making **a tax-deductible donation** of \$25, \$50, \$75, \$100 or even more.

CPRF relies on the support of caring people like you so that we can fund worthwhile research like Dr. Knott's. Your ongoing support today will help us fund future research.

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Right now, we're asking you to be there for us and the people you know facing mental health issues. Your renewed support today is an investment into research and will impact the health and welfare of the one in five Canadians affected by mental illness and addiction. So please help us to fund research by giving as generously as you possibly can today.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Milligan

Executive Director

Our mission is to improve the well being of Canadians by funding mental health and addiction research.

CPRF is proud to have formed a partnership with the Mental Health Partnerships of Canada; the national charity arm's length from the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

P.S. We're seeking better treatments and cures for the one in five Canadians affected by mental illness and addiction each year. But please remember it's because of people like YOU who care, that we can help. So please be sure to send in whatever you can today. Any amount you are able to give would be greatly appreciated and help to make a difference to those affected by mental illness and addiction.

Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada Appeal Letter
(Original format altered for purposes of this paper)

Dear Family and Friends of the TSFC,

It's Santa up here at the pole. Even though you might not believe in me, I hope you don't mind me sending along this letter I received from the Foundation not so long ago. You see, I get so many requests this time of year from folks – kids, their parents, even other charities – that it's hard to keep up, especially during these tough times. Thought you might want to take a quick look at this one since it's right up your alley, and maybe even add them to this year's gift list. Anywho, I've gotta get back to work: it's crunch time!

Best,

Santa

Dear Santa,

Thanks for all of your work helping children with TS. A lot of people think these kids are naughty because of their behaviour, but you know it's just their TS and that they really belong on your nice list. While we might not be kids anymore, we do have a couple of wishes that we hope you can help us with as we strive to remain strong, visible and on mission in this challenging economic climate.

We want more than anything to get rid of all that misunderstanding with a nationwide explosion of awareness, tolerance and acceptance, but misconceptions about TS still cause much distress and hamper our ability to affect change. We need things like up-to-date PSAs along with airtime and newspaper space for them, we need innovative campaigns to push the truth about TS deeper into the public's consciousness, and we need better exposure within the health community so more people who require our help can find us.

We want to continue to help the people who call us every day in great need of information, advice and emotional support. But it takes full-time staff to field those calls, get that information, give that advice, provide that support and much, much more: administration, project coordination, production and far beyond.

As you can see, the problem with these wishes is that they rely on money for their success, and money is something we don't have nearly enough of. We receive project-based funding, but it severely limits our capability: we struggle to maintain, let alone grow, the support needed to reach out further to those in need. So perhaps our biggest wish of all is that everyone could understand how important their participation is in seeing these wishes come true through active volunteering, significant donating, and tenacious advocating.

Effective Communications and Individual Donors: A Case Study

Well here's hoping that we get our wish and 2009 turns out to be the greatest year ever for TS awareness and the Foundation!

With all hope,

The Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada

ALS Ontario Appeal Letter
(Original format altered for purposes of this paper)

Name
123 ABC St.
City, Province, Postal Code

Dear John Doe:

Testimony to the Human Spirit: One Client's Story

While ALS robs those afflicted of their body function, speech and ability to breathe, it does not take the mind and spirit of a person. Those living with ALS want it to be known they are still alive and still a part of society. Many keep in touch through a computer, using the numerous technologies available today to keep their 'voices' heard by family, friends and their communities.

ALS Ontario client Steve Wells is a testament to this.

Diagnosed with ALS more than 31 years ago, Steve has become the longest living person with ALS in Canada. While the regular onset of ALS is between the ages of 40 and 70, it is an indiscriminating disease with a third of its patients diagnosed before the age of 45. Steve was diagnosed at the age of 21 while attending Queen's University.

Claiming the lives of two to three Canadians a day, Steve understands the importance of spreading the word about ALS. Eighty percent of people with ALS die within two to five years of diagnosis. Steve is beating the odds. Having lost the ability to speak, Steve shares his story mediated through a computer which he controls with his inner thighs.

Steve believes that his stubborn and competitive attitude that "drives some people crazy" worked in his favour upon his diagnosis with ALS in 1980. He countered it with defiance, **"I have a terminal illness...so what! I accepted the diagnosis immediately and have continued to live life to the fullest, taking ALS along for the ride"**.

He wants people recently diagnosed to understand that **"ALS is not an automatic death sentence, nor is it an excuse to stop living life"**. He still enjoys his simple pleasures like his morning coffee and happy hour through his gastric feeding tube, "I don't taste them but the effects are still very real". He firmly believes that longevity is driven by the passions one holds in life, and he credits his family for continual support. **Despite his limitations, what drives him**



is trading stock and index options on a full time basis, embodying his motto “life is what you make of it”.

Steve also stresses the importance of being informed; he states how it is “much easier to deal with (ALS) if you understand what is happening”. A member of ALS Ontario since the late 80’s, Steve discloses how the website (www.alsont.ca) is a bevy of important and useful information. Like many other ALS patients, Steve has turned to ALS Ontario for its equipment and care resources; he states how “the equipment pool has been a phenomenal resource over the years”. With average costs of equipment and care reaching upwards of \$140,000 per person, ALS Ontario steps into help where government funding and private insurance does not.

An inspiration to countless people, Steve has fuelled the pressure of being placed “atop a pedestal” to change his outlook on life. He realized that “if I let myself go down, many people will be saddened”. He reveals how this single power thought has “kept my lows short-lived and relatively shallow”.

Along with working full-time trading stocks online, he has participated in numerous ALS campaigns, including the Walk for ALS, and even mentors others. He still travels in airplanes and recently added an eye-controlled computer to communicate. Steve maintains that ALS may have rerouted his path, but it has not changed his determined spirit, “I think that ALS has accentuated that which was already me”.

Help ALS Ontario provide a quality of life for people like Steve. There is no way of knowing how long people with ALS will live so providing equipment and support services ensures they live with dignity, hope and choice for as long as possible.

ALS is an expensive disease – physically, financially and emotionally. ALS Ontario does not receive government funding and relies on the generosity of its donors to provide equipment and support to more than 1000 families per year.

People with ALS need essential medical equipment costing more than \$140,000 over the course of disease (on average 2-5 years). For most families, this is a formidable expense even in the best financial times.

ALS Ontario loans many pieces of equipment, including Hoyer lifts, which cost approximately \$3,000 each. Hoyer lifts are an essential resource for those living with ALS. It enables mobility by helping caregivers get their loved ones safely in and out of bed. By donating, your gift will ensure independence and quality of life is maintained for those living with ALS.

Steve represents the strength of the human spirit we see in our clients. Please give generously to support the equipment and support programs to ensure these resilient people live with dignity, choice and hope.

Effective Communications and Individual Donors: A Case Study

Sincerely,

Maureen Sheahan,
President & CEO

P.S. Please consider becoming a monthly donor. Monthly donations are a convenient, cost-effective way to provide steady, ongoing support to ALS Ontario.

Appendix C –Ryerson University Consent Form Approval and Signed Consent Forms

Ryerson University Consent Form Approval



To: Keely Gregory
ProCom

Re: REB 2011-167: Effective Communication and Individual Donors: A Case Study

Date: June 13, 2011

Dear Keely Gregory,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2011-167 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2011-167) on future correspondence.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Walton". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nancy Walton, Ph.D. - Chair, Research Ethics Board

Healthy Minds Canada Consent Form

(See Attached)

Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada Consent Form

(See Attached)

ALS Ontario Consent Form

(See Attached)

Appendix D – Transcription of Interviews (Questions & Answers)

Healthy Minds Canada Interview

Interview with Jean Milligan, Executive Director

How many times per year will you try to recruit new donors?

That's an ongoing process with every meeting, every person we talk to. The real key and pushes are the events because you're getting a whole bunch of people in the room as opposed to those one-on-one meetings. That's a limitless number. If we could recruit 365 days per year we would.

Ok so that's how you mainly recruit, through events but are there any other ways or is that mainly it?

What we're trying to do now is go back to past CPRF supporters and we're meeting with old honorary Directors and donors to updating them where we're at. These are people who are very much committed to the cause. We're getting a great response. We're finding people that have moved on are still willing to support us and do things for us. One of our honorary Directors is willing to put on a lunch with all his colleagues and partners who were never associated with us. So that's exciting.

How are you finding these existing donors?

We're looking at our database and who's really supported the cause in the past and who's been involved with us. We want to use these people to leverage and engage new donors.

Would it just be you and Michael (Chair of BOD) going on these meetings?

Tends to be. That's a big issue, motivating other people. We encourage all Board Members. That's what their role is kind of supposed to be but not necessarily what they're doing but what we hope them to do...to go out and chat us up and recruit new people. That's the vision of Board support.

So how often would you and Michael go on these meetings? Once a month?

Easily

Do you have any other comments you'd like to add regarding new donors?

They're hard to find. No that's not really accurate. From a mental health perspective, people are becoming more aware and more receptive to us so it's an exciting time and a great opportunity right now to recruit new donors. If we don't do this year, we're not going to do it all so it has to be done and we're working very hard to do it.

Ok I'll move on to existing donors. You mentioned to me before that you send out two appeal letters per year and what are the times of year that you send them?

Spring and fall

And with fall one do you send annual report?

Yes

Do you foresee a change in the amount of direct mailings you will send out in the future?

I'd like to see an increase. It's just capacity and resources. We used to do quarterly newsletters as well but that's gone on the wayside. Whether direct mail is now the most effective and cost effective...just some form of communication letting are people know what's going on.

So how many mail outs would you like to have?

Four

Two appeal letters and four newsletters?

No I would say four in total but the newsletter can be supporting the appeal letter. So it wouldn't be six times per year, just four.

Have you ever asked your donors how often and by what method they want to be communicated with? i.e. donor loyalty survey

No, other than providing the option of being removed from the mailing list. We haven't said how do you want to, we've said do you want to.

Do you communicate with donors by email?

No, not from an outreach, appeal letter perspective. The ones that we are close with will send a quick email here and there.

So when you had your newsletter, it wasn't emailed to them.

No, some of these donors don't have emails.

You have opt-out options. Is that with every appeal letter i.e. with the reply card?

Yes it should be. I know with the tax receipts after they donate. I don't know if it's on every single one...I have to check.

Is that something you would want to do in the future...a donor loyalty survey?

Sure, absolutely

Then you would be fine email the donors that wanted email?

Yes

When communicating with your donors, do you send the same communications to every donor or do you tailor your communications to groups? If you group your donors, how do you group them?

We try to tailor. Once we did legacy planning and then targeted our older donors for that. And that would be about it.

How would you like to group them more?

It's a hard question because we have such a small donor base. It's hard to do groupings of 400 people. As we build we have to keep on the radar of who they are and what kind of donations they give.

Do you find the software you use, Income Manager, is good of keeping track of donors?

It's good but we're not good at it. We need to learn to be more proficient at it. It's an underutilized piece of software.

That software might help you group, right?

Absolutely

How are donors thanked?

Through letters

Are they sent within 24 hours of receiving support or if not, when are they sent?

Probably within a month

For the higher donors, do you call them or do a personal note?

Absolutely. We take them out for lunch.

How much do they have to donate before you do that?

The ones that donate significantly. For example, one came over for coffee and tea and we chatted. Those ones you try to give a little more.

And how do you recognize your donors?

List them in the annual report unless they don't want to be.

You mentioned before that your events we're the most successful with recruiting new donors, what about with existing donors?

If we show them how we're progressing with the events that's great. Also the products. Being able to do those pages that profile the research are great because it shows people where their money is going. A lot of them it's their kids or parents that have mental health problems so when they see those pages it gives them hope so the more we can do of them, the better our donors will feel about how their money is being used.

So would you generally send those research updates with the appeal letters?

Absolutely

I noticed in the 2010 appeal letter you had a story of one of the researchers. From my research of the literature and based on what the other organizations said, uplifting stories are so important. Now that we've put research on hold, do you have other ideas of how to get a story across? I have an idea but I wanted to know what you thought.

Even though we're not funding new research, there's still research coming in. One researcher has looked at brain function with PTSD. Looked at what parts of brain are active during PTSD and during recovery. So it's the first step to moving to finding better treatments. So that's kind of exciting and fits in really nicely with the police and fireman presentation that we'll be having at Silver Dinner and then it'll be a nice write up after the dinner. And another idea is the whole RBC Families project. If we can profile the Healthy Minds Healthy Families to build the community of support for mental health.

I'm not sure if my idea would work. We could engage our donors....maybe in the future, if we were to have a blog or forum. Do we have any clients or donors that have mental health stories that they could share with us and that we could share with our donors? We could tell one of these uplifting stories, and it might not be that they use our handbooks or attend our workshops, but just the fact that we're talking about someone with mental health. Do you think that would be something that would work?

Absolutely, like a testimonial

We haven't sent out are spring letter so do you know of anyone who has a story to share?

We're trying to do that. I'll send you the first mock-up for the anti-stigma tool for parents and it's all about building stories and getting the feeling of hope there. Another thing I was thinking for the mail-out, I don't know if we have time for it but I want to do an appeal to get funds for a John Tory award. He just passed away. We're meeting with his son to talk about it. He started this organization and he and his wife have put in a lot of money into research. It would be an award that we could do on a regular basis. His name would help bring people in and we could

do a story about him and what's he's done for the organization. How he started, why he started it.

That's a really good idea.

Are there any other ways which you stay in touch with your existing donors that we haven't already talked about?

No just keeping them updated. We still use our old Board Members who are connected with all old pack people. Because of our limited (human) resources, we strategically keep a few people up to date and rely on them to spread the word. We really have to rely on word of mouth network.

Generally, do you appeal to donors through emotions (i.e. testimonials and photos of clients of an organization), through reason (i.e. statistics showing the success of programs), or do you appeal to the credibility of the organization (i.e. the organization's track record of success) or do you use a combination of methods?

We use what's available to us at the time. Historically it's been on the credibility and the need and demand. This is what CPRF is, the state of mental health and illness, give because it need so much. We just starting introducing stories in research outcomes. We just started with the Daycare one so it's relatively recent. Whether people give more or not, people respond a lot better.

The TSFC, has an appeal letter that's very honest, it doesn't appeal to people's emotions like the ALS letter but the reason they do that is because they try to stay away from the victim mentality and we try to do that too. You spend so much time trying to build awareness then if you put out a letter saying "this poor person" then you're defeating...

Yah, you're reinforcing the stigma and the marginalization that these people are trying to fight every day.

Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada Interview

Interview with Rosie Wartecker, Executive Director / Kenneth Butland, Marketing and Communications Coordinator and It's Your Move Project Marketing Coordinator

First I would like to ask you about new recruits. What types of direct response fundraising do you use to recruit new individual donors?

Direct mail

That's your primary way?

Yes, also website.

How many times per year will you try to recruit new donors?

Once with direct mail and there are soft asks with other communications as they go out.

When you use direct mail, do you have an elaborate pack design? For example, do you have a fancy envelope?

Sometimes but there are budgetary constraints but we work on making it special, making it jump out at the recipient.

Previously you were talking about having budgetary constraints with advertising so do you ever have any press or magazine advertising?

No, very rare. We would not involve ourselves in something like that.

For radio or television?

For existing fundraisers, we have had radio ads for specific events. Whenever you put a public piece out there, there is always a line that says "give to" or "support to", to some extent but the pieces are usually about public awareness or awareness raising rather than specific asks.

Now I will turn to existing donors unless you have any other comments on new donors.

No that's pretty much it.

What percent of your efforts is spent on donor retention and development and what percent is spent on new recruits?

There's very little in the way of going after new donors who haven't already come to us. Once they're interested in us as an organization, we hit them up.

How many times per year will you send an appeal letter or ask donors for support? I know you mentioned sending direct mail once for the new recruits.

We send existing donors email blasts for specific fundraisers that are general asks. So a few times per year, maybe 3 or 4 times per year.

A combination of 3 to 4 emails and direct mailings?

Yes

Do you foresee a change in the direct mail in the future?

It's still effective. We have a couple of ideas for campaigns that will have a greater return on investment. It's been a challenge but it's still useful. Online hasn't replaced direct mail yet, not for the foreseeable future.

Is there a specific time of year that appeal letters are sent out?

We sort of target the traditional April/November but the one major fundraiser we have now in terms of public is the Trek for Tourette which is a source of new and existing. So that happens in first quarter of the year with the event culminating the last week or last Sunday of March every year. That's a vehicle we're using now. That's a new venture for us and has certainly made a quantum leap into the public face of Tourette. And of course we have this new awareness opportunity which we can turn into fundraising which we call @random.

With regard to special communications, I saw that you have your Twitch Times, your Newsflash, so when you say 3 to 4 times per year, would that include those as well?

No, we just launched a blog that will be a new form of communication that we can use for asks or for anything we can think of, social media is another form of outreach...Facebook we have 1000 users and there's a healthy response rate there when we do put something out. There are no direct donations stem from that because it's hard to track...there's isn't really a tracking mechanism for the social media donations. But when we post something about the Trek, there are like 100 people who are likely to come across it and out of those 100 people you are likely to get donations.

How often would you send out those news updates like the Twitch Times and the Newsflash?

Recently it's been more blasts, just straight blasts with news; we haven't done something that formal for a while. We're re-evaluating it as a tool. But I think the Blog as we go along will definitely fill that role of news and information.

How often would you send your newsletter out?

Quarterly

It's not by email, it's hard copy?

It's hard copy. We're a membership based organization so the information is only there for members, most of it. There is a complimentary subscription list and we send in internationally or to doctor's offices. Basically it's a member benefit for now.

Do you send your annual report annually?

Yes, they were offered at the annual general meeting. So members who had a vote had access.

Have you ever asked your donors how often and by what method they want to be communicated with? i.e. donor loyalty survey

No not yet.

Do you have an opt-in and opt-out email option?

Absolutely

When communicating with your donors, do you send the same communications to every donor or do you tailor your communications to groups? If you group your donors, how do you group them?

We don't right now have the capacity with our database to do highly specialized...They're group based on have they donated before and into categories of over \$100/under \$100 that sort of thing but we don't have the capacity yet to get really finite but we're working on it.

So for example, a thank you letter would probably be the same to all donors?

If they donated a significantly we change it up. The top donors would get a personal note from Executive Director.

Are thank you letters sent within 24 hours of receiving support or if not, when are they sent?

I don't know about 24 hours, electronically they're sent within 3 minutes, but we're really good that way. Probably within a day or so.

That's good because a lot of organizations are behind on that.

It's a top priority around here.

They're sent through direct mail or by email?

Well if it's done electronically, everything is by email but if a donation comes in here, cash/cheque/money order and it's processed internally, there's a hard copy of the letter that goes out along with a receipt.

Ok so if it's done online, an immediate electronic receipt is generated and also a thank you letter?

Yes, the thank you is with the electronic receipt.

How do you recognize donors?

In the annual report they're listed once per year and for the Trek, the leaders in each community were listed and honoured. If someone has made a significant contribution they would be extended invitations to specific functions and that kind of thing. We're not rewarding them with anything tangible. If someone makes a \$500,000 donation that's a whole other ballgame but a typical donor, under \$2,500, they're acknowledge appropriately but we're not using donor dollars to recognize the donor.

Do you ever call you donors?

All the time. Well, not all the time. You get someone who's a \$500 or over donor, they're communicated with both in writing and there's a telephone call follow up by the Executive Director.

Just to say thank you for your support?

Yah, and to find a little more about who these people are and what their interests are and of course those donations lead to other donations based on their interests. If you know somebody's a carpenter and you need wood work done, you've got the name of a carpenter and you can approach them.

Do you ever have face-to-face visits with your donors?

At functions more so and obviously we're talking lower level donors. Anyone \$5,000 and above, absolutely. They're communicated with in a very different way.

There's actually donor categories and recognition on the website. The categories are still there but the levels of recognition but those are off. But we would send a lapel pin to say "hey we're here and still really appreciate what you're doing". Because we're a national organization it's kind of difficult to reach out to somebody in Vancouver. You can't fly there.

Are there any other ways you stay in touch with your donors.

No that's pretty much it.

Which individual fundraising strategies are most successful and why?

The Trek – event fundraising. We have an annual golf tournament as well. Those would be the main other than direct mail. So events have typically been the revenue generators for us.

Generally, do you appeal to donors through emotions (i.e. testimonials and photos of clients of an organization), through reason (i.e. statistics showing the success of programs), or do you appeal to the credibility of the organization (i.e. the organization's track record of success) or do you use a combination of methods?

All three, a combination. In the past, it has been more on what we do and why we need the funds to do it. The emotion is there because the need is appealing to the community saying “we do this, you need this because, we need the money to do this”. It hasn't really been tugged at the heart strings as much as it could potentially. We appeal to optimism of the community too. We try to stay away from the victim mentality. There's too much stigma about the disorder itself so we have to be careful not to feed into it. So if you use that victim mentality in these pieces, that's exactly what you're doing, feeding into what's already out there and you're working so hard to dispel. If you didn't give us a shovel we couldn't dig a hole for these poor people to fall into. We've made a conscious decision to stay away from that. If you use that strategy, you'll attract new donors but you'll alienate others in the community who expect you to be a positive motivating force.

That's really interesting. That's all the questions I have. Do you have any questions for me or anything you wanted to add?

No

I can provide you with a recommendation report at the end of this if you'd like.

Sure, would love to see it.

ALS Ontario Interview

Interview with Kathryn Dunmore, Manager of Communications, ALS Society of Ontario and Debra Bond-Gorr, Director of Leadership Giving (in charge of Major Gifts)

How do you recruit new donors?

The number one way this organization recruits new donors is through events. It has a very limited direct mail campaign although that's about to change in reality. 90% of operating budget revenues come from events which is not the way to do it just so you know.

Are there any other strategies that you use?

Newsletter with an ask in it. Three times a year and sometimes it does have a direct mail letter in it. That's basically a client story of how they're living with ALS and how they are doing it with our equipment and there's an ask in that direct mail letter.

And that letter would only go out once per year?

It used to go out once per year but they're upping it now. I know we did one earlier this year already. Usually it's just around the holiday season and we already did one with our spring newsletter so already we are at two but we'll see; I know that whole direct mail program is being revisited. We have a new staff member who's going to revisit that whole campaign to see how it can be more effective.

Do you use email at all to recruit new donors?

New is difficult through email because you have to have the email addresses. We can't and we won't go fishing for email addresses so the email addresses that we get are the ones that have supported the cause so already they're connected to the cause so they're not really new donors. Should they choose to share the information that goes out through email that's a different story but I don't know if they do or any way to track it.

I know you said you don't do a lot of direct mail but when you do it, is the pack design elaborate or is very basic and simple?

It's very basic and simple. It's actually a letter and it just describes a client story. We like to give positive messages of how they're living well and how they're using ALS Ontario's equipment and support programs. The new strategy will be through mail house and will be much more design focused. There are a million things you can do with a direct mail package that you can really move people forward.

Do you use any magazine advertising or anything like that?

No, we have very low budget for advertising. Most of our advertising goes towards surrounding the walk for ALS which we're trying to get donors through those events.

Would you spend more time with your new or existing donors?

I don't think we spend enough time with any of our donors and I would say that as charities go, the stewardship piece of this and the building piece of this, I don't know any charity that does it particularly well. We do it particularly poorly but that's just because of the nature of the organization. It's not that old and it's grown exponentially and it's been heavily reliant on events. So a large number of our new donors are recruited by the disease itself, in all honesty. If someone is newly diagnosed, there's a ripple effect of the people around them that want to do something because it's an awful disease. It's a death sentence and a very short death sentence. It's like you're alive today and not tomorrow. So the majority of donors come from the disease itself and those people know ten people who know ten people who know ten people. That's where it really comes from. A large portion of Kathryn's efforts and everyone else's efforts will be to raise awareness of the disease and when then happens then you can start to have an impact on the general populous. It's not well known. Mental health used to be like that and before CAMH changed the way they approached everything, nobody talked about mental health. We're at about that stage in the development of the ALS story where we have to make that next push because the incidents are going up exponentially. The diagnosis is actually as big as the diagnosis for MS which I didn't know before I came here...it stunned me. The difference is that are clients die quickly...very quickly. I just did an interview with the press...everyday, two to three people are diagnosed with ALS but then every day, two to three people die so it is on the increase but it is kept small because the fast progression of the disease. On average, two to five years, that's 80% but then we see plenty before, some after. Stephen Wells is a rarity, he's been living with it for 30 years but that's a real rarity. Someone described it as living in a glass coffin which I thought is very poetic but also very true. You can see, your brain works perfectly well unlike Alzheimer's or even some mental disorders and you're lucid, you feel, you taste, but you just can't eat, you can't swallow, you can't breathe, you can't move. Nothing wrong with your mind. It's very devastating.

Yes, a member of my faculty at Ryerson passed away of it. It's very sad.

She was probably a client of ours. We have an awful lot of them. Another thing is that most of the equipment that people need isn't covered by anything so unless you have critical illness insurance on your own, it's an awful lot of money you have to spend. That would explain why Ryerson is so support of us. Every year we do radio PSAs for our walk, and for the past two years, Ryerson has donated their studio and Preston Paytee works in the Sound Engineering over there to mix and edit our PSAs for all of the walks. All 30 of them, so that would explain that. That's the thing with ALS, it's not well known so if you haven't seen somebody live with it,

people just don't understand the impact of it but when you do see somebody living with it, you understand how devastating it is financially, emotionally, and physically and that's when people are motivated by it.

Ok if there are no further questions about new donors, I'll move on to existing donors. How many times per year will you send an appeal letter or ask donors for support?

It used to be one at the holiday season but it's increasing. We're going to first start doing what I call impact communications before we start asking for more donations because there's a real tendency in fundraising to ask without appropriately thank or steward so there's a whole series of things based on how to appropriately thank the person in the beginning and then follow up and write in a month or so to tell them the impact of their gift. Sometimes the things that you do when you don't ask for money work better than the things when you do ask. At every place I used to work, I stopped doing appeals in newsletters and I just made them thank yous so they we're all about stories, things we've done well and things we've impacted. And every one of those newsletters that we sent out, has raised money that I never asked for which is an interesting thing. But in reality, I think we're going to be moving towards six mailings per year to see how it goes but doing it in a very gradual way. Ideally, a direct mailing program is twelve mailings per year and I know it sounds like a lot but it really actually works and in my last position I spent a lot of time with a creative firm to make sure that we focused on online giving inside of that so we encouraged people even though we mailed them because that's a tactile thing and you have to be tactile sometimes. We encouraged them to go online to give because when they went online to give, they used a credit card or debit card and therefore the gift went up almost by 20-30% every time because people won't put ten dollars on their credit card. They're more apt to put \$30, \$40, \$50 and it doesn't seem as much to them. It's all psychological. We were making a really big move which was being very effective towards social media and driving people to the website which is much more cost effective. We'll get there.

So you plan on having six direct mailings per year, every time will you ask for support or not necessarily.

No, every time. Every time you mail, you ask. You tell a story, but you ask. And the reason the repetition happens is because they won't give every time. Most people intend to give but they put the thing aside and the second one is a reminder and the third one might be a reminder. A really good program starts in probably January/February even though you just mailed at Christmas with a membership renewal. We have members here. So you ask people to renew their membership and its donation, just under another name. And you'll have a follow up to that within a set period of time, say three weeks, because people will forget the first one and often respond to the second one. So you'll have a real hit when it first drops...bang, bang, bang...all your good loyal donors will come back, second drop it'll go down by roughly 30% but you'll get the drags of it if people are choosing to give, then you would probably choose to follow up in the spring, April/May, with another mailing. It could be for a specific ask, in other words, we could

need a particular piece of equipment really desperately, let's say in our wheelchair inventory the expense of \$18,000 wheelchairs is gone, they're just not repairable. You might to a special ask then, to a very specific thing to a very specific purpose and the odds are that you would go again at Christmas but do that in October with a follow up before the end of the year and a second follow up. So that's how it tends to work. If you're a large charity with a large donor database and a national appeal, then you expand that to the twelve mailings I talked about.

That's great. Have you ever asked your donors how often they want to be contacted and by what method they want to be contacted? Have you ever done a donor loyalty survey?

Not to my knowledge. And that should be something on every piece i.e. do you like to receive the newsletter electronically, would you like to register online for the pdf. We haven't done that but we will be.

Is your newsletter sent by email or by direct mail?

By direct mail.

Ok, do you have opt-in and opt-out email options?

Right now it's done very archaically. Basically, if you want to unsubscribe to this email, just reply to this email with "unsubscribe" in the subject line and then we have to go into our database and tick off "do not email" and they are removed from the mailing list. Any communication you send out electronically, you kind of have to state that...the opt-out option.

When you send you communications, do you send the same communications to every donor or do you tailor your communications to groups? If you group your donors, how do you group them?

We have not done the data analysis on our donors but we are going to start customizing. Particularly around a thank you letter. A donor gets the same letter...if they give five times a year, if they gave \$50, \$500. That's not going to happen. We're going to be able to customize in that we will recognize long term donors so we're putting a bunch of new thank yous in the system to make sure we tailor the communications. Eventually, once we get to analyze the clean data and the more we know about people, we'll be able to customize even further and send hand written notes to little old ladies because that works really well.

When donors are thanked, are they sent within 24 hours of receiving support or if not, when are they sent?

No we are so far behind the standard I can't tell you. We're lucky if they get a tax receipt in the same year (Note: I don't think this is accurate because apparently donors receive immediate electronic receipts...see next question). The walkers. We're going to work toward a 48 hour turnaround time for some things. Some things will never get there because until we get the

walks organized a bit differently than they currently have. Now you come in with pledge sheets like this (making a measurement with fingers) and half written data and the poor data entry people and you have to go through and can't even read half of the names. We need to approve some of those systems to make it a lot easier for our Finance people.

If people donate online, do they get an immediate electronic receipt or no?

If they register for the walk online they do (Note: I registered for the walk and did indeed receive an immediate electronic receipt). Also on our site you receive one...I've donated to us and received an immediate electronic receipt.

How do you recognize your donors? We talked about thank you letters, what else?

Annual report, President's Message (inserts we put in the summer newsletter). That's it. We are creating a donor recognition system. We are not a hospital so we can't put up a wall. No one is ever going to walk in here to see a recognition wall. I'm working on a system of creating donor clubs and recognition that people can take home. So it can start off for a donor at one level getting a certificate that they can add stickers to and then moving up to a take home piece. I'm finding that donors appreciate something at home that says they gave as opposed to a plaque in a hospital. We're going to work on levels, groupings, clubs and that kind of thing. You want to create a system where if a donor gives and gives \$1,000 for ten years, they shouldn't be thanked at a level down here but they should be up here at the \$10,000 level.

Do you ever call your donors on the telephone?

Yes I call them to thank them. At least in my category which is \$500 and up. One of the cool things and I shouldn't be sharing this but the year before last at another organization, the week before Thanksgiving, we took our entire direct mail list and divided it up and called everyone and left a happy thanksgiving message, (i.e. we really appreciated your support and happy thanksgiving), the mailing dropped two weeks later and the response rate went up 24% and the average gift went up 33%.

So you would call them and thank them and send a letter that also says thank you?

No the letter was an ask. I do the thank you calls because the thank you letters take a little longer than I would like but I would do that anyway for certain levels.

Do you have face-to-face visits with your donors and if so where does the face-to-face visit take place?

Nine times out of ten it's at their home or their place of business. They're the donor. And that's 95% of the job. Yes that's what a lot of organizations call major gifts but I call it leadership giving because the term "major", donors find insulting. Most of the money I've made in my entire career was face-to-face. It's the most cost effective way of raising money.

Which donor management database software do you use?

Raisers Edge

Are there any other ways that you stay in touch with donors that we haven't talked about?

Events are a big way. We are going to start of series of what I call thank you events where we might invite five or six people or ten or twenty people to have come coffee with the CEO or somebody like a family member and really hear about what's going on with ALS in Ontario. So a series of small things like that. We would like to often talk about the impact as opposed to asking for money so they know the dollar they gave has made a difference. We'll have a far more robust communications strategy by next year. We've had a fairly high rate of turnover here. A lot of fund development is new that is why a lot of these programs are being revisited and revised.

Out of all the strategies you've mentioned, which is the most successful?

It's got to be the newsletter. If you have a good story and you have to make it kind of inspiring and positive you get a good response. Stephen Wells' story moved a lot of people. I know one person donated \$1,000 after reading his story. If you put a face to the story because on the back you'll notice if you donate this much you'll get this product which will do this for the clients and spell it out...that there's a human behind it which is why we're doing this ask. That's the most effective way.

Actually, that answers my next question. Generally, do you appeal do you appeal to donors through emotions (i.e. testimonials and photos of clients of an organization), through reason (i.e. statistics showing the success of programs), or do you appeal to the credibility of the organization (i.e. the organization's track record of success)?

Through emotion. People only give through emotion and guilt. That's how churches do so well because of guilt, fear of going someplace other than heaven. The number one way to motivate people and corporations is you have to put a face to an ask and bring emotion to the table. People buy cars because they feel in love with them. In reality, people seldom give for rational reasons. You're asking them to take their after tax dollars and give them away. It's no benefit for them or their family nine times out of ten, it's going into cyberspace to help the world which is why children's charities do so well.

That's all the questions I had, did you want to add anything?

That's pretty complete. Doing it right means being focused on thanking your donors, recognizing your donors, and stewarding your donors – not asking for money, that's the technical part which you have to do. If you do these three things, your donor retention will be extremely high. Donor acquisition is very expensive...direct mail is now costing you \$1.40 to raise \$1.00 from a brand new donor so you'll lose money the first year and odds are you'll lose money the

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second year. If you steward them right, those donors stay and grow with you. The recognition/stewardship part is something that very few charities do well and if they do, they stand out in the market place.

I agree. I have already analyzed your website and think it's great but I have small recommendations so if you're interested, I can provide you with recommendations.

Sure, that would be great.

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