

Do Donors Prefer Email or Snail Mail?

The answer will surprise you...



Most donors see advantages to both e-mail and direct mail communication from the organizations they support, and a new study reveals that very few completely reject one form or the other. The study, of 1,000 American charitable donors shows that very few donors consistently see e-mail or direct mail as a better way for non-profit organizations to communicate with them. The Donor Mindset Study, conducted jointly by [Grey Matter Research](http://www.greymatterresearch.com/index.htm) (<http://www.greymatterresearch.com/index.htm>) (Phoenix, AZ) and [Opinions 4 Good](http://op4g.com) (<http://op4g.com>) (Op4G, Portsmouth, NH), asked donors to compare the two methods of communication from organizations they already support on six different factors. Which method is:

- *more likely to get read*
- *more likely to be discard unopened*
- *a better use of the organization's resources*
- *more likely to annoy them*
- *more effective at communicating facts and information*
- *more effective at telling a touching story*

When it comes to which method is more likely to be read, donors are almost evenly divided – 37% feel they are more likely to read direct mail, 35% e-mail, and 28% say they're equally likely to read each one. Age plays a role in this, but not a big one. Among donors under age 35, e-mail from charitable organizations is more likely than direct mail to get read, but only by a 44% to 35% margin. Among donors 65 and older, direct mail wins by a relatively small margin, 39% to 29%.

The two methods may be equally likely to get read, but donors do find it easier to discard direct mail unopened (41%, compared to 26% for e-mail). This may be because the carrier envelope acts as a “preview” for direct mail, allowing donors to see the purpose of the mailing, while some people may have to open the e-mail in order to see what it's all about.

Reading some communications and tossing others away unopened are not mutually exclusive activities. Thirty-four percent of those who are more likely to read direct mail are also more likely to discard it unopened; for e-mail, that figure is 20%. In fact, only 21% of donors are truly biased toward e-mail, as they're both more likely to read it and more likely to discard direct mail unopened. Almost as many (16%) are truly biased toward direct mail in the same manner. Most donors simply do not have strong preferences in how the charitable organizations they support choose to communicate with them.

Donors do have the feeling that direct mail is more effective at communicating with them. Direct mail has only a slight perceptual advantage at communicating facts and information (37% to 32%), but it has a substantial advantage at telling a touching story (38% to 23%). Even among the youngest donors, who are often assumed to reject direct mail in favor of digital communication, 38% give direct mail the advantage at telling stories (versus 35% for e-mail). Among donors 65 and older, the perception is strongly in favor of direct mail (47%, to just 13% for e-mail).

Where e-mail has an advantage is in not annoying donors – but it’s only a slight advantage. Twenty-eight percent say they are more likely to be annoyed by receiving e-mail from an organization they support, while 34% are more likely to be annoyed by direct mail. Younger donors are the ones more likely to be annoyed by direct mail than by e-mail (45% to 24%), while among donors 35 and older it’s evenly split between the two.

Where e-mail has a substantial advantage is in the perception that it is a better use of an organization’s resources. Fifty-five percent of all donors feel this way, while 24% believe direct mail is a better use of resources. This is one perception that does not vary by age group.

Ron Sellers, president of [Grey Matter Research \(http://www.greymatterresearch.com/index.htm\)](http://www.greymatterresearch.com/index.htm), notes that this study may help combat some common myths about donor communications. “There are some in the industry who preach that older donors simply won’t accept digital communication, or that young donors reject traditional direct mail,” Sellers said. “While different ages do lean toward one method or the other, most donors are quite accepting of both methods.” He explained that only 4% of all donors feel direct mail is superior to e-mail on all six of these measured factors, while just 6% rate e-mail as superior on all six. The vast majority see advantages to both methods.

Sellers pointed out that when new methods are introduced, there’s often a rush to “bury” traditional methods, but what frequently happens is that consumers get used to having more choices rather than migrating quickly from the traditional to the new. “We heard that with the introduction of online and mobile banking, bank branches would be closing all over the country – yet there are more branches in the US today than in 2007. We heard that with the increased number of television channels, the big networks would quickly die – yet they’re still very much alive. We’ve also heard many times that direct mail is dead and that e-mail is how non-profits should be communicating with donors. The reality is that donors usually accept both. Just like with banking and TV, they get used to having more options.”

The study examines these donors perceptions more in-depth, including by religious identification, amount given, and various demographics. Please e-mail ron @ [greymatterresearch.com \(http://greymatterresearch.com\)](http://greymatterresearch.com) (with the spaces around the “@” removed) for a free copy of the full report.

About Grey Matter Research:

Grey Matter Research (<http://www.greymatterresearch.com/index.htm>) is a marketing research and consumer insights company located in Phoenix, Arizona. Grey Matter has extensive experience with research related to non-profit organizations, with numerous donor-supported organizations as clients. Grey Matter works directly with donor-supported organizations and in partnership with the fundraising, branding, and marketing services agencies that support them.

About Op4G:

Philanthropic online market research panel [Op4G](http://op4g.com) (<http://op4g.com>) invites its panel members to participate in paid online research surveys, and then requires they donate a portion of their incentives – at least 25% and up to 100% – back to one of its 400-plus member non-profit organizations. Op4G’s unique approach to recruiting yields a highly engaged group of quality people who, as respondents, are dedicated to helping market research clients fulfill information needs. Since beginning client delivery in June 2011, panel members have donated over \$425,000 to Op4G’s growing number of non-profit partners. Op4G is headquartered in Portsmouth, NH and operates globally.

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