

you," "love," "how much," and "only."

Again, your headline can make or break your direct mail letter, so you should spend as much as 80 percent of your time just coming up with a real blockbuster.

TIP #7: BENEFITS VS. FEATURES

Soliciting someone for a contribution is no different from asking someone to join a record-and-tape club. People buy with their hearts, not with their heads. You must stir feelings if you're going to get someone to dust the cobwebs off their wallet and part with their hard-earned cash. So you need to provide an emotional appeal as well as a rational appeal.

That means giving the reader both the features of your offer...and the benefits.

To understand this better, break out some of those letters in your "swipe" file. As you read them, you'll come across certain claims being made by the writer, such as "our organization has 2 million members, a spiffy new logo and brand new offices in Podunk." These are features - to which the reader's response is often, "So what? What's that mean to me?" WIFM again.

If you really want to pull in the big bucks, you need to load up your direct mail letter with benefits which actually benefit the *reader* - not the writer. It's actually easier than it sounds. All you do is complete the following sentence: "You get..."

If the sentence in your letter is an "I (we) have..." - that's a feature. If the sentence says, "You get..." - that's a benefit. Load your letter up with "You get's."

One final note: People are much more motivated by a fear of loss than they are by the hope of gain. Scaring the dickens out of your audience is a sure-fire way to stir up their emotions...and loosen the purse strings. "If you don't help us, our opponents will steal your retirement benefits!" Scary...and powerful. On the other hand: "If you help us, we'll work to raise your retirement benefits to keep up with the cost of living." Good...but not quite as compelling.

TIP #8: LENGTH

One of the most often-asked questions I get at fundraising direct mail training seminars