

## THE TOP 4

# Notes on Outer Space

With all the recent back and forth about the impending postal rate hike and its future impact on mailers' wallets, it's no wonder the recent **AdoptaPlatoon** mailing landed on the desk of *Inside Direct Mail's* Editorial Director Hallie Mummert with the simple query: "How did they do it?" While our staff normally sifts through the Who's Mailing What! Archive bins for each month's potential Top Mailings, when a subscriber forwarded this package from his personal mailbox, it raised our eyebrows enough to put it on the agenda for analysis. The cause of the conundrum? The fact that the two live stamps on the national organization's 4¾" x 6½" acquisition piece total a whopping five cents and, seemingly, not a penny more

(Archive code #601-701219-0702).

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Neither of the stamps have the familiar precancelled design that is typical of nonprofit organizations. Instead, both are First Class postage overlaid with a nonprofit mailer's permit imprint. Although a trained eye might notice the meter mark and deduce the difference simply was charged to an account, it still is slightly irregular to divide postage costs between a two-cent stamp, a three-cent stamp and a meter. Nonetheless, the application will get approved by the post office so long as the full rate is paid and the nonprofit mailer's postmark is used, says Stuart Mac Lean, creative mentor and senior account executive for Eberle Communications Group, the fundraising agency that handles direct marketing for AdoptaPlatoon. "We do end up paying the full nonprofit letter rate; we're only representing it with five cents in stamps," he adds.

According to USPS's *Domestic Mail Manual (DMM)*, this strategy is not just an exception available only to fundraisers. Depending on the type of piece being sent (presort, ECR, automated, etc.), there are basic provisions that allow a mailer to affix postage at a rate lower than the mail piece qualifies for so long as it meets requirements outlined in the *DMM* and, in addition, the mailer secures the appropriate authorizations from the USPS.

The circumstances under which the piece ended up at *Inside Direct Mail* notwithstanding, this tactic was far from an attempt to cause hullabaloo in the direct mail world. On the contrary, it was part of an attempt to emotionally connect with AdoptaPlatoon's potential donors. Mac Lean maintains that the goal of the outer envelope



To forge an initial connection with prospects before asking for their money, AdoptaPlatoon, a national nonprofit for American soldiers in Iraq, enhances its outer envelope with a postage strategy that circumvents the typical nonprofit designation. To order, 215-238-5225, Archive code #601-701219-0702.

was to start building a relationship with prospects by detailing the hardships of American soldiers in Iraq, before bringing in the fundraising element of the piece. "We're not trying to fool anyone here by doing that. Obviously, it's a fundraising appeal, but I don't want anything that screams, 'This is a fundraising appeal,' like a stamp that says nonprofit," he says. The call to action further is strengthened by the copy tactic used on the effort's outer envelope, which Mac Lean affirms is particularly effective because of its headline and copy: "Mail call hurts! American soldiers in Iraq ... (over) Nickel Enclosed."

These teasers begin the story of forgotten soldiers on the address panel, while prompting prospects to flip the piece to continue reading—in essence, leading the recipient to take the next step and open the mailing. According to Mac Lean, the poignancy of the "Mail call hurts!" headline was designed to overcome the common problem faced by nonprofits of achieving a high response rate and a low average gift. While this copy approach, once pervasive in the mailstream, no longer is seen in high numbers, the old faithful has been working for the nonprofit since it began mailing in October 2005. The response rate for the piece is 1.15 percent with an average gift of \$49.95.

This particular effort is just one of the package's three variations that are sent in rotation throughout the year. The "Nickel Enclosed" portion of the copy is the variable in each of the three iterations; the second has the teaser removed in favor of actually showing the nickel through the address window and the third is sent sans the coin entirely. The "Nickel Enclosed" version was created in response

to a recent rule put into effect by the USPS that charges mailers six cents if a coin is visible on the outer envelope. "Interestingly enough, in the three-way split test we just did, nickel enclosed and nickel visible buried the no-nickel version but, even with the extra six-cent surcharge, the nickel visible is still slightly ahead," Mac Lean reports.

—Christen Gruebel

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