



Do Diligence Sounding Board Report

To: Interested Parties

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

Re: Review of a Southern Oregon Land Conservancy Fundraising Email

Date: 02/10/2010

Water Words That Work, LLC is preparing to launch a new market research service -- tentatively titled the "Do Diligence Sounding Board" -- for nature protection and pollution control organizations to use to evaluate marketing materials and messages.

The purpose of this forthcoming service is to allow you to **quickly** and **affordably** pre-test materials *before* they are final -- giving you an opportunity to improve your piece before you release it into the wild. Once the service launches, Water Words That Work, LLC will provide DDSB feedback to our clients in complete confidence.

As part of our field trials for this service, we tested 8 fundraising webpages and emails from nonprofit organizations seeking financial support for water-related work.

This report summarizes what two dozen "everyday citizens" have to say about the year-end appeal from the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy. You can view the full email at the URL below:

<http://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0BxjtnOJhd9TUMWFKyzI0OGItNjJjZS00NDBhLTgxMTMtNTlIMWJjNGVkJmRh&hl=en>

The Do Diligence Sounding Board provides feedback that you can use to sharpen your fundraising message -- finding your way to the words and pictures that successfully evoke a charitable response. However, favorable feedback does not guarantee fundraising success, and negative feedback does not guarantee failure, for the following reasons:

- This report provides insight into the *first impression* that your fundraising message makes. Those who already have an impression of your organization already may react differently.
- You are *competing* for donors' generosity against other good causes, as well as the events that occur in their lives and in the world.
- A powerful message is only one part of a fundraising effort. Successful fundraising also requires regular effort, enough suitable prospects, regular effort, a good reputation, regular effort, and a good system for delivering your message and processing the gifts.

By the Numbers

Of the 8 fundraising pieces tested, this email received the lowest overall marks.

Statement	1-Strongly Disagree	2-Somewhat Disagree	3-Somewhat Agree	4-Strongly Agree	Average for this Piece	Average for similar pieces
This group is trying to solve a problem that is important to society	1	3	16	8	3.11	3.45
This group is trying to solve a problem that has affected me or someone I care about	7	7	11	3	2.36	2.46
This organization will use donations to help end the suffering of people or animals	7	14	5	2	2.07	3.03
This organization will use donations to correct some kind of injustice	5	16	6	1	2.11	2.63
This organization will use donations to help children	12	8	8	0	1.86	2.34
The group has a clear goal that it is raising money to achieve	5	3	11	9	2.86	3.32
I understand how the organization will use the	7	5	10	6	2.54	2.83

donations it receives						
I am confident that this group can make a difference if it reaches its goal	3	6	14	5	2.75	2.95
I am confident that others are supporting the group's work	5	5	11	7	2.71	3.06
If the group doesn't reach its goal soon, it may be too late	9	12	6	1	1.96	2.59
Overall					2.43	2.86

Key Findings

Question	Yes	No
Does the work of this organization fit your own personal definition of a "good cause?"	21	7

Question: "Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question:"

They answered like this:

- "I used to live in Southern, Oregon, and I know the beauty of the wilderness up there and how nice it would be to preserve. Loggers really liked to hack things up, though, and occasionally there'd be forest fires cuz some idiot would throw a cigarette out a window or something".
- "I believe we need to save the planet one small section at a time, this organization focuses on just that".
- "Preserving land for future generations is always important".
- "Its a great to see a company keeping our earth clean and natural. I believe this is a great cause and many people would find this foundation helpful and promising for our future".
- "It is always a good cause to protect natural habitats".
- "I drink a lot of water and I'd prefer it clean".

- "Well id have to know why they are protecting the lands other than stating that it is providing fresh air through preservation"
- "We definitely need organizations to preserve important areas and lands to make sure that we have places to go in the future for recreation, and that we are saving important areas from the ruin of pollution, etc. This is definitely a good cause - the alternative is not appealing".
- "I believe that conservation in farming especially is very important, and woodlands are needed for our balance. I like that they're asking for private personal funding for this".
- "Environmental consciousness is very important today, and organizations like this keep part of the world free of the negative effects of humanity".
- "Well its not clearly defined what its trying to do just that its a conservation group".
- "They are working to help preserve valuable natural habitats".
- "The organization wants you to donate money, but they never tell you what they are doing with it. Also organization seems like a fraud, just begging for a handout".
- "I lean more towards charities that help animals or people. When I have so little to donate actual lives are more important to me".
- "Keeping natural areas protected from corporations so that future generations can continue to enjoy them is important".
- "They are helping to preserve valuable natural wildlands".
- "Good stewardship of the environment is important to me".
- "because it wants to help conserve the land of farmers and its future farmers".
- "I'm pro-environment".
- "They never show how they are protecting the land or provide many pictures of it".
- "Its a good cause but not an earth shattering cause. Conservation is important. I'm not sure if this particular application of conservation is enough to make me drop a ton of money, but people in Oregon, particularly people who live in the area, pretty well might".
- "I appreciate groups who try to maintain and sometimes beautify the natural lakes areas and rivers basins".
- "In very trying times, they are trying to preserve the natural state of "preserves" and I don't see any urgency for this need. People are out of work and they need money to keep natural things natural but do not tell why these lands need protecting-- no sense of urgency".
- "A clean, safe environment and long-term economic growth depend on sustainable use of natural resources and respect for the biodiversity that keeps ecosystems in balance"
- "The SOLC protects land that cannot defend itself. It ensures that southern Oregon will not turn into an asphalt wasteland".
- "I'm torn on this one between the feeling that land and animals have to be protected when there are interests that people have that are more important. There are some beautiful, scenic, natural places I wouldn't want to see destroyed but I'm not sure that everything an organization like this wants to preserve I would agree needs to be protected or preserved".
- "It is a good cause, because some lands will be preserved for future generations and will not be developed".
- "This group is trying to keep the natural landscape the same as it has been so as not to interrupt the environment or style of living of those around the areas protected."

Their Initial Reaction

Question: "Pick one word that summarizes the feeling this piece evokes in you:"

They answered:

- "determined"
- "hope"
- "future"
- "Environmentalism"
- "Confusion"
- "confused"
- "Intrigue"
- "positive"
- "Appreciative"
- "confused"
- "honest effort"
- "angry"
- "beauty"
- "begging"
- "respect"
- "Calm"
- "calm"
- "hopeful"
- "Boring"
- "comfort"
- "nature"
- "low priority"
- "Warm"
- "cooperation"
- "Conflict"
- "precise"
- "Decency"

Your Message in Their Words, Part I

Question: "In your own words, please describe the work of this organization:"

They answered like this:

- "Conserving the woodlands"
- "This organization works to save lands in Oregon"
- "Land conservation".
- "Conserving land in Jacksonville Woodlands and keeping the area clean and looking good for boaters and people of the area".
- "To protect Oregon lands for conservation".
- "Something to do with clean water, they're a lobbyist group that tries to shape environmental policy".
- "Well it isn't clear in this online letter but they are protecting the lands of southern oregon through preservation".

- "This organization works to enhance, improve, or preserve areas of land in Southern Oregon".
- "This organization is working on positive conservation in Oregon, a farm and woodlands".
- "They work to preserve the lands in a certain area of Oregon"
- "Protects the lands in southern Oregon"
- "They are a conservationist advocacy group. They are working to preserve Southern Oregon, the Illinois River waterfront, and the Jacksonville Woodlands".
- "An organization that is promoting a clean environment and clean air".
- "To preserve Oregon land"
- "Protecting lands in the rogue river basin"
- "They are a conservation group that works on preserving the Southern Oregon region".
- "The organization seeks to preserve land in Oregon".
- "protecting a farm and forest land".
- "This organization works to preserve greenspace in Oregon".
- "The group is trying to protect 60 acres on river in Oregon from becoming polluted".
- "This group sets aside pockets of land in Oregon for conservation. Specific pockets of land are mentioned as is the use that will be made of them. The ad emphasizes what the group has done (specific projects completed) and then goes on to emphasize that more work is needed. Very good ad, overall".
- "This organization works with the community and with landowners to protect the areas around the Rogue River basin".
- "This organization is a land conservation organization working to keep protect Southern Oregon's natural beauty".
- "Southern Oregon Land Conservancy purchases undeveloped land in and near the Rogue River Basin, including farmland and forests, to keep this land safe from development".
- "The Southern Oregon Land Conservancy works to preserve and protect special lands in southern Oregon for future generation".
- "They are fighting to preserve special lands in southern Oregon. Places that are scenic, historic, that have natural beauty".
- "The organization is a land trust, buying lands for conservation purposes in the Southern Oregon region".
- "This group strives to preserve places of 'beauty' in Southern Oregon from changing at all. It seems as though almost anything can be preserved by this group and left untouched as it has been for years".

Your Message in Their Words, Part II

Question: "In your own words, please describe the people or animals this group is trying to help?"

They answered like this:

- "They appear to be helping the woods instead of people or animals by preserving its beauty. Then again, I'm sure the wildlife would approve! Lots of deer, elk and other animals up there."
- "this group s trying to help all people and animals by trying to save our most precious resource,the Earth"

- "Mainly future generations, a little more tangential than usual."
- "They are trying to help those animals in nature and people in the surrounding area live in a clean area and enforce the fact that we need to keep our earth clean and healthy".
- "Oregon wildlife"
- "I'm not really sure who they're trying to help. I assume anyone who likes water, vacations, or lives near it".
- "The surrounding area of people in southern Oregon with fresh air".
- "This group is not trying to help a specific group of people or animals, but instead is trying to create a benefit to the people of Southern Oregon and anyone that may visit those areas, in being able to protect and preserve important areas".
- "The group will be helping mankind in general by preserving farmland/woodlands. The wildlife will be preserved by not destroying their habitat".
- "The group's efforts protect not only the land in Oregon but the fauna, as well. They are maintaining a natural environment for these animals to live in".
- "Protect the lands in southern Oregon"
- "They are helping the natural wildlife in these areas".
- "They are acting like they are going to protect a certain area of land from pollution. However, they do not provide enough information to persuade me in to believing them".
- "none"
- "I don't feel they are helping any people, and there is no mention of any specific wildlife that they are trying to protect."
- "The animals that inhabit the wildlands of Southern Oregon".
- "The inhabitants of the land the group is trying to preserve".
- "it's trying to save a forest and farm land.. i guess and farmers"
- "Preserving and protecting greenspace is important to animals and to our children's legacy".
- "The group is trying to preserve wildlife that lives on the protected land in Oregon. The charity does not give enough information on who it is helping".
- "They're trying to protect land in Southern Oregon. This helps people in the area who don't want to deal with a lot of sprawl. It helps preserve the landscape. Its not particularly clear from the ad what type of conservation they do. Maybe people in the area are more familiar with the specific examples mentioned, although they don't mean a whole lot to me in this context. It's not clear from the ad whether they're trying to benefit the environment or just establish little nature parks to liven up the area".
- "They are trying to protect the area around a river basin so that would probably entail wildlife which lives in and around the water".
- "This group is trying to preserve land for people and animals to enjoy".
- "Oregon communities benefit from access to natural spaces, and the animals and plants in those spaces benefit from being protected from developers".
- "This group directly benefits the current and future residents and visitors of southern Oregon, as well as any animals whose habitats lie within the land it preserves".
- "They are not trying to directly protect people or animals. They are trying to preserve pieces of land. Animals and people may benefit but not directly".
- "It is trying to help us all, by preserving some lands for future generations to enjoy, along with the wild animal and plant life it inhabits".

- "This group is simply trying to preserve the natural beauty of the landscapes in the area rather than see them change. It is not an attempt to return the areas to their natural state, but to not allow any more construction or tampering to occur"

Shop Talk vs. Plain English

Question: "Imagine that your friends, coworkers, or family member are looking at the piece themselves. If there are any words or phrases that might be difficult for them, please share them below:"

They answered like this:

- "None of it. This was very simple"
- "I felt as if the page was well written and easy to understand".
- "N/A"
- "None that I could find"
- "No, this is a good and well written yet basic letter".
- "What the organization is doing to solve the problem".
- "None"
- "n/a"
- "none"
- "How much of their money is really going to help the protected land?"
- "This ad is well designed, factually, textually, and design-wise. It's really nice."
- "This was all pretty basic, not really confusing".
- "easy to read but wishy-washy--- it does not really say anything"
- "[No confusing language]"
- "There really isn't anything in the piece that would be difficult".
- "none noted"

Strengths of the Piece

Question: " In your opinion, what is the strongest or most compelling thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "The desire to preserve and conserve"
- "The entire piece is very compelling just a person caring about where they live and there surroundings"
- "That it needs more support overall".
- "The clean air statement, because that is becoming a very important topic now a days. The links are also great".
- "The need to conserve habitats".
- "Pointing out their membership numbers, that their funding comes from members".
- "its a nice clean web page with a beautiful graphic up top"
- "I think the strongest part of this piece is that they recap the changes they were able to make with the donations from this year, which is a great motivator for people to donate - they can physically see the changes they are helping to create".
- "The personal touches in the writing, it feels as if it's written to one person".
- "The specific work they've done, such as the conservation of the Quarry property".
- "The bottom of the email makes them seem legit and professional".

- "It is well structured and gives specifics. It lists some of its accomplishments".
- "The lack of information that it needs to show to persuade someone to make a donation".
- "Gave actual examples of the work that it accomplished last year"
- "Listing accomplishments from this years work".
- "It is specific about its projects".
- "The design, it's very soothing and gentle".
- "The Jacksonville Woodlands received a notable addition with permanent conservation of the Quarry property this year. " seems like they achieved a goal and that moved me".
- "It tells its story in a compelling way: here is what we have done, and more work is planned. I like that it includes the link to its website where (presumably) I can learn more about its financial record.
- I think matching grants are always compelling. Not only does it seem to amplify the impact of your own donation, it confirms that others are supporting the organization".
- "That they have been collecting money for about 25 years".
- "The design lacks nothing. The top graphic is soothing and well chosen. The photo of the director adds credibility, as does the contact info at the bottom of the ad. The font is nice, the layout is nice. Everything is clear and readable. Specific examples of what the group has done are mentioned. Really this could be a model for these type of ads".
- "The fact that they are working with the landowners as well as the community to protect this area".
- "That is the problem with this request for money-- it is not compelling"
- "The specific description of the group's 2009 accomplishments is particularly impressive. The postscript's mention of a offer to double end-of-year contributions was also compelling. Finally I was struck by the clean, crisp graphic design of the page".
- "The strongest part of this piece is its listing of accomplishments the organization has made in the past year. In addition, mentioning that the SOLC is the oldest land conservancy in southern Oregon is also beneficial".
- "The descriptions of the two successes Jacksonville and One River Farm".
- "The piece is very clearly written with precise achievements and goals, including a description of exactly who the organization is".
- "This piece lists the great accomplishments that it had achieved the previous year showing that it is working toward and achieving some set goals".

Weaknesses of the Piece

Question: " In your opinion, what is the weakest thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "Not sure. Maybe in explaining more about how they plan to meet their goals".
- "I don't think the presentation of the information is done in a very professional manner,the site needs to be polished."
- "Nothing".
- "Include more benefits of making a donation".
- "The background of the site could use some a different theme".

- "It's vague. I don't know what they've done or what they really plan to do. There's no concrete mention of any legislature they've been a part of or are trying to be a part of. Just that they talk and people listen."
- "I'd say the lack of clear definition of what they are doing and then why they are doing it. That compiled with the fact that there are no strong graphics or headers that make this seem like a place that's reliable and respectful".
- "If I were thinking of donating to this organization, I would want to know what projects were on tap for 2010 - what exactly is my money going to go for? Therefore, the weakest part for me was that the letter just stated that there was a full list of projects for 2010, but didn't elaborate on this point".
- "The butterflies and flowers on the top, to cutsie".
- "Not enough specifics, especially about projects for the upcoming year. I think it's important to give people a tangible goal that the organization is working towards".
- "Its not clearly defined why they needs donations or what they are going to do with them'.
- "It mentions a "full docket of projects" but does not say what these are. This doesn't make the claim very credible".
- "The lack of information of how they are going to spend your donation".
- "Piece was good- just not one of my top priorities"
- "I have no idea what their future goals are and why they are raising funds".
- "It is not specific about its "full docket" of projects."
- "A lack of pictures of accomplished projects"
- "The org. seemed like they was more interested in the land than the farmers that i assume inhabit the space".
- "Hmmm.....I think possibly a more specific mention of future work to be done rather than the very vague "We have a full docket of projects to work on next year,".....yeah, like what!
I think they probably wanted to keep the number of links focused in the body of the letter, but I would have enjoyed links to the two successful projects named. Maybe side boxes or something at the bottom of the letter".
- "The lack of evidence that proves my money would really be going to help the land since there are no pictures of the area they are supposedly saving".
- "Really nothing. This one has it all. I don't imagine it would have much appeal to people who are outside southern Oregon, but I get the impression that its not meant to".
- "Overall, I would say it's a little vague and general".
- "It does not create a burning platform or sense of urgency for the need."
- "What are the threats to conservation? With no evocation of urgency, no contxt about the economic and political dynamics operating in its jurisdiction, I am left hard pressed to know whether Southern Oregon Land Conservancy deserves my dollars more than other environmental groups in the same area or more than those operating nationally or internationally. Perhaps the outlook isn't especially dire, in which case the omission is more understandable. But if no threats to conservation in this region existed at all, the organization would hardly be necessary".
- "This organization is specific to a certain small region. In addition, the piece mentions goals for this year, but fails to enumerate any of these goals, which might be helpful in encouraging future donors".

- "It really doesn't tell what they do. What and how are they protecting is absent. It doesn't compel me to join".
- "Only weak point is the limited regional reach to South Oregon".
- "There is not a big enough argument given to make me care about the situation. It does not seem in dire need of assistance."

About the Do Diligence Sounding Board

Just whose opinions are these, anyway? The "Do Diligence Sounding Board" is a standing body of U.S. residents who provide feedback on marketing materials and perform related tasks in return for payment.

A major corporation recruits the board members, maintains the system for securing their feedback, and handles the financial transactions. Water Words That Work, LLC pays to access to this service, as do other marketing firms.

The feedback that you receive from the sounding board is different from feedback you receive from your peers, for three reasons:

- The sounding board members who review your materials approach them like actual everyday citizen "in the wild." They are not professionals in the field and have not participated in the drafting of the materials.
- The sounding board members have never met you, and will provide their feedback anonymously. Their feedback will not be influenced by their personal relationship with you.
- The sounding board more closely approximates the demographic makeup (especially race and education) of the U.S. "public" than the staff and board of most nature protection and pollution control organizations.

Demographic Trait	Environmental Professionals	Do Diligence Sounding Board	Traditional Telephone Poll, U.S. Sample	Actual U.S. (Census)
4 Year College Degree	95% or higher	~50%	~40%	24%
White/Caucasian	95% or higher	~80%	~80%	79%

All sounding board answers are verbatim -- including spelling and typographic errors.

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