



## Do Diligence Sounding Board Report

To: Interested Parties

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

Re: Review of a Fundraising Email from the World Wildlife Fund

Date: 02/11/2010

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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 "Showing some heart for Lake Niassa" fundraising email distributed by the World Wildlife Fund.

<http://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0BxjtnOJhd9TUZjkxYTczYWIYjJlMC00NmIxLTNmN2MtZWVjNjhmY2Y1ODAw&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 pieces reviewed, this email scored the second highest overall. WWF made the case how its wildlife conservation work benefits people very effectively -- and made a compelling case that even small donations to the organization would make a difference.

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	0	0	9	16	3.64	3.45
This group is is trying to solve a problem that has affected me or someone I care about	11	4	7	3	2.00	2.46
This organization will use donations to help end the suffering of people or animals	0	1	10	14	3.52	3.03
This organization will use donations to correct some kind of injustice	2	6	10	7	2.88	2.63
This organization will use donations to help children	7	1	10	7	3.22	2.34
The group has a clear goal that it is raising money to achieve	0	0	5	20	3.80	3.32

I understand how the organization will use the donations it receives	0	5	8	12	3.28	2.83
I am confident that this group can make a difference if it reaches its goal	0	2	12	11	3.36	2.95
I am confident that others are supporting the group's work	1	2	11	11	3.28	3.06
If the group doesn't reach its goal soon, it may be too late	1	6	12	6	2.92	2.59
Overall					3.19	2.86

## Key Findings

Question	Yes	No
Does the work of this organization fit your own personal definition of a "good cause?"	24	1

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

### They answered like this:

- "Who can argue with sustainability?"
- "Obviously, in this area of the world, people still rely heavily on the natural surroundings for their livelihood. Ending that practice and preserving the area would help these people".
- "It is trying to conserve the fish in the lake"
- "This community could have drastic changes to their lives if their local ecosystem is disrupted".
- "Conservation is not only an important environmental principle, but it is also an important economic cause, as is displayed in the information described on the site".

- "Although I haven't recently, I supported this organization in the past. I support similar conservation efforts locally".
- "Yes definitely. They are helping the environment and people at the same time, which is great".
- "I feel the group is trying to save the fish, by not letting humans harm there Eco system, which in my opinion is very beneficial because if they kill off all the fish how would they eat?"
- "The people have been given nets to protect themselves from mosquitoes with malaria in the area. But instead of using these nets to prevent disease the people use them to catch fish which hurt the fish population".
- "Well of course you want to protect species especially if they are only located in this one location".
- "I am very involved in volunteer efforts (education-related) in Africa, as well as involved in "green" projects locally, so this effort combines two of my pre-existing concerns".
- "Anything that is helping and restoring the environment is a good cause"
- "These people needed food so they provided them with the right fishing nets".
- "Conserving lakes and land around the world could only ever be a good thing. And encroaching business interests are making it harder and harder".
- "Working to restore for the good of the people is important to all. This particular story of the turn around in the fish population is a good example. When the conservation/restoration helps with the economic lives of the local people it's very important".
- "This organization is bringing awareness to a problem for the fishing communities in Africa. And providing an alternative way to fish by using proper fishing nets is a good cause."
- "Without careful scientific study and energetic grassroots advocacy, ecosystems and animal populations vulnerable from deliberately harmful human action or the harmful side effects of human action may be seriously damaged, processes that also carry ramifications for human well being. WWF's approach, to judge from this letter, is rooted in fine-grained empirical and social activism to promote regulations that allow harmonious, sustainable outcomes for human needs and those of other species on whom we depend."
- "Preserving natural resources all around the world is important."
- "I'm behind anything environmental. The issue that's targeted here seems highly specific, though. I'm left with a clear idea of what the problem is and with what's at stake, but also with the idea that there are ways that I could help that would probably have more impact."
- "I think it's important to maintain species of animals or fish that are indigenous to certain areas and to help people who depend on them for survival."
- "The ecosystems and animals WWF helps to safeguard are important to a healthy ecological balance."
- "It is a good cause because it is not only seeking to conserve and protect wildlife but is also concerned in providing better opportunities for fishermen."
- "WWF is a champion for creatures that cannot speak for themselves. It raises awareness of the plight of the environment while also taking directed action. As this particular fundraising piece indicates, it does so while balancing human need. WWF's success is everyone's success."

- "they work to ban smaller nets so the baby fish and the eggs won't be scooped up and they can get larger therefore helping the ecosystem in the lake, "
- "It is a good cause to protect wildlife and their habitats and to do this in unison with local communities."

## **Their Initial Reaction**

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

### **They answered:**

- "Hopeful"
- "Empathy"
- "caring"
- "change"
- "Compassion"
- "worried"
- "hope"
- "Concern"
- "heartful"
- "emotional"
- "hopeful"
- "knowledge"
- "Compassion"
- "support"
- "Positive"
- "Generosity"
- "Impressed"
- "help"
- "concern"
- "collaboration"
- "caring"
- "effort"
- "hope"
- "thankfull"
- "worthwhile"

## **Your Message in Their Words, Part I**

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

### **They answered like this:**

- "It's the World Wildlife Fund, they're a global conservation group that works to help animals in a variety of ways, one of which is helping local communities become more sustainable."
- "The organization is working toward the end of mosquito net fishing and the creation of a reserve at the lake".
- "Conserving Lake Niassa"
- "They are helping to preserve natural habitats of fish by educating the community about the dangers of fishing with mosquito nets. They want to get the entire

community involved with this effort so they do not kill off all species of fish and other things that live in the waters."

- "WWF is a conservation organization that works with local governments and other groups to promote sustainable efforts."
- "Environmental conservation efforts"
- "They provide fishing nets that don't damage the environment in lake niassa, so fishermen can survive."
- "Prevent the further damage to the local fish in its entirety, and other marine life by trying to stop the use of the Mosquito net fishing."
- "The people of lake niassa are using mosquito nets to catch fish but these nets are hurting the wildlife."
- "Its protecting lake niassa from over fishing and destroying its natural species of plants and animals."
- "This organization is working to involve local communities to save and conserve the resources that not only support biodiversity, but provide economic sustenance to their community."
- "They are working to restore and preserve Lake Niassa by prohibiting mosquito net fishing and working to give them the correct tools they need and a governing body for fishing regulations."
- "This organization is promoting the growth of the people and the ecosystem of that land. By providing them with the right fishing nets they are giving them the food they needed. Like the saying says " give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, feed him for a lifetime."
- "Conservation efforts around the world."
- "This organization works in many ways for positive conservation/restoration around the world with groups large and small."
- "This organization is dedicated to natural conservation efforts and providing assistance to the fishing communities in Mozambique, Africa. They raise awareness to the issue of using mosquito nets and its negative impact for the community."
- "World Wildlife Fund works with local groups internationally to protect biodiversity and the ecosystems on which many species and human communities depend to thrive."
- "Land preservation, and specifically preserving a body of water in Africa."
- "They work to promote the use of better fishing nets in the area around a particular lake in Africa. Better fishing nets prevent low-value fish kills. A better net separates fish that people want to catch and eat from fish that should probably be thrown back and allowed to grow a little.  
Better fishing nets preserve the ecology of the lake."
- "This organization, the WWF, in this instance is trying to establish a reserve in Lake Niassa in Mozambique to protect and conserve the lake's resources."
- "The organization helps promote the safety and wellbeing of ecosystems and the animals that live in them, trying to make human activities safer for everyone."
- "World Wildlife Fund in Mozambique is promoting the improvement of fishing techniques in Lake Niassa in order to conserve and protect the waterlife species that due to mosquito net fishing were being affected. This has been achieved through the establishment of fishing councils and the collaboration between the government and local communities."

- "WWF works with communities, governments, NGOs, etc. to increase sustainability and conservation efforts around the globe."
- "helping the fish population"
- "The organization promotes worldwide conservation by supporting local community efforts, habitats and wildlife around the world."

## **Your Message in Their Words, Part II**

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

### **They answered like this:**

- "They're trying to help people in developing countries adapt to make better use of their resources and therefore save them so they can be harvested more sustainably long term."
- "The people and natural ecosystem of that area of Mozambique."
- "It is trying to help the variety of fish in this lake."
- "They are trying to save small fish, eggs and other parts of Lake Niassa, in Mozambique."
- "People who depend on wild spaces for their livelihoods and wildlife in endangered areas."
- "Helping animals by preserving their habitat. May be helping humans if providing alternatives."
- "The fisherman and villagers of lake niassa and the ecosystems in the lake itself."
- "It's trying to help fish, and other marine life forms."
- "The people are trying to protect the natural fish habitat in the lake."
- "Its trying to help the animals of lake niassi"
- "The people who lives around the lake were harming their own long-term prospects for a good life by using short-sighted, but easily available, fishing techniques. By changing fishing practices, the people will have a sustainable economy (supporting their families including their children) and the fish population will grow."
- "They are trying to help the people of Niassa by restoring their fish population"
- "The group is trying to help third world people from starving, not by giving them food but providing them with the tools they need to have in getting it."
- "Everyone in the future. Everyone who appreciates nature, and everyone who lives off the product of lakes and other wildlife."
- "The group helps people be more self sufficient while also restoring our resources."
- "They are trying to help people living in Mozambique, Africa. The community at large will benefit as this directly effects peoples livelihoods as well as a their ability to feed their families."
- "WWF is trying to help local actors save marine species and the human communities that depend on a vibrant marine ecosystem in Mozambique, and is taking analogous action for animals and human communities around the world. "
- "All of the people who need and use this body of water and all the animals that would live in it and around it."
- "The group is trying to protect the ecology of a particular lake in Africa. They provide better nets to fisherman that aren't as destructive to the environment. Better management of the ecology of the lake means that its ultimately more productive for

the fishermen, so ultimately its good for a lot of people concentrated in a relatively small area."

- "They're trying to protect the fish in the lake which were being removed, eggs and all, by fisherman using mosquito netting to gather up the fish. And they are also helping the people who fish for a living by establishing a reserve for them."
- "WWF seeks to protect both animals and their ecosystems from the dangers of some human practices."
- "It is trying to help water-life animals and water-life habitats and also the quality of products that the fishermen can capture."
- "WWF's work really touches all of us in some way. Directly, however, it addresses endangered and threatened species and the humans who live among them."
- "the fish that are getting caught in the nets too early in there life"
- "It helps local communities in their conservation efforts and works to preserve wildlife and their habitats."

## Shop Talk vs. Plain English

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**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:

- "I doubt most people know what benthic algae is."
- "They might not understand "mosquito nets."
- "none"
- "I'm not sure everyone knows what "beach seining" is."
- "fishing council"
- "No, this document was an easy read."
- "They will be shocked to see how these people use the nets to catch food."
- "I don't think my peers will have any problems."
- "Where is this country located at? Who is the founder?"
- "The sentence: IT is by leveraging the strength of our collaborations and supporters that we are able to accomplish our greatest conservatioan successes. It doesn't fit the tone of the rest of the article and might be something some could not understand."
- "Seining' is a terrible word. I have the sense that this ad was written either by, or for biologists. There's a definite fact-oriented approach going on here and in some sense it works. I just feel like they might be going a little overboard. I guess it depends on what they really do with the money. "
- "I had to look up the word seining, so there might be others that aren't familiar with it either. Also, without going back to look for the particular instance, there is at least one sentence that is very confusing to read and could be rewritten to make it sound less pretentious. Say it in layman's terms. Also, there are people I know who probably still think the WWF is about wrestling, unfortunately."
- "No, it is very clear."
- "how much money they spend doing these tasks, and where all they help besides the lakes, do they help in oceans? is it only marine animals?"
- "Everything was very clear and understandable."

## Strengths of the Piece

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

### They answered like this:

- "Mtambo's story about buying 3 new fishing nets."
- "The idea that there are humans and animals/plant life to be helped."
- "The efforts to save these fish"
- "The fact that they have tried to change this over the past 4 years and are seeing improvements, is wonderful."
- "I like the story that pulls you in to start the piece."
- "lots of detail"
- "The personal story of the fisherman."
- "In my opinion, what's so compelling is the irony of the situation, the people was given these nets to help stop the spread of malaria through mosquitoes by using the nets. but they in turn use then nets, with out caution to feed their hungry family or make some money by fishing , and harming another life form in a process.. just the irony."
- "The pictures that go along side the article show the rich culture of the people about the lake. The signature makes it look important."
- "The personal touch with the person located in the photo. "
- "The quote and the pictures make it very "real."
- "the fact of all the indigenous fish their- 95%"
- "That the organization is giving the needy the tools to not starve, not just feeding them."
- "The specifics gone into are incredibly helpful and it helps humanize the situation."
- "The strongest point to me is the people again being able to be self sufficient, and their learning how to care for the earth better one on one."
- "That you can donate to purchase proper fishing nets for the community in Mozambique, Africa."
- "I was impressed by the detail and context the piece provided about the reasons the Lake Niassa Reserve is important -- how the health of the lake ecosystem affects nearby human communities and how interventions to improve netting practices can improve the ecosystem and the prospects for those communities."
- "Needs were very thoroughly laid out."
- "The facts are great. I like facts. The writing gives a whole, whole lot of credibility to the ad, but then poor visual design steals a lot of that credibility away. The layout is nice and the font is appropriate, although not very strong. It doesn't really lend anything to the presentation, you could probably choose something better."
- "The fact that things are going so well for the fisherman who the piece is focused on, makes it sound like it's really a worthwhile project."
- "The story of the fisherman."
- "The fact that it is one of the largest lakes in the world with a varied diversity of species that may go extinct because they are only found in that specific lake."
- "The strongest part about this piece is the fact that it concentrates on one particular outcome that WWF work has helped to bring about. It puts a face to an oftentimes

overwhelming global crisis. It also reassures that WWF's work is helping humans as well as animals."

- "they are working hard to save animals that exist no where else in the world"
- "The story of the fisherman in Mozambique adds a lot of interest about the work of WWF."

## **Weaknesses of the Piece**

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

### **They answered like this:**

- "The PS part after the signature."
- "The graphics looked somewhat pixelated/dithered."
- "How they're going about it is a bit confusing"
- "none"
- "It takes a little while to get to the WWF part, and it sort of sounds to PR-y at the end. Maybe a better transition?"
- "too long"
- "The design is passible, but uninteresting."
- "I didn't see a solid solution, I was beginning to wonder if, they rather the fishermen go hungry."
- "The color of the borders look very dated, it looks as though it was made a very long time ago."
- "Really nothing its a great email. If i had to make a criticism it would be that most people aren't away this is occuring therefore they wouldnt be compelled as much to donate towards this."
- " mmmmm.....maybe adding some links to outside science organizations providing supporting documentation of the threat and the program results. Oh, and maybe something like: your donation of \$x will buy ten nets, or \$x will bring a program education to a village to make a presentation, etc."
- "doesn't make clear what it's benefits are"
- "There wasn't enough factual data backing them up."
- "Nothing weak."
- "Again, the sentence above, a different wording would be less offputting to the average person. Other than that I liked the article and it was something that I would stop and read."
- "It doesn't disclose how much the fishing nets cost."
- "It would have been great to read about the stakes if action is not taken; what is the sense of urgency that attaches to missions like the fight to establish the Lake Niassa Reserve? There's no need to be hyperbolic -- its sober tone is one of the best things about the piece. Still, a larger sense of context (how many communities, for instance, need help of this kind? how much help is getting to them?) would help clarify my perspective."
- "Could be less wordy."
- "The language is a little difficult though, and the visual design is not so good. If the issue is all about a lake, then why use all that ugly red color? It seems like they tried to take swatches of color from the sunset image. Maybe this differentiates the ad from a whole pile of lake-related brochures? Its eye catching yes, but only because its ugly. The top graphic makes extremely poor use of the space and the red block

interspersed with the other blocks is jarring. I appreciate that the color design probably differentiates this ad from others on a similar topic, but overall the visual design just doesn't work."

- "There is a whole lot of extra information which doesn't seem to have a whole lot to do with the actions of the WWF. In fact, you have to read 2 or 3 paragraphs to even know that's what the charity is. Toot your own horn first, then fill in the rest!"
- "nothing"
- "In the introduction it doesn't state specifically how the fisherman is currently being affected by the situation at the lake."
- "In all honesty, I think this is a very strong fundraising piece. Perhaps, for some donors, the fact that the story is about Africa may fail to incite donations. Maybe this should be more regionally based."
- "they don't go into detail about what all and where all they do this besides the focus place of the artical"
- "I don't see anything that is weak."

## About the Do Diligence Sounding Board

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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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