

## Peering into the 2021 Crystal Ball

Has there been a New Year greeted with more anticipation than 2021? There is certainly a lot to be hopeful about in the coming year. The stress and worry caused by the COVID pandemic may diminish through the nationwide rollout of effective vaccines. Our political discourse may find calmer expression even if our policy and party divisions remain. An improving business climate tantalizes as a welcome, if nebulous, prospect.

While this may bode well for our general health, mental, and material well-being, fundraisers have more immediate concerns on their minds.

In surveying professionals at nonprofit organizations and the agencies, data brokerages, and production facilities that serve them, we learn the primary worry is not knowing which direction the economy will move, and what effect it will have on charitable giving. Will the donors who responded during the COVID crisis become fatigued, difficult to retain, or simply unable to continue giving? When COVID mitigates and normal routines are re-established, will charitable response decline because donor attention is diverted from urgent fundraising needs?

The inability to cultivate donors in person, the difficulty of developing correct messaging and marketing strategies in a quickly changing environment, and apprehension about the postal service also weighs on our minds.

Without discounting these formidable challenges, when asked about their plans for 2021 fundraisers are both optimistic and inspirational.

Almost half of our surveyed peers believe they will be mailing more in direct mail acquisition volume this year, while an almost equal amount believes their volume will remain consistent with 2020. Only 10% envision a decrease of volume. When discussing renewal mailings, a 65% majority believe their mail volume will increase, while 30% feel it they be comparable to 2020.

For those using online channels for acquisition (with Email, Facebook, Display, Instagram, and Texting being the most popular reported channels), the forecast is even rosier as over two-thirds of marketers expect to increase their digital spend this year.

Only 3% expect a decline in digital acquisition spending, while the remainder (almost a third of the total) expect hold it the same as 2020. Digital renewal efforts are about evenly split between those who expect to increase their spend and those who expect to match current efforts.

Although some will miss the political messaging opportunities of the past year, or have concern that donors will rely on new government policies to replace their need to give, the

results of the 2020 General Election are not expected to dramatically affect fundraising efforts in 2021 with only 10% of survey responders believing it will lead to a decline in their work.

Despite economic uncertainty, our sector is ready to embrace the opportunities of the New Year. The influx of new donors responding throughout the pandemic may require special cultivation to retain as ongoing supporters, an exciting challenge for many. Likewise, the wide variety of media channels available for exploration, testing, and integration into successful reinforced marketing strategies remains of vibrant interest. Our changing political and social landscape offers the steadfast opportunity to create the messaging that will resonate with our advocates and prospects.

Fundraisers in 2021 wish for a robust and healthy economy, sound data to use in support of decisions and campaigns, and the chance to clearly communicate the benefits of their mission and work to interested supporters.

May 2021 offer you a renewed world of opportunity and success!