

Lit Dropping 301

Warning: since I have written this article, the campaign in question performed poorly. Discount what is said below accordingly. Also, the LP News editor who I was criticizing has since moved on.

Warning: this is an advanced article on the subject of lit dropping! It is too technical for *LP News*. It is suitable for real activists only. (And it is the editorial policy of *LP News* to assume that most readers are not real activists and are not on the way to becoming real activists. End of rant.)

Like it or not, literature dropping is the cheapest, most focused way to get your message out -- with the possible exception of rural districts. Alas, lit dropping is a labor intensive way to get the message out, so it behooves us to take ergonomics seriously.

Placing the Lit

I have been on many lit dropping expeditions, and I have cursed many a doorknob design. Not all are suitable for holding a trifolded piece of literature. I have even gone so far as to print up thousands of heavy slick trifolded school choice brochures to sell at Tools for World Liberation (www.quiz2d.com/tools) on the theory that a heavy slick brochure can be left on the ground and not blow away. (Come on folks, buy some! www.quiz2d.com/tools)

Dave Goree, on whose campaign I am now working, has a better idea: jam the brochure in the crack between the doorway and the door. Do so at the top and the brochure will fall oln the prospect's head; this is hard to ignore. The other advantage of going high in the crack is that the crack will be less tight the farther away from the doorknob and the hinges.

My current inclination is to move away from trifolds and just use plain old 8 1/2 x 11" photocopies. If you roll up one or more sheets you can easily find a place where the roll will stick: between the knob and the frame, in the loop under the thumb latch, in a screen door handle, in a chain link fence (where there are dogs), in the newspaper cradle of a porch mailbox, or under a mailbox flag. (Never place lit *in* a mailbox; this is a federal offense.)

Admittedly, plain old 8 1/2 x 11 rolled up white paper is a bit plain. There are several ways to fix this:

1. Use flashy headlines.
2. Use graphics.
3. Use pictures.
4. Add a colored tri-cut to the mix.

It's the Message!

No matter how many volunteers you have, no matter how much money you raise, your campaign will fail unless you have a powerful, yet believable message. It is demoralizing to expend a great deal of effort dropping lit only to have people ignore it or worse. On the other hand, it is extremely motivating to drop lit and watch people pick it up with interest and respond to it positively.

When dropping lit, you are targeting a wide range of people, very few of which will be political junkies like ourselves. However, you do want to impress those who are political junkies, as they are likely to vote and carry much influence! In your market you have:

1. Political junkies require you to describe your actions with credible detail. They need essays, and maybe hard numbers. They will not believe in your tax cut unless you have a credible plan of spending cuts.
2. Others are concerned primarily with your intent. Highlight what *benefits* (vs. actions) you intend to accomplish. And remember that freedom (as in the non-initiation of force) is *not* the only value! Freedom has many beneficial side-effects. Promote them as primary values with freedom as the tool to provide them.
3. Yet others judge the person more than the plan. Put out some bio information. *Prove* both competence and character with actual data.
4. Many are turned off by politics. You need a gimmick to get their attention. This is a big pool of potential voters. Do not ignore it.
5. Some will be concerned about your party affiliation. Some gentle explanation of the Liberty Party is in order. Also, just in case you do not win the election, you can at least build up the party!

This is a lot of material. For this reason the Goree for Asheville campaign is dropping a bundle of three double-sided sheets and a colored tri-cut.

The Art of the Tri-cut

Observe the image below of the front of the tri-cut we are placing at the front of the bundles.

[image of tri-cut]

We have a picture of the candidate with his name. Do have a name and picture combination! The human brain is hard wired to connect names with faces. You want people to remember the candidate's name as your first priority. Otherwise, your message is wasted (unless they remember party affiliation, party is on the ballot, and you successfully sell the party vs. the candidate).

OK, so you cannot see Dave's face in the picture, but it *is* a very memorable picture! It is not just another shark in a suit. I went with this picture for several reasons.

Dave is a racing engineer. He is far more comfortable under a car or on a motorcycle than he is in a suit. Getting a good picture of him in a suit is bloody difficult.

The image is memorable and attention-getting. Remember the non-voters. I have had many positive comments and promises to vote based on the picture alone.

The picture sells the competence and character of the candidate. It takes skill and bravery to race a motorcycle.

Underneath the picture and name the campaign is sold using merely 5 words: "Freedom, Efficiency and the Environment." These are all values, not actions. Yes, we need to back up these bold words for the skeptical, but to start off on a positive footing, a statement of positive values is crucial. Finally, we have a reminder to vote and contact info. That is enough to introduce the campaign.

Note the color of the paper. It is the most glowing shade of green I could find. It grabs the eye and sends a symbolic message of environmental concern.

Now check out the back of the tri-cut.

[image of tricut back here]

We have a repetition of the name and a reminder to vote. Below, we have a mix of actions and goals. The pledge to cut taxes is quite open-ended. Call for too big a tax cut and you lose credibility.

Environmentalism is huge in Asheville so we have jumped on the bandwagon, offering market-based solutions to environmental problems. Whatever is the source of discontent in your district is what you should jump on. Offer libertarian solutions to the problems of the day. Fix what people are currently concerned with first, then you will get a chance to fix your concerns.

The socialists won by offering socialist solutions one at a time to whatever people were concerned about. Over time they got through most of their agenda. We can do the same.

I have made a point of joining lefty organizations and sharing their concerns. Then, I offer the pieces of our program that address their concerns. This works! It works far better than trying to convince people to accept the non-initiation of force premise and the get them to derive the consequences.

Finally, we have another picture of the candidate. He is in a T-shirt, but since he is in the midst of working on a car, this speaks of competence as much as a nice suit. Note that we are selling the person -- Dave has an environmental business -- not just the program.

Some important notes on the production of the tri-cuts:

1. Adobe InDesign rocks! It is expensive, however.
2. Give yourself 1/2" between columns. This gives you slack when cutting.
3. Consider investing in a paper cutter. They are handy, and it gets you out of the copy center quicker.
4. If you use a 1/4" margin at the ends of the paper, you will have even left and right margins on the resulting tri-cuts after slicing.
5. I found that a grayscale image from an inkjet printer worked better than a halftone as a master for the photocopies. Your experience may vary. Try both. Getting a 1/4" margin at the bottom of the page is impossible with most inkjet printers. Use legal sized paper and then slice off the bottom. (I lost a good day to find a good laser printout before I figured this one out! Details count!)

6. Use high quality paper for your master, especially if using an inkjet printer.
7. I found that I got a better printout by making a PDF file first and then printing from Acrobat Reader. But there was a gotcha. Acrobat Reader has an auto rotate and scale flag that will ruin your nice margins. Turn this off and manually switch to landscape mode or rotate the image.

The Handouts

We went with three double-sided sheets. This is more than most will read, but the sheer heft gives credibility. If people see the multiple headlines and see that there are words to back them up, they may be satisfied. Or some will opt to read what interests them.

Warning: do not rely too much on your web site for communicating detailed messages! Most people are still not web-addicted. Libertarians have an unconventional message to sell. This means they cannot get away with just sound bites. And since Dave Goree is running as an unconventional Libertarian...

The first sheet can be viewed by clicking [here](#). It is primarily a vision piece. Most of the actions needed to carry out the vision are actually private (Energy~Liberty and the Asheville Indoor Motorsports League). The only government action is to convert some of the city's fleet to run on used vegetable oil. But the fact that Dave is *doing* alternative energy is a revealed preference proof of environmental goodwill.

On the other side is a good government piece calling for district elections. Asheville currently has at-large elections for city council, making it expensive to run. This issue appeals to pro-democracy forces of both the Left and the Right. Remember that there is more to good government than just making it smaller, important though that is. The second sheet is more blatantly Libertarian. On one side is an attack on John Ashcroft. That's right, we are doing a handout on a national issue in a city race. The idea behind representative government is to have a representative who has a thinking process that represents the will of the voters. Views on national issues can be a way to tell the voters how Dave thinks -- in this case how he thinks about civil liberties.

On the other side is the trickiest message: calling for replacing zoning with tradable property rights contracts. While this is an important issue, it is a new one and a bit complicated. Some of the sophisticated environmentalists understand the benefits quickly, and the anti-zoning property rights advocates respond positively, but I suspect this one to be a wash for getting votes. (It can be a good issue for in person discussion, where you have the chance to explain the subtleties. It is the main one I refer to when talking to live voters.)

The final sheet is one of mine, summarizing some of the ideas on my web site, <http://www.holisticpolitics.org>. We've used the "L" word elsewhere while trying to appeal to left liberals and environmentalists. This piece is designed to sell libertarianism in general to those on the hippie left. It actually formalizes some thoughts I have since heard from others, including former Libertarians who have become Greens. Yes, such do exist and we need to get them back.

(By the way, any Libertarian campaign or affiliate who wants to use this piece for lit dropping or outreach tables has my permission. I have some other pieces along these lines as well. Send me an email if interested.)

The Power of the Paperclip

A few last ergonomic thoughts:

Collate first; then drop. I do not like collating while walking. It slows me down and causes muscle aches. Worse yet, there is a lot of fumbling around when handing out materials to live voters on the street. Have a collating party. It makes for a good social event much like the quilting circles of yore. Better yet, if you use a photocopier, you can have the full sized sheets collated as they are produced.

Shop! There is a huge spread in cost for photocopies and printing. Shop around. I found Kinko's to be about three times as expensive as the cheapest place I could find.

Waste a few. Consider going to a print shop and doing a big print run to get a volume discount and expect to waste a few. Trying to load balance volunteers when the handouts run short is very time consuming.

Use paperclips. Do not staple. If you staple, people will look at the piece as a single work and may stop at page one if they are not interested in the first topic. With a paperclip, there is more chance of people seeing the subsequent pages. This is especially true if you have a tri-cut on top, as people will likely pull off the paperclip to see what is underneath. Better yet, you can pull off the paperclip after rolling when rolling to place in gaps.

Go with big paperclips with a smooth finish. These go on easily and cost about half a cent each in bulk. And you can reuse. Big paperclips not only go on easily, they add heft for those situations where you don't have a place to jam the rolled up bundle. A clipped together stack will lie nicely on the floor of a front porch, or in a chair near the front door if one is available. Laying out flat like this takes less effort and shows off the tri-cut. But do note that my experience with this is in a town protected from wind by mountains. This may not work in windier cities.

Last Words

So get out there and walk some neighborhoods. You don't have to experience the stress of knocking on doors to have an impact. Given my experience with door-knocking, I think that passive lit dropping is more efficient in terms of votes/hour, and it is considerably less stressful. Indeed, walking is a great form of exercise and dropping literature is less boring than power walking.

And finally: Blessed are the poor, for they have small yards. Get the poorer neighborhoods first. Go for the townhouses if your town has them. It is nice to dream of getting high-dollar members by dropping in high dollar neighborhoods, but my experience in this regard has been negative to date. Go for the neighborhoods where people sit out on the porch and you get to talk to voters. And have literature that appeals to the poor. For ideas, see www.holisticpolitics.org.