

Chic Invitations dressed to impress

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A unique custom-designed invitation is a great way to create buzz about an event.

by **CHRISSY KADLECK**

Looking to enhance the prestige of its annual fundraiser, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society joined forces with Cleveland graphic design firm Invite-Design and zeroed in on the event's first impression — the invitation.

Designers created an invitation printed on stunning red stock, symbolic of the blood cancers the society works to defeat. A red pocket with an elegant black tie completed the invitation to the Man, Woman and Business of the Year event.

The result? A 40% higher response rate compared to the previous year's event, said Amy Pausche, campaign manager for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Cleveland.

"We actually had people calling us ... People were very excited to receive these envelopes and they received a lot more attention than our previous mailing had or our nomination letters," she said. "The invitation looked so elegant and it really stepped up the level of the campaign."



PICU Dedication Event for Rainbow Babies & Childrens Hospital, Invitation Design by Sharon Baden, Bâden Design



The invitation is a powerful tool for any event, said Sharon Baden of Bâden Design in Cleveland.

"With most events it set the stage for the theme, the mood and people know right away if it is going to be elegant. They can tell right away by the invitation," said Ms Baden, a graphic designer of 15 years. Her clients have included Baker & Hosteler LLP, the Cleveland Clinic and Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital.

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"With the invitation being the first thing that anybody sees, we really try to stress in the invite anticipation for your event because you want people to come," said Ms Kenney. "We've found that colorful and striking envelopes make a huge impression. When people get their mail and there is red envelope, it stands out immediately and people want to open that one. Different textures and engraving always make a big impression because it is so professional and beautiful."

Ms Baden, who holds two patents on an invitation — one for its designs and the other for the glueless envelope that she designed to hold it — aims to create her custom invitations so people who receive them feel like they are getting a special gift in the mail.

"Sometimes it's the fact that you have to untie the invitation package, or there is a wrap or band to slide, or it's in a beautiful textured paper, or embossed technique that you only will experience intimately—by receiving it in hand (not virtual) it's a more personal delivery," she said. "I call it the wash-the-hands effect where when a recipient knows it's special, they may say, 'Oh I've got to have my hands clean to open it' because they know what's inside is going to be nice. If you do that in today's busy lifestyles, make people stop and want to open their mail carefully, that's a powerful thing."

An up-front investment

Custom-designed, professionally printed and hand-assembled invitations come with an expense and a more structured time frame than ordering stock invitation out of a book.

For a corporate event, designers need anywhere from two to three months, or even longer ideally to create an invitation.

"You try to interview your clients and find out what is the most appropriate, what kind of paper, whether you send a

Hallinan-Newman Art Exhibition Event for Council of Leaders, CDCF, Invitation Design by Sharon Baden, Bâden Design

three dimensional piece in the mail or a flat folded piece," she said. "If the time allows for it, you can do something quite unique and quite different."

How much a company spends on an invitation sends a message to the invited guests, co-workers, colleagues or investors.

"If you send something very unique and thoughtful, your guests feel very special and will become your event promoter and an advocate," said Baden. "It's worth it to hire a designer. It's going to make a huge difference as will adding detail and a professional polish."

"If it's important for you to get your people to your event, you need to decide what your marketing costs are too," Ms Baden said. "People don't want to spend a lot on invitations and then they don't get a good turnout. Spend \$200 on invitations and get \$100; that's not worth it. Spend \$5,000 and get \$25,000 or more back from your event, it was money well spent."

Pausche of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society agreed.

"I think a (custom-designed invitation) establishes credibility instantly," she said. "Our response rate was so much better, I felt that it was worth the investment of money in having not only a beautiful design but really make it cohesive with the rest of the campaign and the event in general. ■



Playhouse Square Opening Night for Disney's The Lion King® Benefit for Children in Cleveland, OH, Design by Bâden Design