



# 25 STEPS TO FALL & HOLIDAY FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

*Meet (and exceed!) Your Fundraising Goals*

**Happy reading!**

*(Be sure to catch the two bonus tips—about social networking and providing “freebies” to your supporters—at the end!)*

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# STEPS 1-3:

## *CRAFT YOUR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN*

- Do you have a campaign plan ready to go?
- Have you included the seven “must-haves” for your campaign?
- Do you understand the “4 Ps” and how they apply to nonprofit marketing?



## Step 1: Complete Your Campaign Plan

*(Hat Tip: Thanks to our friends at **FireFly Partners** for their hard work and content in the "Fundraising Campaign in a Box"!)*

It's time to develop your plan and goals. Follow these steps from the "Fundraising Campaign in a Box" released earlier in 2009:

1. **Figure out what you're trying to accomplish.** Any campaign worth its salt is about getting results. What results are you and your organization looking to achieve? When you're planning your outreach, remember these three tips:
  - There is no such thing as "the general public"...
  - Instead, you need to segment your communications to be effective and targeted.
  - Some audiences are more important than others. Think about your goals and who holds the key to your success. Lack of participation from primary groups can cause your campaign to falter or fail.
2. **Determine how you're going to accomplish your goals.** So - you have groups of people and actions you want them to take. How are you going to tell your story in a compelling manner? What themes, messages and ideas are you going to take from your arsenal of content to encourage action?
3. **Determine which communications channels you'll use.** There are a variety of online and offline channels that you can use to send the right message to the right audiences. Examples of online channels include your website, search marketing, email marketing and social networking. Offline channels include things like direct mail, paid advertising and public relations.
4. **Decide which resources you need to get the job done.** Is email an important part of your plan but you're still communicating with supporters via Outlook (eek!)? Is your website set up to take online donations? Do you have a quick and easy 'Sign Up for News'

interface on your website? Ensure that you have all of your tools and resources in place to make your job—and the jobs of your audience(s)—as easy, effective and cost-effective as possible.

5. **Determine who will execute your campaign steps.** Accountability will make or break the success of a campaign. As much fun as it is to pass the buck, now is as good a time as any to decide which members of your organization, board or volunteers are responsible for the different portions of your campaign.
6. **Lay out how you will measure your success.** In the case of holiday fundraising, this could be as simple as a dollar sign with a number after it. But take a moment to consider what other goals you may have. Wow your organization's Board and leadership with conversation rates, list-building, website traffic and any other number results into which they can sink their teeth.
7. **Set your timeline and benchmarks.** One of the defining features of a campaign is that it has a defined start and end. Now that you have planned out the 'who, what and why' questions of your campaigns, it's time to determine the when. Continue to build your campaign plan by setting ownership and deadlines for the associated activities. Begin with the end in mind – if your campaign will run from 10/1 – 12/31, work backwards to be sure that all activities will happen in a smooth manner. Don't use magical thinking to set deadlines! Run activities in parallel if you are worried about compression time-wise.



## Step 2: Ensure Your Campaign has the Seven “Must-haves” Covered

*(Hat Tip: Thanks to **Katya Andresen** and Robin Hood Marketing for the following tips!)*

Your end-of-year campaign is a coordinated, concerted, multi-channel effort to get certain people to take an action—in this case: donate. Below are seven universal principles of successful campaigns which you can apply to marketing your nonprofit to any audience:

1. **Begin with the Desired Actions:** Marketing starts by defining a desired action for a specific audience within a marketplace and plans backward from there. That's why our marketing arrowhead has action at its tip. (Review number 2 from Step 1 above if you want some additional tips for planning your goals.)
2. **Ground it in the perspective of the audience it is intended to reach:** This audience perspective becomes the basis for forging connections with the people you want to reach, offering them a compelling benefit exchange, and sticking in their memories.
3. **Be Inescapable:** To succeed campaigns must deliver a message many times, over time, in many forms. A few ads do not constitute a campaign. You need to concentrate your marketing efforts, or they won't have an effect.
4. **Stake Out a Unique Competitive Position:** Your campaigns vie for attention with many other campaigns (especially during the end-of-year fundraising season!), so you have to draw on the principles of competition to make sure the campaign you create not only reinforces the unique competitive position you want to stake out but also stands out from other campaigns.

5. **Be Emblematic of your Cause and Extend the Brand:** The campaign is defining your cause in the eyes of your audience—clarifying the competitive advantage of your product or service. It is projecting who you are, what you do and why your task is important. Therefore the campaign needs to be true to your cause.
6. **Be Flexible:** Fundraising campaigns are in sync with the marketplace, which shifts all the time. Campaigns must be sensitive to those dynamics.
7. **Be Tested Many Times:** Good campaigns are tested before they happen, while they are happening, and after they happen.



### Step 3: Integrate the “4 Ps” of Traditional Marketing into Your Plan

Any traditional marketing 101 course will tell you about the magical quartet that composes the music of the marketing mix: price, product, placement and promotion (or, the "Four Ps"). The Ps provide a framework for professional MBA-types to gain their footing and strategize their outreach initiatives to reach their audiences and ultimately sell a product or service.

Meanwhile, we as nonprofit, mission-oriented types often find ourselves looking at the ever-important nonprofit "P" (passion) and losing sight of the rest of potentially powerful Ps and how they affect our "customers"—our supporters and potential supporters.

So, can nonprofits apply the traditional marketing mix and achieve great fundraising results? What's the difference in approach? What four bite-sized marketing tips can you take with you back to your next campaign planning meeting?

Read on to see the overlap between for- and non-profit strategy and the ways to soar to new understanding of nonprofit marketing:

1. **Pinpoint your product.** In the work you do you're not selling cars or cola, but that doesn't mean you lack a product. In fact, you have two products.
  - o The first is what your nonprofit is actually delivering: school lunches for underprivileged children, showcases of local artists' work, bed nets for people to prevent malaria, etc. Nonprofits often confuse their mission for their product: Saving the Earth versus recycling bins for every household. The trick is to make your product into something tangible. It's taking a concept

and a dream, and translating that into a tangible, visualize-in-my-head-able thing or service.

- The second-and oftentimes more elusive-is the value or service you're providing to the donor/volunteer/advocate. Yes, you're providing an avenue for the individual to help someone/something else. But think beyond that: What feelings or benefits are you providing for the donor him/herself? Here are a few examples of things you're providing with your benefit-exchange: happiness, convenience, power, safety and so on. Take some time to brainstorm what your organization is offering behind door number 1 and door number 2. (Hint: "Stopping malaria" is not a valid response for either type of product. Providing a bed net and the proud feeling you get for potentially saving a child's life are the right one-two punch.)

2. **Set the price.** When translating for-profit-speak to nonprofit lingo, you might associate price with "amount of donation." However, donation amounts are not the whole story. Price comes down to the sacrifice your supporter is making in order to support you-whether it's with her time, money, etc. When you think of your marketing "calls-to-action," the action is the price. Nail that down and you can speak more clearly and openly with your audiences. And, when considering what you're "charging," make sure you know the value you're providing in return. What are the benefits for the supporter? What's the reward?
3. **Plan the promotion.** Quick: Think of a synonym for promotion! Did you say "advertising"? \*buzzer\* Sorry, you only get partial credit. The complete answer we're looking for is channels. Promotion refers to the various aspects of marketing communication. By going through this "Ps" exercise with your marketing strategy, you've got the product and how much it costs determined; this third step covers how you're going to spread your message the product and its cost/benefit trade-offs. Are you going to talk about your "products" online? Via direct mail? With a black-tie gala? Through paid advertising?

We'll sneak in a bonus "P" to this category: packaging. The success of your promotion and outreach around your products relies heavily on the way you frame the information. What's the messaging? To what audience values are you appealing? What's your communications strategy? (Hint #2: "Facebook" is not a strategy. If anything, it's a "place" and we're not there yet. Hold your marketing-resource horses!)

4. **Pick the right place.** "Place" is another two-in-one situation. When choosing your outreach tactics, you're reaching out to audiences in two places or ways: 1) where they are physically (ex: in their email, on Facebook, at a convenience store), and 2) where they are mentally (ex: their state of mind). To be at the right place at the right time, make access easy: meet people where they are physically and appeal to what's top-of-mind for them right now. One example of easy access is to accept donations on your website and have a donate button that's simple to find at a glance. That potential donor is on your website and thinking about your organization, your product and the price you've set to get involved; make sure you're in that place along with her.

# STEPS 4-8:

## *WORK YOUR WEBSITE*

- Do you accept donations on your website (with an effective donation form)?
- Have you performed a “button audit”?
- Do you capture email addresses on your site?
- Is your home page ready for an influx of new users?
- Have you avoided the five common website design “don’ts”?



## Step 4: Find an Online Fundraising Solution to Allow You to Accept Donations on Your Website

Regardless of their donation preference, 65 percent of all supporters will check out your website prior to making a donation. While they're in this "open-minded moment" (considering contributing), make it easy for that person to donate right then and there. Web users are no longer shocked at the idea of making online contributions; a shocking discovery, instead, would be *not* having the ability to donate from your website.

Now's the time to invest in a customized online donation page that looks exactly like your website, branding and general style. If you have a Custom DonateNow page from Network for Good, you will be in good shape.

Here are the 7 deadly sins of donate page design:

1. Scary, long forms with unnecessary fields
2. Multiple non-giving options
3. Long text, weird formatting, reversed-out type
4. Amateurish looking design
5. Layout that is not intuitive
6. No security or privacy policy links
7. No address or phone number



## Step 5: Perform a Donate Button Audit

At Network for Good, we love donate buttons. Big, bold, bordering-on-obnoxious donate buttons. They light our collective fundraising fire (which we also use occasionally to make s'mores, but I digress).

Sadly, during an informal survey of more than two dozen nonprofit websites, we found tiny, buried buttons gasping to see the light of day and clicking action. Why does this matter? Research shows that size DOES matter: Bigger donate buttons help convert more donors!

Here are three surefire ways to get your button noticed and your donations up:

1. **Make it big.** Visitors to your website should be able to find your donate button in two seconds or less. If it's a tiny text link at the footer of your site, how can on-the-fence (or even die-hard) donors find it? Not making your button prominent can imply that your organization doesn't need individual gifts. (If that really is the case for your nonprofit you can ignore all this button talk and go enjoy a nice s'more instead.) Here's an example of what we consider a BIG button:



2. **Put it "above the fold."** No, we're not newspaper folk, but the term carries some weight in online design: Above the fold is a concept in Web design referring to location of an item near the top of a Web page which can thus be viewed in a browser without scrolling. Get

the most bang for your button buck--let your non-scrollers (i.e. the majority of Web-browsing folk) have easy access to your button. Check out a big button in action:



Even with all of the information on this page, a visitor will have no trouble understanding the importance of contributions and how/where to give!

3. **Be sure to include a link to donate in every communication you send out!** Put a link in your email signature. Include your donate button in your email campaigns. Make sure your website is listed on any offline communications, too--when interested supporters are at your page they'll have no trouble completing their donation!



## Step 6: Integrate a Captivating Email Address Capture Form on Your Website

**Ask yourself why someone should sign up to get your emails.** Is it because they'll get tips that can help them improve their health, or access to articles before they're published, or alerts about the environment? And then make your case clearly to prospective subscribers. Don't just ask them to sign up for your emails; instead, ask them to sign up for your emails to get exclusive, email-only information (or whatever the reward might be).

**Keep your signup process short and sweet.** Minimize the clicks, and ask only for the information you truly need (if you're not planning on using people's birthdate information later, don't trouble people for it). And by all means don't mislead people into thinking the process is short and sweet only to hit them with a 20-minute routine. (You've seen signups that ask only for your email address followed by a 'join' button - but instead of joining you're greeted by 20 more fields and a citizenship test.) Make signing up a pleasant, fast experience, and you'll lose fewer people along the way.

**And, consider using the "people love free stuff" principle.** Incentivize. You're asking people to give you something (information), and they're going to wonder what's in it for them:

- Set up a drawing.
- Offer prizes to the first X people who sign up for your new e-newsletter or who sign up by Y date.
- Show people that they're making a difference and/or joining a community.



## Step 7: Make Sure Your Home Page is Stellar

*(Hat Tip: These tips are based on an entry from **NonprofitMarketingBlog.com** and the associated comments.)*

Let's face it: People have short attention spans. Especially when it comes to the Internet. We're all clicking around furiously trying to nab the quickest, most-reliable answers to our questions. (And, often, we're just browsing for things to entertain our instant-gratification-seeking minds.)

Your nonprofit home page needs to share just the right amount of information. Effectively. And, oh yes, *quickly*.

Here are ten things your home page must have in order to accomplish two goals: grab a reader's attention and spur that person to action:

1. **Something that tugs the heartstrings** - Think an arresting image, a bold statement, the start of an incredible story. Connect to your Web visitors on an emotional level to hook them into the rest of your content. When you show that you align with what they care about and can relate to, you're starting a conversation.
2. **A two-second statement** - This brief statement should sum up who your organization is and what you do. This niblet of information will ensure that anyone glancing at the page "gets it" right away. (Hint: This is *not* your mission statement. Please put that away on your "About Us" page where it belongs.) This sound bite, instead, shows differentiation and value of your nonprofit and its unique work. Here's a great summary of this concept from Mark Twain (at least according to Wikipedia's "sound bite" entry): It's "a minimum of sound [or words] to a maximum of sense."
3. **Clear, intuitive navigation** - Your website should be organized according to the brain of the people who come to your website. Did you notice this did not say "organized

according to your organizational chart"? Funny-we did, too. Website visitors are looking for more information about what you do, how they can get involved and why they should *care*. Org charts don't jive with that train of thought.

4. **A quick case (or link to a case) for your nonprofit** - Why is your organization *the* nonprofit to support? What are you doing differently? What's special about your volunteers, constituents, geography, programs, events, etc.? There are more than 1.8 million charities in the United States right now. And - let's be honest - many that do similar work to yours. Make your case!
5. **A way to capture people whose interest has been captured** - Worst-case scenario: Someone visits your website, thinks "wow, that's really cool... huh," and then jets off to check his or her email again, leaving your website in the dust. That's a missed opportunity for a relationship. Be sure to have a great email sign-up form that entices people to provide their email address. (Review Step 6 above for more tips on capturing supporters.)
6. **A big donate button for people ready to give** - Don't be afraid to ask for donations on your website. Isn't that the whole point of online *fundraising*? Supporters new and veteran will appreciate an easy donation flow. So make that button shine! (Review Step 5 above for information on performing a donate button audit.)
7. **A third-party endorsement** - Consider including ratings from GuideStar and Charity Navigator, or a testimonial from someone else regarding your nonprofit's services (a volunteer, a beneficiary, etc.). A lot of the effectiveness of the messages on your website depends on the messenger. When you compare "My organization rocks" to "That organization changed my life because of..." you can sense which one is stronger. The "we're awesome" argument doesn't carry much weight on its own; let others help build your case.
8. **Something that shows where the money goes** - Be sure to share information or links to information about where donations go. Share what percentage of donations goes directly to mission-related activities. Consider making a connection between donations

and services provided. One of our favorite examples is Malaria No More's case that \$10 equals one bed net.

9. **Something portable** - Research everywhere has made it clear that nonprofits are experimenting with social media more and more. Be sure that all those hours tweeting, blogging and vlogging (video blogging) don't go to waste: Provide links to your social media presence, and make it easy for supporters to grab content and bring it where they are (ex: text they can paste as a status update promoting a campaign of yours or a personal story on your website).

10. **Links to events and other opportunities for engagement** - Give folks other opportunities to get involved and stay connected. Maybe there's a petition to sign or pledge to complete. Have an upcoming event? Link to registration details. And as your site evolves, consider adding a feedback loop-polls, quizzes, comments, messages boards and so on.

**A final reality check:** If you've worked your way through this list and think you're good to go, take a moment to pause and reflect on the home page's usability. Be sure to test the site to make sure that it's as easy to navigate as you think it is. Ask a couple of volunteers, donors and others in your target audience to try it out and provide feedback to make the finishing touches.



## Step 8: Avoid Five “Don’ts” of Nonprofit Website Design

Your nonprofit's website can be a powerful, strategic tool. Unlike the days of brochure-like static pages, home pages now have the potential to win over potential supporters and reaffirm the folks who already know you.

When you boil it down, websites do not just sit on a server—they are action-oriented. They **persuade** and (hopefully) **convert**. And for the latter—in terms of raising money online—your website has the most potential with two groups of donors: new donors and impulse givers.

When these newbies visit your website, what do they see? What's their experience with your navigation and donation processes? According to recent research, **nonprofits could be leaving as much as 10 percent of their online revenue on the table simply due to two website usability issues: content and design.**

Read on for the five content and design flubs to avoid when you aim to convert browsers into donors:

1. **A lack of call-to-action.** The number one thing to avoid when asking for donations on your website is to forget to make the ask! (Yes, this is also on our list of “website do's,” but it's important enough to mention at least twice.) If you don't ask for donations, website visitors might think you don't need them. Yes, it's almost laughable to us in the nonprofit world, but Web-savvy surfers assume that if something's missing, it's intentional.
2. **Jargon breath.** (No, this has nothing to do with the take-out you had for dinner last night.) “Jargon breath” refers to a tendency by communicators—particularly in the nonprofit sector—who rely on a particular vernacular of terms to try to educate others

about their mission and programs ("services," "accessible," "at risk," etc.). But, as Tom Ahern, an authority on effective donor communications, so lovingly points out, "jargon just conjures confusion and blank mental screens." Go over your website copy with a fine-toothed comb, and perhaps a friend who doesn't work at your nonprofit, and flesh out what your organization really does. Show people and explain in real terms.

3. **Navigation that is not intuitive.** This fix could be as simple as changing the text on your navigation's buttons. Is your donate text hidden behind an "about us" button? Are you asking people to "join" you, but your home page doesn't indicate that you're a membership organization? It may be time to break out the "Grandma-intern-or-significant-other" test: Sit someone down in front of your website and watch them navigate around your site. Try to quiz them to find certain areas and probe them for feedback. Whether the person's a Web designer or a teen who spends an hour on Facebook every day, you'll be sure to glean some important info.
4. **Inconsistency with the mother ship.** Of the 1.8 million nonprofits in the U.S., most are small, one-location shops with small budgets (but big hearts). However, if your nonprofit is part of a national or international network, you'll want to avoid completely flying off the brand handle when you're working on your local website. You may have great design resources and a quirky new take on your organization, but you want to make sure site visitors (i.e. potential supporters) easily make the connection between your site and the national one they may be familiar with already.
5. **Confusing, third-party donation processing.** Make it as easy as possible for supporters to donate to your cause. They're trusting your organization with their hard-earned cash, as well as your website with their credit card. According to Network for Good's own research, branded donation pages like [Custom DonateNow](#) bring in a higher average donations (\$125) and improve the donor experience. (Improvement refers to shortening time to complete the transaction, lessening the number of clicks and giving the feeling that a supporters has not left the nonprofit's website.)

# STEPS 9-15:

## ***ENHANCE YOUR EMAILS***

*(Hat Tip: The tips in this section are from Kivi Leroux Miller and The Nonprofit Email Marketing Guide: 7 Steps to Better Email Fundraising & Communications.)*

- Do you have a good email service provider (ESP)? (Or, are you still using Outlook for email “blasts”?)
- Is your mailing list in shape?
- Have you figured out what your readers want to read?
- Can you compose email works of beauty?
- Do you know how to make your micro-content (subject lines and “from” information) even better?
- Have you mastered email design?
- Are you tracking results from past campaigns to improve future ones?



## **Step 9: Get Yourself a Reliable Email Service Provider that Understands the Needs of Nonprofits**

Many nonprofit organizations get started with email marketing by sending out e-newsletters via Outlook or Google's Gmail. But beware; there are rules, caveats and landmines awaiting the nonprofit using Outlook or Gmail for email outreach.

While Outlook and its many cousins are fine for 1-to-1 email, they weren't designed for sending email newsletters or fundraising appeals to groups of people. To do this effectively, you need an Email Service Provider. Already have an ESP? You are ready to skip to Step 10. If not, keep reading.

Email Service Providers (ESPs) are companies that specialize in delivering your email to your mailing list for you. You create the message and you control your mailing list, but all of that data is stored on their computers and your messages are sent out through their mail servers. You login to your account on their website to create your messages, manage your mailing list, send your messages, and track what happens after the message goes out.

Many different providers serve the nonprofit community and provide competitive services and affordable rates, including Network for Good's EmailNow powered by Emma.

But an ESP like Network for Good does much more than deliver your messages. Look what else they'll do:

- **Create sign-up forms for your website.** Your website needs a way for new supporters to sign up directly for your mailing list. Your provider will help you do this by giving you the HTML code for your sign-up form so you can add it to your website and/or by hosting

a sign-up form on their website that you can link to from yours.

- **Manage bounces, unsubscribes, etc.** People change their email addresses all the time and change their minds about which lists they want to be on. Using an ESP automates the process of managing the individual records on your mailing list. Readers can unsubscribe themselves instead of you doing it by hand, and they can often update their email addresses all by themselves too. When you send a message to an email address that is no longer active, the ESP will remove that record from your list for you.
- **Analyze the results.** Your ESP will give you statistics about your email campaigns that you could never create on your own. Data like who is opening your email and what links they are clicking on can help you create even better, more relevant content for your subscribers next time.
- **Help you comply with the spam laws.** Nonprofits must comply with the federal CAN-SPAM law and your ESP will help you do that by automatically including “unsubscribe” links and your physical mailing address in the messages you send.

***Bonus Note: Why You Really, Truly Can't Do This Out of Your Own Email Account***

It may not happen right away, but if you repeatedly send the same message to large numbers of email addresses, at some point, your Internet Service Provider (the company that connects you to the Internet and/or sends and receives email on your behalf) will cut you off and may even label you as a spammer. You won't be able to send email to your boss, your best friend, anyone at all, let alone your mailing list of supporters. And sending e-newsletters by putting lots of names in the BCC or (heaven forbid) the CC or TO field marks you as an amateur.

Doing it on your own is also incredibly time-consuming – splitting up your list into smaller groups to get your email program to send the message, responding to all those people who want on or off your list, dealing with all of those bounced emails that end up flooding your inbox every time you send. All of these administrative tasks eat up valuable time you should be spending on creating great content.

You also have no way to track who is opening your messages and clicking on your links, making measuring the effectiveness of your campaigns nearly impossible. And odds are you aren't in compliance with the federal CAN-SPAM regulations either.

Paying for an ESP is well-worth every dime you'll spend on it – and if you follow the advice in this checklist, we bet you'll raise more than enough money to cover the expense.



## Step 10: Get Your Mailing List into Shape

### **Looking to build your list from scratch?**

So you're ready to start an email campaign to inform your supporters about your good work and how they can help you do more. You open your email contact list and realize your mailing list is made up entirely of people who work three feet away from you and already know everything that's going on in your organization (or maybe not . . . that's another article).

Where do you begin? With your existing snail mail address list.

If you already have a business relationship with a person, it is OK to start emailing them. So if you had a good reason to put them on your print newsletter list (they donated or volunteered, or attended an event, or asked to be put on it), then you can start to email them too. If you are starting your e-newsletter from scratch, go ahead and collect as many emails as you can for people already on your print newsletter list and start emailing them.

While this approach is legal, it's not necessarily the best practice. Ideally, you want a list of people who have confirmed that they do, in fact, want to get email from you. As you begin emailing your supporters, briefly describe your email privacy policy so they know that you will not be sharing their addresses with others. Tell them about all of the great content they can expect to find in your newsletters and how often you plan to email them. Always include links that let them opt-out from being on your list.

Next, work on collecting email addresses from your other supporters. Send a postcard with an enticing offer for those who sign up for your e-newsletter. Put your sign-up form within your website template so it appears on every page.

Building your email list takes time. Start where you are and grow from there.

### **Already have a list that needs some Miracle-Gro®?**

Here are 14 of our favorite ways to keep your email list growing:

#### On Your Website

- Put your sign-up form in your website template, so it appears on every single page.
- Offer special downloads, like how-to guides. Be clear that when they sign-up for the download, they will also get your e-newsletter.
- Sponsor a fun contest or drawing, and be clear that when they enter, they will also receive your e-newsletter.
- Let people segment themselves on the sign-up form by which topics they care about.

#### In Your Email Messages

- Offer great content! Nothing will build your list faster.
- Encourage supporters to update their email addresses themselves (if your system allows it).
- Ask readers to forward your e-newsletter to friends and be sure to include a link to your sign-up form in each edition so those friends can sign-up directly.
- Respect all opt-outs. It's better to lose a subscriber than to have that person tag you as a spammer.
- Put a link to your sign-up form in your personal email signature as well.

#### Face to Face

- Audit all of your paper forms and make sure you are also asking for an email address anywhere you would ask for a phone number or mailing address.
- When people register for your events, tell them they will receive your e-newsletter, too.
- Include a newsletter sign-up form at your reception desk.
- Collect business cards when you make presentations.
- Get in the habit of regularly entering those hand-collected addresses into your system.



## Step 11: Give Your Readers What They Want

Even though your e-newsletter readers may be incredibly generous individuals, it's helpful to think of them as very self-centered, selfish people when they are reading your email newsletter. Here's why: if the content isn't immediately relevant and valuable to them as individual human beings, they'll delete it in an instant. You go through your inbox the same way, don't you?

**Know what's in it for them!** We know what's in it for you – you want your supporters to know all about what you are doing and to support you even more. But what's in it for them? As you write your newsletter articles, keep asking yourself these questions:

- How will this article make our readers feel?
- How will it make their lives easier or better?
- Does this article show our readers how important they are to us?
- Does it celebrate successes they helped our organization bring about?

Survey your readers at least a couple of times each year to find out what they want to know about, what questions they have, and what kind of information they want to receive from you. Keep your surveys very focused and short (just a few questions) and offer an incentive, if you can, for completing them. Many ESPs have surveying tools built into their packages, so check with your provider.

Call supporters on the phone and ask them what they remember from your last newsletter and what they'd like to see in your next one. You can also identify trends in your readers' interests by tracking which links they are clicking on in your newsletters and on your website. Remember, what you find interesting and what your readers find interesting may not be the same thing. Always put yourself in your readers' shoes.



## Step 12: Compose Kick-butt Emails

Good email writing is friendly and conversational. While there are certainly times where the newsy, facts-only journalistic style can work, most nonprofit newsletters should be much more personal, and even a little chatty. Speak directly to your reader by calling them “you” and refer to yourself and your nonprofit as “We” or “I.”

People give to and support nonprofits for highly subjective reasons. Your supporters get something deeply personal out of their affiliation with your organization as a donor, volunteer, or advocate. So why would your response back to these passionate people be institutional, monolithic, and completely objective?

You need to break out of the “501(c)(3) speaks to the masses” writing mode, if you want your email communications to be successful. Here are a few ways to make your writing feel more personal to your readers.

- Use bylines. Let your readers know who is writing the article.
- Make people central to your content. Include your staff, donors, volunteers, clients, and others by name in your articles. (Better yet: Let them write the articles.)
- Tell stories. Tell stories in your e-newsletters to engage your donors in your work, to reinforce their giving decisions, to inspire them to do more, and to encourage more word-of-mouth marketing on your behalf.
- Include headshots or photos with people. Show your readers who’s talking and who you are talking about.

Your supporters give their time, talents and gifts with passion for your cause. They are part of the family. Write to them that way.



## Step 13: Make Your Micro-content Even Better

If we told you that micro-content was the most important part of your e-newsletters, what would you say?

### *“Micro-what?”*

Micro-content is a phrase that catches your eye and is often viewed out of context, like an article headline displayed on a search result page or the subject line of your emails.

Good micro-content grabs your supporters’ attention and keeps them reading. Bad micro-content is generic, drab or missing entirely.

Every email has four key pieces of micro-content:

- The Subject Line
- The From Line
- The Headings and Subheadings
- The Next Step or Call to Action

Good micro-content tells the reader what’s in it for them.

The busier your supporters are, the more likely they are to look at your email subject line and nothing else before deciding whether to read it or delete it. This is your first chance at grabbing their attention. Make it good.

- **Your “From” field** should stay the same with every message. For most nonprofits, this will be your organization’s name or a well-known campaign or initiative.

- **Descriptive headlines and subheads** with active verbs and vivid nouns will grab your supporters' attention and nudge them into actually reading the text. Headlines and subheadings that make people think "This is useful" or "This is timely" or "This is about me" will always work.
- **Your call to action** tells them what they can do next, including donate, volunteer, or simply learn more.

Want to give your supporters a little nudge to actually read what you've written in your e-newsletter? Great micro-content is how it's done.



## Step 14: Get Your Email Design Up to Par

Twisted in knots about how to design your email newsletter? Relax. The good news is that people are expecting to read email, which means your words are way more important than your design. Even better news? You can use a template. You don't have to design the thing yourself.

Don't get us wrong. How your newsletter looks is important. You can go for that interesting visual punch while keeping it clean and simple too. Here's how:

- **Make the words easy to read.** People don't expect the same visual stimulation that they do when they visit a web page.
- **Use a custom template.** Use generic templates and your emails will look like every other nonprofit that uses them. Custom templates are created just for you, to match your website, colors, logo and style. Network for Good's EmailNow subscribers can purchase custom templates for only \$99.
- **Give text top billing.** You can still use a stylish design and photos. Just make sure that the text is a priority and wraps cleanly around any graphics. And be sure to stick with basic fonts. Online readers skim more than read, so legibility is even more important. The fonts Verdana, Georgia, Arial and Trebuchet work well online.
- **Give your campaign the five-second test.** Once you've got your draft ready, send it to yourself. When it arrives, pop it open for five seconds and then close it. Then ask yourself: What was this email about?

Your supporters are more interested in what you are saying than in how cool your email looks -- your really cool supporters are reading it on their phones and won't see your design anyway!



## **Step 15: Track Your Email Results to Make Future Campaigns Better**

One of the greatest benefits of online marketing is that metrics are already built into most of the tools. Your ESP, along with managing your mailing list and sending out those messages, will also provide you with data on the health of your email list and on how your campaign messages are working.

### **Monitor Open and Click-through Rates**

The two most common measurements you'll want to check after your message goes out are your open rate and your click-through rate. Your open rate tells you, in part, how many people opened your email. ESPs use a tiny little image they insert into your email to track open rates. But if your supporter has image blocking turned on, she won't see your image and she won't be counted as opening that email. Therefore, your open rate, expressed as a percentage of the emails delivered, is most likely higher than what your ESP reports.

Your click-through rate tells you how many people (and often exactly who) clicked on which links in your email messages. Some ESPs provide more detail than others, but you can generally tell which links were the most popular in your email message.

### **Analyze Which Links Perform Well**

Assuming that your email link sent readers to a page on your website, you'll want to pair up your click-through data with your web stats for that landing page. What happened next? For example, if you include a "Donate Now" link in your email message, how many people clicked on that link? Then how many people actually completed the transaction on your website?

### **Understand Subscriber Responses**

You should also watch what's happening with your email list after you send each message. How many people unsubscribed? How many times was the message forwarded to a friend? Use your

email statistics to help figure out what kind of content your readers are enjoying and acting upon (and what they are ignoring) so that you can create even better content for them in the future.

You can also track how your list is growing over time. List churn is a natural process where a percentage of your email list will go bad each year as people change their email addresses or install more stringent spam blockers. Keep churn in mind as you set list growth goals. For example, if your churn rate is 20%, and you want your list to grow from 1,000 names to 2,000 names, you'll actually need to add 1,200 names.

***A note on benchmarks:*** While benchmarks are helpful, remember that the most important measure of your success is how the people on your mailing list are responding to your nonprofit. While open and click-through rates are easy to measure, they aren't the results you are actually seeking. Focus on more meaningful outcomes instead.

Are more people volunteering, or are they volunteering more often? Are more people telling you they learned about your organization from a friend? Are more people attending your events, writing bigger checks, or signing up for monthly giving programs? It may be difficult to tie these results directly to your email marketing program, but we're confident that if you follow the advice in this checklist, you'll find that your supporters will love you more and will show their love for your good cause in ways that really do matter.

# STEPS 16-21:

## *MAKE YOUR MESSAGING SING*

- Do you know what differentiates your organization and how to highlight that in your messaging?
- Can you answer the four questions your donors have for you?
- Do you encourage one-time donors to become recurring supporters?
- Are your online and offline messages in sync?
- Have you cranked up your WOM (word-of-mouth marketing)?
- Have you taken advantage of search marketing?



## Step 16: Determine Your "Onliness"

*(Hat Tip: Thanks to **Marty Neumeier** for inspiring these tips with his book Zag.)*

Now **point of differentiation** is the foundation of your fundraising messaging. What makes your nonprofit the *only one* of its kind? Taken from one of our favorite books, *Zag* by Marty Neumeier, you need to determine your "onliness" (only-ness): "If you can't say you're the 'only,' go back and start over."

This article is devoted to helping you discover your "onliness." Your unique value proposition will lead you down the path of effective messaging, and here's a short exercise you and your staff/volunteers can do right away to figure it out:

1. **Take a journalistic approach to determining your "onliness."** Break it down with the good ol' five W's and an H: Who (are your constituents), What (is your category), Where (are your constituents located), When (do they need you), Why (are you important) and How (are you different)?
2. **Get an outside-insider's opinion.** Call up a volunteer and ask him/her why s/he's involved with your organization and not Joe's Other Advocacy Group down the street. You might be surprised what a little primary research will do for you: Your view of your differentiator might be way off from what your supporters see.
3. **Complete this phrase: "Our nonprofit is the only \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_."** This gets right to the core of why your organization exists in the first place. What does your animal shelter do that no one else's does? What niche is your nonprofit filling for human services? What populations are you serving that no one else does, and how are you doing it differently?

Take your "onliness" statement from number 3 and use it moving forward to help you make decisions. Will that new program you're considering implementing align with your statement? Does it really make sense for your organization and subsequent communications? How can you position your organization in the fall and year-end fundraising seasons?

***Bonus Tip: Don't Forget to CRAM in the Four Parts of a Great Message***

There are four components to a great message - **connecting** with an audience based on their values (C), **rewarding** (R) your audience, asking for a specific **action** to get that reward, and making it **memorable**. Remember this with the mnemonic device, CRAM! This works for fundraising letters but also for any marketing message. We need a different message for each audience, complete with a unique connection, reward, action, and memory.

Steps to CRAM:

1. **Connect to things your audience cares about:** saving time, feeling good about themselves, feeling powerful, etc.
2. **Identify and offer a compelling reward for taking action.** Remember, good rewards are immediate, personal, credible and reflective of audience values.
3. **Have a clear call to action.** Good actions are specific, feasible and filmable (in other words, easy to visualize doing). They should also measurably advance our mission.
4. **Make it memorable.** We don't want simply to make an impression; we want to make a lasting impression. What makes something memorable? It's memorable if it's different, catchy, personal, tangible and desirable. But a word of caution: memorable elements should always be closely tied to your cause. Think of all the advertisements that were so funny or memorable that you told a friend about them, but when asked what product the ad was for, you were not sure. You don't just need a memorable idea or picture; you need an idea or picture that makes your cause memorable.



## Step 17: Answer the Four Questions All Donors Have

*(Hat Tip: Thanks to **Katya Andresen** and Robin Hood Marketing for the following tips!)*

Now that you have a message that highlights your “onliness,” make sure it answers four questions required to turn interest into a donation. Here’s the checklist:

- **Why me?** Your audience needs to care about what you are doing. Show them why what you're doing is personally relevant to them. They need to connect to you on a human level. Use pictures, tell stories and do anything that can help your audience relate.
- **Why now?** Most people donate online on two occasions. The first is towards the end of the year; people are in charitable mindsets and looking to make year-end tax contributions. The other is when there's a humanitarian crisis such as Hurricane Katrina. What do you do the rest of the year?
  - Create a sense of urgency and immediacy in your appeal. Explain why a donation is needed right now.
  - Break down what you are currently doing and show any immediately understandable or visible results that will make people want to take action.
  - Get a friend to ask them to donate. Peer-to-peer fundraising adds its own brand of urgency and persuasion.
- **What for?** People know you're a nonprofit organization and you need donations to help your cause. But where exactly is a donor's money going? What will they get in return for their donation - personally and in terms of your programs?

- Don't just focus on need; focus on specifically explaining the impact a donation will make.
  - Show them that you will take care of their money so a potential donor knows it won't be wasted or inefficiently used.
  - Clearly show which programs are being helped by a donation or what good will result.
  - Share human interest stories and success stories. Share how other donors made an impact or how donors impacted other individuals in need.
- **Who says?** The messenger is often as important as the message. Use trustworthy messengers - people you've actually helped or other donors instead of just you. People say friends and family are the most influential in determining where they give money, so also think about how you can get your supporters to speak for you among their own circles of influence.



## Step 18: Turn One-time Givers into Recurring Donors

Thinking about monthly giving is one of the smartest things you can do as a fundraiser. At Network for Good, we find that 30-40% of the donation volume for a nonprofit website is monthly giving, and that would be a great situation to find all nonprofits in—thanking people every month instead of asking them for donations every few weeks.

How do you do that? How do you turn your annual givers into monthly supporters?

- **Make sure your donation form asks what type of gift the donor wants to make** ("Do you want to give us a monthly gift?"). Whenever you're asking for money, ask for the monthly pledge, not just a one-time gift.
- **Revisit the language you're using in your appeals.** Frame your ask in such a way that it's a win-win situation—monthly donations for you, convenience and budgeting for your donors.
- **Package the appeal in an exciting way.** For example, some organizations have an ambassador program or a sponsor-a-child every month program. Put a face on that sustainable gift. This way you're creating some tangible tie to the idea of giving monthly.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for a monthly gift of support after someone completes a one-time transaction.** It can be ingrained as a nice thank-you message: "Thank you so much for making a one-time gift. This is how you can put your support to work for us each and every month. Would you consider becoming a monthly supporter?" We've seen great success in converting first-time online donors into monthly donors by doing that within the first three days of them making their first online gift.



## Step 19: Make Sure Your Online and Offline Tactics Mesh

Online fundraising only makes up a portion of your overall marketing plan during this fundraising season. It's not a stand-alone initiative—it's an integrated part of your communications strategy. Not only is your strategy multi-faceted, but your donors are too!

Below, check out our tips for integrating your offline and online tactics to best reach your donors across all channels:

### Offline Mailing Tips:

- **Ask your donors their preference.** No, we're not talking about pizza toppings or movie genres. Reach out to your donors and find out what communications and donation options they prefer. You may think the majority of your folks are strictly offline (or exclusively online). Don't assume! Get to know them!
- **Send a cultivation mailer to your lapsed donors inviting them to visit your website.** Direct them to a special page on your site that makes an appeal for why they should make another gift this fall. Make this landing page compelling.
- **Use email to boost direct mail response.** Remember: Your donors hang out in multiple channels, and you want to give them options. You can email your subscribers telling them to watch the mail, or wait for the call. You can also try following up a special appeal with an email, saying, "We hope you read our recent letter, just click here to make your donation online today. It's convenient and saves us money." The first renewal effort might be conducted by email, followed by the usual multi-letter series, and eventually a phone call.

- **Develop a program to gradually gather the e-mail addresses of direct-mail donors who want to add email to their communications with you.** Test asks in the direct mail (P.S., buckslip, reply device, etc.) and track response to find the most effective and least expensive ways to gather e-mail addresses without depressing gift response.
- **Follow up with email.** Email is the fastest and cheapest way to let your donors know what happened after they donated. If your donation appeal made the situation seem urgent, your donors will be left scratching their heads if they don't hear anything else from you about it.
- **Create complementary content.** Entice donors reading your printed communications to visit your website for "exclusive" content. Not sure what to offer? Maybe you have educational tips ("Download 10 tips for managing your diabetes!") or other downloads of content people can't get from a postcard or letter.

#### **Tips for Other Channels to Consider:**

- **Events.** Having a fundraising walk? Hosting an educational program? Create an email list sign-up sheet to capture in-person email opt-ins.
- **Marketing collateral.** Craft your call to action on your brochures and handouts--and let that action have an online option! If you're requesting donations, give potential donors the address/directions to donate online if they so choose. Remember: Include your website on everything you print/produce.
- **Business cards.** In a previous article we advised building your email list in a variety of ways, including email opt-in information in your email signature. Next time you order business cards, why not include a small call to action? (Ex: Donate online at... Or, Visit our website to learn more...)
- **Phone calls.** Did you just collect a donation over the phone? Does a donor want some follow up? Try this: After you finish a telemarketing call, tell the donor, "We'd like to send you a receipt to acknowledge your gift. The most efficient way is via e-mail - that way we don't have to waste paper and postage." (Thanks to Madeline Stanionis for this tip!)



## Step 20: Crank Up Your WOM to Spread the Word

In this "back to basics" step, we'd like to share a few practices of how to get your word-of-mouth marketing away from your Board meetings and into the marketplace where it can thrive:

1. **Find other people to talk about you.** Just because you're on the payroll doesn't mean that you can't talk shop outside the office--make sure co-workers are doing their part, too. Get your Board out there. Court bloggers. And, of course, tap into your pool of volunteers.
2. **Give 'em something to talk about.** Turn your talkers into story-tellers. You and your web of supporters have passion about what your organization does. Let your advocates explain why.
3. **Give 'em a way to talk about it.** Give your story-tellers outlets: handouts, collateral and online opportunities (message boards, blogs, etc.). Remember: Social proof is a powerful tool.
4. **When people talk back, yell at them.** Wait. Strike that. Don't yell at them. LISTEN to them. What are people saying about you? What's the public's impression of your organization or your current campaign? Pay attention, and then...
5. **Join in the conversation again.** You and your band of merry men/women got the ball rolling with your word-of-mouth campaign. Now it's time to engage the people who are responding. Be tactful and true to your organization, but most of all, be real. You enlisted people to spread your message. Now, show them that your

organization is full of people (not a marketing machine) who care about their response.

Keep in mind that you can apply both offline and online tactics to the above strategy. Being a marketer means getting the message out—whether it's at the computer or over coffee—and engaging with those who hear it.



## Step 21: Seek Out Search Marketing Success (and perhaps some alliteration along the way)

You use search engines like Google and Yahoo! every day, and so do your donors. But what happens when a prospective donor types in the name of your nonprofit or your issue area in Google? Is your organization at the top of the results? The good news is that it can be, through Search Engine Marketing (SEM).

In a nutshell, SEM is a way to promote your website by increasing its visibility in search engine results. Sound complicated? Here's the good news:

1. SEM is common sense
2. If you are a nonprofit, SEM is free, thanks to Google
3. Getting started with SEM is as easy as 7 steps

***First, why should you care about SEM?*** Let's say you are a small AIDS prevention nonprofit in Boise, Idaho. It's December 30, and several Boise residents have logged onto Google to search for a charity to donate to so they can get a last minute tax deduction. These potential donors might do a Google search for "boise aids charity." If your nonprofit doesn't pop-up near the top of the search results, these donors may never find you.

**So, how can you make sure your organization DOES get to the top?** There are two ways: either organically by designing a website that is search-engine friendly, or by paying a search engine to place your ads prominently in their search results.

Here we are going to focus on paid search, since Google Grants provides free paid placement to 501(c)(3) nonprofits.

Here's how to get started in 7 steps:

1. **Signup for Google Grants:** Google promises to process all applications within six months. Once your application is processed, you can begin advertising your nonprofit on Google Adwords. If you don't want to wait, you can setup a paid Adwords account and begin to experiment for as little as \$10 a month.
2. **Take five minutes to write your first ad.** Not sure what to say? CRAM! (See Step 16.)
3. **Develop your keywords:** A keyword is the search word or phrase that you "buy" from Google (i.e., boise aids charity). Ask yourself which keywords-word combinations and phrases you would type into the Google search box to find your organization's programs and services. Select as many keywords as you like. (Note: Google Grants will only pay for keywords up to \$1.00).
4. **Still not sure which keywords to select?** Go to [www.google.com/keywords](http://www.google.com/keywords) for suggestions. You can type in the address of your website and Google will even make recommendations on what keywords to use.
5. **Target your audience:** Through Google AdWords, you can create a variety of groups of ads for different audiences, as well as target your ads to different geographic locations (i.e. Boise) and even languages.
6. **Test, test, test:** Create two versions of the same ad: one that points to your website, and one that points directly to your donation page. See which does better.
7. **Track your results:** When people search on Google, your ad is displayed and traffic is driven to your website. But how do you know if anyone is clicking? Google's dashboards provide an easy way for you to proactively monitor the status of your keywords and their associated ads.

# STEPS 22-25:

## ***TROUBLESHOOT YOUR MARKETING***

Feel like your marketing strategies and tactics aren't working? Ask yourself the following questions and remember this: Marketing is an iterative process and you'll undoubtedly make changes as you go!

- Do you suffer from "*Field of Dreams Syndrome*"?
- Have you come down with a case of "*It's All About Us Disease*"?
- Are you feeling the symptoms of the "*Call to Inaction Condition*"?
- Have you taken preventative steps to avoid "*Death by Thanklessness*"?



## Step 22: Cure Yourself of “*Field of Dreams Syndrome*”

A mythical voice telling you that “if you build it, they will come” might sound less mysterious and more like your Board chairperson when you’re in the context of online fundraising discussions:

*“Just put a button on our home page!”*

*“Write something like ‘Sign up to receive our e-newsletter’ somewhere on the site.”*

*“Create a Facebook page and call it a day!”*

Unfortunately, these tactics are not goals in and of themselves. A donate button does not ensure online donations. An email capture does not ensure list growth.

Instead, you need to employ real strategies and enticing storytelling techniques to get the attention of your supporters and potential donors.

Check out these resources to learn more and cure yourself of this pesky (but all too common) ailment:

- **The Learning Center:** [www.fundraising123.org](http://www.fundraising123.org)
- **Nonprofit 911 training series:** [www.nonprofit911.org](http://www.nonprofit911.org)
- **Weekly online fundraising webinars:** [www1.networkforgood.org/free-weekly-online-fundraising-webinars](http://www1.networkforgood.org/free-weekly-online-fundraising-webinars)
- **Network for Good’s online fundraising services:** [www1.networkforgood.org/for-nonprofits](http://www1.networkforgood.org/for-nonprofits)



## Step 23: Treat Your “It’s All about Us Disease”

“All about us disease” is also known as “nonprofit narcissism.” If your homepage or your email newsletters read like an “about us” page or self-portrait, you may have this problem. If your appeals simply talk about what you need, and you keep telling your donors what your need over and over again, you have a problem.

What's the problem? You're having a one-way conversation. Here's an example: We wouldn't come up to you at a Starbucks, hand you our life story and say, “Hi, I'm so and so. I was born in 1967. I care about good causes. I work in marketing. I'm a really good person; therefore, you should be my friend. Won't you be my friend right now?”

### **You would think we were nuts.**

But how many times do we do this in our materials? We cite the year we were founded, our mission statement and then ask for money. That's a monologue, not a true conversation – and you want to have a conversation with your donors.

There are 119 new nonprofits being formed every day. All of them need money. All of them are good causes. All of them have mission statements. It's just not enough to assume need alone will get someone to pledge.

You'll learn how to have a better message here: You want to talk WITH your audience about how you are personally relevant to them. You want to paint a picture of what they can accomplish, together with you.

In other words, you want a message that's all about them, not simply about you.



## Step 24: Turn that “Call to *In*action” Upside Down (well, you get the idea)

A lot of campaigns fall down because they lack a strong or clear call to action. If we went up to you carrying a banner saying, “Save the Earth,” you would smile and say, sure I want to save the earth. But what would you go home and do? That’s not a specific call to action. Good calls to action are highly specific, easy and very feasible for someone to do.

If we say to you: “Would you commit to rolling out a blue recycling cart on Wednesdays with your paper products from your household?” That is a very specific call to action (unlike “saving the earth”), and you are much more likely to do something that doesn’t sound that hard.

Here are the four steps you can take to improve your call to action:

1. **Know and respect your audience.**
  - Have a mindset of humility. That means thinking of your audience before yourself.
  - People have limitless options to spend their time and money. It is important to quickly and confidently create a powerful case for why people should donate to you.
  - Honor your audience and respect their time by getting straight to the point, making it easy for them and addressing what they care about.
2. **Don't market the mission. Market a specific action.** Reverse the way you think. Focus on how the audience will take in your message in as opposed to how you will get your message out. Start with the audience and what you specifically want them to do. Avoid vague generalities, larger goals and mission statements. Give people something specific to do.

3. **Construct your call to action.** A good call to action will be all of the following: highly specific, feasible, free of barriers, filmable and first priority.
4. **Communicate your call to action.** There are three ways to communicate your call to action: through your website, through email and direct mail and through Web 2.0 - the social networks, blogs and user oriented web communities. Segment your audience and present personal and unique messages to different groups. Shorter is better in online communications. People tend to scan rather than read, in fact a study shows that changing the words "Read More" to "Continue" dramatically improved response rates. Keep it short and sweet.



## Step 25: Take Preventative Steps to Avoid “Death by Thanklessness”

The number one reason why people stop supporting a nonprofit is because of how they were treated by that nonprofit. Donors complain about too many appeals and not enough information on what their money accomplished.

Treat your donor like a hero, not an ATM machine. Here are three ideas:

1. **Thank your donors three times as often as you appeal for donations.** You read that correctly: Three times as often. Say thank you. Send an update. (Heck, you might even drive up your website traffic in the process!) Highlight a program, person or other aspect of your organization that the generous donation went toward. Think about the last time you received a thank-you note—didn't it just make you feel all warm and fuzzy?
2. **Make your thank-you message personal.** A person cannot be thanked enough, unless the thank you is a corny form letter. You can spare your supporters from receiving a single one. (Trust us: Donors can tell the difference.) Consider hand-written notes, phone calls or some personalization in your email message at least. When crafting your letter, check out the four parts of a great message and don't let another "Dear Donor" message happen to you!
3. **Show your donors their impact: Be transparent!** How did your organization spend their money? Who did they help? Be accountable. If I know that I saved Spot the dog from being euthanized, show me a picture of Spot. The most important thing is to be genuine.



## **Bonus: 10 Things You Need to Do Prior to Diving into Social Media**

Social networks are shiny and exciting. Millions of people are connecting on them every minute of the day. They're passionate and engaged.

They must be ripe for the fundraising picking, right?

Whoa there, farmer Joe: There are number of things you need to check prior to building profiles, making "friends" and Tweeting to the world.

If you pass the quiz below with flying colors, you can begin the research phase associated with social networking (find out where your supporters are already spending time online; decide which medium is most appropriate for your audiences; etc.). Not there yet? Use the questions as the seed for a strategic online action plan.

So, how does your nonprofit stack up?

1. **Is your URL guessable?** Imagine one of your supporters (we'll call her Sally) describing your organization to a friend or colleague (his name is Bob). Sally paints such an incredible picture of the impact you're making and the value of your programs. Next time Bob hops onto the Internet, he thinks, "Ooh, I want to check out that nonprofit Sally recommended." If Bob types in the name of your organization with a .org at the end, will he find you? Or, do you have dots, dashes and a venerable Morse code situation going on? Make it easy for potential supporters and search engines to find your nonprofit.
2. **Do you use website design strategically?** Notice the inclusion of the word "strategically," and the absence of the word "beautifully." Whether you have a work of art

for your homepage or a Spartan site, it needs to be effective. From big donate buttons to compelling language, make your site user-friendly.

3. **Do you provide relevant content?** If homepages could collect dust, would yours be in dire need of a Swiffer? What entices you to keep reading when you're doing your own Web-surfing? Timely, interesting, compelling content. If your cause was mentioned in the news, share it on your website. If your program changed someone's life—a constituent or volunteer, for instance—share that person's story. The same things that make marketing and journalism successful will make your website copy sing.
4. **Can you collect email addresses on your website?** Points one through three were ones to mull and consider; this one's a simple yes or no. Have you made it easy, clear and enticing to sign up directly for email communications? (And by "enticing," we mean something other than, "Get Our Newsletter." Make your emails sound exclusive and valuable.) This simple mechanism will make your life easier (hooray, automation!), as well as your supporter's. If you're using an email marketing service like EmailNow you can quickly create a sign-up form to embed right into your website.
5. **Can you accept online donations on your website?** Regardless of their donation preference, 65 percent of all supporters will check out your website prior to making a donation. While they're in this "open-minded moment" (considering contributing), make it easy for them to donate right then and there. Web users are no longer shocked at the idea of making online contributions; a shocking discovery, instead, would be *not* having the ability to donate from your website.
6. **Do you tell your story through pictures, videos or podcasts?** Remember your writing 101 lessons from high school: When you're writing, *show* people, don't *tell* them. The same carries into our nonprofit messaging, and now we have other resources in addition to our words. Make visiting your website and watching your event presentations more exciting and engaging by using visuals and audio. (Note: Put a photo on your homepage—a big one. Consider making it a photo of a face to create a fast-track to engagement.)

7. **Do you have a blog?** Maybe your website is under lock and key, making it difficult to update and keep chocked full of timely information. Blog to the rescue! In addition to its traditional outreach and dialogue-encouraging uses, blogs serve a number of purposes: increase your search engine optimization, improve credibility and improve transparency, to name just a few. If a blog seems like the right fit for your audiences and your staff (emphasis on the "if"), be sure to brush up on some blog and blogger basics in the Learning Center.
8. **Do you use email marketing to drive traffic back to your website?** When you get your supporters in the habit of visiting your site often, it will deepen the connection they feel with your organization. The more time they're spending on your website, the greater number of times they'll see your call to donate and all that dynamic content you're posting.
9. **Can people find your website in search engines?** That friend of a friend who's searching for your organization online may turn to his trusted search engine of choice to locate you (whether it be Google, Yahoo!, MSN, etc.). Have you done any work to improve your "search engine optimization" (SEO)? There are some brilliant techie folks who have written entire books and training courses about this process, but never fear: A few small tweaks can go a long way.
10. **Do you publish your URL on every communication, both online and offline?** Yay - another yes-or-no question to round out the checklist! Are you plastering your URL on everything you type, print, send, email, mail, publish, etc.? Is it on the final slide of every presentation you make? Is it in your email signature? There's no such thing as putting your organization's website in "too many" places.

What's the moral of this checklist's story?

***You need to have your website, email marketing and online-fundraising ducks in a row prior moving into the social-networking space.***



## **Bonus: A Four-letter Word That Won't Get You into Trouble with Supporters**

For a sector defined by its lack of revenue ("nonprofit"), we sure talk about money a lot with our audiences—as in fundraising dollars, grants, special event tickets and so on, especially during our year-end push.

**But what four-letter word do supporters *want* to hear?** What model should you incorporate into your organization's culture (during the end of 2009 and into 2010) to better connect with supporters and potential supporters?

*Free.*

For all the money and engagement you're requesting from supporters for tickets, donations and other expenses, one model for success your organization should consider is this: "inspire and connect now, reap all sorts of benefits—including monetary ones—later."

Here are few tips for getting "free" out the door and supporters strolling in:

1. **Incorporate "free" into your branding goals and strategy.** Put yourself in your supporters' shoes for a second. When they receive an email from your organization, what's their first thought? "Oh, no, not another fundraising appeal!" Remember this: You do not dictate your brand—others do. Make sure your stakeholders are in a position to look at your nonprofit in a positive light. Organize events without a price tag (sure, you can accept donations, but don't require them); send your supporters a recent news article relevant to your mission just because you think they'd be interested; let them know what services you provided your constituents because of previous generosity. These freebies allow you to put a face to your organization, as opposed to an open palm.

2. **Offer "freebies" on your website to empower your supporters to become your champions.** Maybe you started a Facebook page or Cause, and your base is growing. Great. Now what? Empower your group's members to do the work for you! Upload great content for your supporters to spread on your organization's behalf. This approach is great for at least three reasons: one, you're engaging your current supporters and cultivating your relationships; two, it's cheaper than trying to reach new networks on your own; and, three, your supporters are giving more credibility to your nonprofit than you can. Add a section to your website and Cause page with great content: podcasts, videos, text to Tweet with (that's info to post on Twitter), links, stories, etc. Make it as easy as possible for your message to go viral.
3. **Set goals that do not have \*direct\* revenue goals attached to them.** As a fundraising, marketing, executive-directing guru, you want to see your returns on investment (who doesn't?). Be sure to integrate some "free" initiatives into your marketing campaigns to achieve results other than direct donations: raise awareness about your cause or a timely event (a vote set to happen in your neighborhood, state, etc.), inspire volunteers and donors to act again, spread your message, and get advocacy efforts of the ground. This is another relationship-building opportunity; your supporters are people, not ATM's, so find out what types of activities they want you to offer.
4. **Become a media contact dynamo.** Create some free content that helps establish your organization as an expert in your field. (You are one, right?) Publish an article or blog entry on your website. Share some research you've done. Start following relevant blogs and join in the conversations. The end result? You're the media and blogger go-to when they need info about your topic. Note: We're not advocating you go and yell your unsolicited message *at* people. Listen, react, converse, repeat.

These four "freebie" strategies will strengthen relationships with various groups: donors, volunteers, advocates, the media and other supporters. Investing your energy and time now (yes, we realize those certainly aren't free!), you're much more likely to convert those relationships into donations later. Wouldn't you be more likely to give a friend a dollar than a stranger? Be that empowering and generous friend to your supporters.

## Next Steps

Throughout the 25 Steps above we shared information and tips for kicking your online presence into high gear to achieve stellar fall and holiday fundraising results.

At the heart of these tips is the crème de la crème of tips (hint: check out Step 4): **You need to allow donors to support you online.** And, not only do you want to accept gifts on the Web, you want to give your donors the easiest, most inviting donation process possible.

What better way to do that than with a donation form that matches your website? Or, perhaps an additional page that's branded to match your fall/holiday 2009 campaign messaging and graphics?

Let our team at Network for Good provide an incentive that may get you over the hump of indecision as to whether now's the time to partner with a fellow nonprofit to increase your fundraising success:

*When you subscribe to Custom DonateNow at regular price, we'll give you FREE set-up for a second donation page!*

*Visit [www.networkforgood.org/apply](http://www.networkforgood.org/apply) and use the discount code "FALL2009" to get started, or call 888.284.7978 x1 to speak with one of our fundraising specialists who can provide more information.*



## **About Network for Good**

### *The Home of Easy & Affordable Online Fundraising*

At Network for Good, we don't just give you a DonateNow button--we help you make sure people click on it. And we don't just give you an email tool--we help you run a great campaign. We help you become an online fundraising and marketing superhero without superhuman effort or a big budget.

Here is a few of the ways how we can help nonprofits success online:

1. Easy, affordable fundraising solutions: Get donations on your website with [DonateNow](#)
2. Email campaign and newsletter tools: [EmailNow](#) for sending and tracking mass emails that also tells you what messages work best
3. Free weekly fundraising and marketing tips: [Sign up here](#) for great advice in your inbox each week
4. [Fundraising123.org](#): Our free online learning center is filled with ideas and best practices on what it takes to be an online fundraising superhero

We're biased, but we think there are many good reasons to work with us:

- Kinship. We understand you because we're a nonprofit too
- Value. We handle the tough parts of fundraising for you – like state registrations
- ROI. Our customers raise \$25 for every dollar they spend
- Support. We provide lots of training and support via phone, email and chat

We can't wait to help you fundraise online, and we'd love to talk to you about that important topic. Network for Good has a team of online fundraising experts ready to discuss how Network for Good can help your organization raise money online. Feel free to give us a call at 888.284.7978 or email us at [fundraising123@networkforgood.org](mailto:fundraising123@networkforgood.org). We will be happy to contact you to schedule a personal demonstration of what Network for Good's online fundraising services can do for your organization.

We are pleased to have you join the thousands of fundraisers who rely on Network for Good to help them become online fundraising superheroes. We look forward to speaking with you soon!

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