



Ten Ways to Raise More Funds Over the Internet



Use these Internet keys to increase donations.

By Gene Austin

As Americans migrate to the Internet in increasing numbers, online fundraising campaigns are gaining ground. You can now use the Internet as a tool to create long-lasting e-relationships with donors and constituents. To make each online campaign as effective as possible, follow these steps:

1. Determine Objectives

Before launching an online fundraising campaign, you must clearly understand your strategic objectives. Setting objectives will sharpen your messages and help you measure results.

Suppose, for instance, that your campaign goal is to improve awareness and acquire new donors among younger supporters. This campaign might include four e-mails, sent over a 12-week period.

The goal of the first e-mail might be to engage this younger demographic by providing an update on your organization's activities, while the second e-mail could be an invitation to a special event for younger supporters. The third might include a fundraising appeal, followed by a reminder to those who haven't yet donated.

Offer donors the chance to receive personalized information that matches their interests.

2. Segment Your E-Mail List to Target Specific Audiences

Improve response rates by segmenting your e-mail file based on constituent interests, donation history, or other characteristics.

Use this information to target donors with specific messages. Here are a few techniques for gathering such data:

- Regularly ask constituents to volunteer information about themselves, which will allow more personalized communications.
- Conduct "profiling drives," offering donors the opportunity to receive personalized information that matches their interests.
- Ask donors and prospects for zip code information, which you can use to send communications about events or news in their communities.

3. Cross-Market to Reach More Donors

One benefit of creating a database of e-mail addresses along with a detailed profile of each constituent is the ability to cross-market. Say,

for example, a group of constituents has volunteered for your organization but never donated. Send them a targeted e-mail thanking them for past support, and re-engage them with an update on a recent organization event or project. After re-establishing that relationship, send another e-mail encouraging a donation.

4. Create Compelling Messages that People Read (The TRUST Rule)

To ensure that each e-mail message generates an optimal response, follow the TRUST rule. Be sure each e-mail is:

- **T**imely: Time e-mail messages around an event, holiday, or something else that's happening in the near future.
- **R**elevant: Include information specific to each constituent's interests.
- **U**rgent: Explain why the recipient needs to act immediately.
- **S**pecific: Make sure readers know exactly what you want them to do (for example, donate or sign up for an event).
- **T**ested: Test the message before sending to the entire list to ensure all links work. Also, run it through a spam checker to weed out elements that might prevent delivery. Test the message content for effectiveness by sending two or more messages with a varied element (such as the subject line) in each message to a percentage of the target audience. Then, send the most effective message to the rest of the audience.

Test the message before sending to the entire list.

5. Build Context in Which Supporters Can Participate

Provide context and create urgency by challenging supporters to participate in specific drives with stated deadlines and goals. Create the context or use an exist-

ing context such as a breaking event and then make it easy for supporters to take action.

Time e-mail messages around an event, holiday, or something else that's happening in the near future.

6. Create Multi-Phased E-Mail Appeals

Include a series of communications to maximize response. In the first message, you might announce a campaign and explain how the funds you raise will be used. A second message, sent only to those who did not respond to the first, could remind recipients about the campaign and encourage response. A third message might tell recipients how the campaign has progressed and ask for help so your organization can meet its goal.

7. Include Dedicated Web Site Pages

Extend the reach of an online campaign with a landing page — a Web page where the constituent goes to get details about a campaign and make a donation. Also consider creating a dynamic personal campaign page that recognizes and thanks the donor, shows the donor's past contributions, and offers the opportunity to give again.

8. Provide Giving Level Options

Include several options so donors can give at their preferred level, and display the options based on the donor's last contribution. For example, if a donor gave \$100 one month, the next time he visits the site, he would see giving options for \$100 and more, encouraging increasingly larger gifts. Also, offer sustainer-giving options that allow repeat donors to set up recurring online payments.

9. Offer Convenient Online Donation Processing

Allowing donors to give online enables you to receive funds

immediately and automatically. Today's advanced software for nonprofits features donation-processing capabilities, including configurable online donation forms, so that you can choose the exact donation options you prefer on your Web site.

10. Give Ongoing Feedback

Donors may wonder, "What happened to my donation? Did it make a difference?" Keep constituents involved by telling them how your organization used their contributions. Send regular e-mail updates to let them know about campaign progress. This simple act helps people feel that their donations have impact so they're more likely to give again.

In summary, by using the Internet to develop strong relationships, you can better target and sustain communications with donors. This, in turn, will help drive giving to your organization. Today's advanced technology solutions foster a more interactive approach to fundraising and should be incorporated into every nonprofit's campaigns. ■

Resources

Allen, Nick, "Using E-Mail & the Web to Acquire & Cultivate Donors," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 21, No. 1.

Bhagat, Vinay, "Beyond the Single E-Mail Message: Running Effective E-Mail Campaigns," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 23, No. 3.

Crooke, David, "E-Mail Deliverability: Increase Your Chances of E-Mail Getting Through," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 23, No. 2.

These articles are available free at www.snpo.org/members.

Gene Austin is CEO of Austin-based Convio, Inc. (www.convio.com), a market-leading provider of software and services to help nonprofits use the Internet for developing strong constituent relationships to drive fundraising, marketing, advocacy, and other forms of support.