



How Often Should You Ask Donors to Give?

Like many things in marketing, best practices can be counter-intuitive.

Q: How often can we request donations by mail? And how often by e-mail?

A: Some nonprofits go directly to donors for an answer to that slippery question; and, predictably, donors say to contact them only once a year. Taking that advice is a great way to lose donors to rapid attrition—perhaps even destroy the base of your donor pyramid. The problem is simple: What your donors believe about their own behavior seldom reflects *what they actually do*.

And what donors actually do is what matters in building revenues for your nonprofit.

Like many things in marketing, best practices can be counter-intuitive. Many nonprofit managers may not want to believe anything that contradicts their own gut feelings. But those feelings—and the off-hand thoughts of donors—are irrelevant when they contradict what marketing science has taught nonprofits about donor behavior.

After testing what works best for their organizations, some large organizations mail monthly with three or four e-mails in between! You may believe your nonprofit is different from these organizations, and you may be right... *in some ways*.

You're giving donors an opportunity to share in the joy of what you do.

But, remember, these larger charities have not only measured what works with remarkable precision, they also compete with you for a limited number of charitable dollars. Donor loyalty isn't a given. If you aren't in there pitching, your donors will move to charities that appeal more regularly. That's not a guess; it's a reality proven in live-market testing.

Four mailings a year—not including newsletters—is the minimum for just about any nonprofit; six is better, even for the smallest organizations. And one or two e-mails each month is certainly well within bounds.

If these figures sound high, remember, giving is the only way most of your donors take part in your organization's mission. So you're not begging; you're giving them an opportunity to share in the joy of what you do.

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President, Blue Crane Creative

Deduction for Paying Charity Bills?

Can the president of a nonprofit deduct bills paid?

Q: Can the president of our struggling 501(c)(3) organization take a tax deduction for personally paying most of our expenses during our first year in operation?

A: Yes. A donor may claim a deduction for contributions made "to or for the use of" a charitable organization. The organization ought to acknowledge the payments and state that no goods or services have been received in return (assuming that is the case) so that the president has the substantiation letter if ever audited by the IRS. ■

Don Kramer
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Be sure you acknowledge the payments.



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