Online Strategies for Year-End Fundraising
These 10 simple steps will get you ready for year–end fundraising.

Did you know that most organizations receive half of their annual online donations during November and December? What you're doing now to build enthusiasm with your loyal supporters and engage new supporters will make a big difference in meeting or exceeding your year-end goals.

Mid-year is the perfect time for a plan check-up. Pat yourself on the back for all you've accomplished so far and start working on implementing some simple strategies that can make a big year-end impact.

Think of these 10 steps as your mid-year checklist — to help you ensure year-end success. Check off the strategies you've already put in place and pick a few of your favorites to implement now so you maximize your efforts for end-of-year appeals.

1. Capture E-Mail Addresses for Your Offline Donors

More and more supporters are open to engaging with you online, even if they choose to donate offline. Capturing e-mail addresses for your offline donors will allow you to implement a multi-channel approach, which has been proven to be the most effective strategy.

Whenever you can — at events, through direct-mail response cards, via telemarketing, and so on — gather e-mail addresses from your supporters. The best way to encourage people to give you their e-mail addresses is to offer specific calls-to-action that are only available online. For example, tell people that if they register for an event on your Web site, they'll receive a premium or a special "early-bird" rate.

Also, in your offline communications, note reasons to visit your Web site. For instance, tell people they can go to your site to see user-contributed photos and stories. Or let them know that your site is a quick, easy place for them to update their mailing address and other contact information.

Your online relationship begins with capturing an e-mail address. Only with a growing e-mail list can your organization thrive online.

2. Use a Multi-Channel Approach (If You Aren't Already)

Adopt a multi-channel approach to convert prospects acquired online into donors. To maximize conversion rate, use e-mail first, followed up by mail, then by telemarketing.

In your direct mail, provide incentives for people to give online. Some popular incentives include drawings, give-aways, receiving an e-mail tax receipt, or having the person's gift be matched by a major donor.

According to research, direct-mail donors who also receive e-mail give two times more and renew at 10% higher rates than those receiving e-mail alone. According to a joint study by Convio and StrategicOne, "the increased value of adding an online donation and solicitation channel for donors acquired offline is $44.71 (a 39% increase) per donor over 12 months."

> **Pick a few of your favorites to implement now.**

3. Get to Know Your Supporters

Your supporters are made up of many diverse groups, each with unique needs. You must segment them into groups so you can communicate relevant information to each one. Segmenting your list and then targeting groups with communications and appeals based on their interests, donation history, gender, age, length of membership, or any other defining characteristic will result in higher response rates.

Know who your supporters are and what they care about. Understand which donors, activists, and volunteers are most active, and devise special programs to keep them engaged.

Regularly ask supporters for information about themselves to help you improve your targeted messaging. Include questions in your online surveys, direct-mail response cards, and sign-up sheets at events.

4. Segment Your Welcome Messages

Do you have a welcome series to cultivate prospects — a series of messages you send over several weeks or months to introduce people to your organization and start building your relationship with them? It's great if you do. But take it up a level, and create a different welcome series for each type of supporter. Creating "pathways" for each supporter type is key to maximizing people's experience on your Web site.

A solid, professional welcome series sets the tone for the relationship, creates an identifiable voice for your organization, and educates new constituents about your mission before they start getting appeals. Create a welcome series to thank first-time donors for their support, communicate how their funds are being used, and eventually build up to asking for their continued support year-round. After new supporters have "graduated" from the welcome series, add their names to your other communications so you can further cultivate these relationships.

Never send requests for funds to people who just signed up to your list. They haven't been properly cultivated (that's what your welcome messages are for), and it's one of the fastest ways to make them feel you're treating them like an ATM machine.

5. Be Transparent with Your Communications

To keep supporters engaged, provide regular updates on how the funds you raise are being used. You can include these updates in your e-mail communications and on your Web site.

You'll make your e-mail and Web site messaging more engaging by highlighting specific goals, recent successes, and inspirational stories. Equipping your supporters with this type of information will give them even more reason (and confidence) to spread the word.

6. Promote a Sustainer or Pledge Giving Program

The donors who supported you last year likely had to be selective about their charities. These donors may be especially inclined to be loyal to you. They may well be open to giving recurring donations or paying their annual donation amount throughout the year.

"Sustaining donors" and "pledge donors" typically renew at rates 10-20% higher than single-gift donors. It's important to offer reasons for people to give on a recurring basis or to pledge a larger commitment that they can pay out over time.

7. Optimize Your Home Page

This is a great time to make improvements to your home page that don't necessarily require a redesign. Here are a few best practices for your home page:

- **Have a strong message.** Surprisingly, many home pages don't tell visitors what the organization does. Be sure you clearly state your mission on your home page in 15 words or less, and provide a compelling call to action.

- **Decrease the clutter on your home page** to promote opportunities for visitors to get involved. Move your engagement opportunities "above the fold." After you tell Web site visitors who you are and what you do, be clear about the actions you want them to take.

- **Improve your registration opportunities.** Aim to have one or more sign-up opportunities above the fold. Make sure you have a form on the page, not just a link or button. Have compelling reasons for your top three audiences to register with you. There are many effective tactics you can use to motivate online registrations, such as downloadable content, contests, drawings, e-cards, polls, pledges, and premiums.

- **Make your online registration simple.** Capture e-mail address, first name, last name, and ZIP at most. You can use a second page to ask for additional information — such as interests and chances to opt into other e-mail communications.

The Five-Second Test

Ask a few friends to look at your home page for five seconds. Then close it, and ask your friends to write down what they remember. Effective Web sites tell visitors within seconds of their arrival:

1. **where** they are
2. **what** they can do
3. **why** they should act.

8. Create Targeted Web Site Content

Your Web site is the primary way many supporters stay informed about what your organization is doing. So make sure it speaks to them. Target content to your various audiences, based on their needs and interests.

> **Offer specific calls-to-action that are only available online.**

9. Make Your E-Mail Newsletter More Engaging

An e-mail newsletter is a prospecting tool, so sending the same version to everyone isn't appropriate. You ought to have at least two variations of your e-newsletter. One should go to prospects and non-donors. The second should go to current donors.

Follow these tips to get the most from your e-newsletter:

- **Be sure your segmented newsletter shows** that you know the recipients. Consider adding content based on their relationship with you. Have they donated this year? Do they volunteer? Have they attended events? Have they done team event fundraising? Does your newsletter engage them and build on your relationship with them?

- **Include clear calls to action** such as "Update Your Address," "Learn More," or "Share Your Story."

- **Put the Donate and Tell-a-Friend links** above the fold.

10. Tap into the Power of Social Media Marketing

Social media isn't a silver bullet. But it does help extend the reach of your communications to a broader audience. And it can leverage existing support to spread the word about your organization.

There's a seemingly endless number of technologies at your disposal that your supporters are using every day. Before diving in, take these steps to make the best choices:

- **Use the tools yourself.** Listen to what your constituents are saying. Follow thought leaders in your field.

- **After gaining insight** into topics of interest to your audiences, decide which social media tools will help your organization most.

- **Teach your stakeholders** to use the tools you've selected as the most helpful. Give your most passionate supporters the chance to distribute content and raise awareness on your behalf.

This article was prepared by Convio (convio.com), a Blackbaud Company. Convio is a leading provider of on-demand constituent engagement solutions that enable nonprofit organizations to maximize the value of every relationship.

More Online Strategies

For more ways to build relationships and raise funds online, see these *Nonprofit World* articles at NonprofitWorld.org/members: