

E-Mail Mistakes that Could Be Damaging Your Fundraising Efforts

Raise more funds and gain more supporters by avoiding these common errors.

By Peter Ansbacher

A recent study shows e-mail marketing has a median return on investment of 122% (emarketer.com) — more than four times higher than other marketing channels, including social media and direct mail. Yet, despite these benefits, many nonprofits aren't seeing the full impact e-mail marketing can have on their fundraising efforts due to some common e-mail mistakes. Thankfully, there are easy fixes that can improve your e-mail campaigns, allowing you to spread awareness of your cause and raise more funds.

Build the relationship first.

A common mistake nonprofits make is using e-mail exclusively to request donations. E-mail can — and should — be used to support your fundraising efforts, but, just as you would offline, you must nurture the relationship and build a connection to your cause before you start asking for funds. The more connected people feel to your organization, the more likely they are to help support your efforts monetarily. These relationships are easiest to build with consistent face-to-face interaction, but as communication shifts online, you must learn to build these relationships in the digital space.

How can you use e-mail to foster a strong relationship? Start with a simple welcome campaign. More than one-third of nonprofit organizations (ironpaper.com) don't send a single e-mail to new e-mail subscribers within the first 30 days of signing up — a missed opportunity that sets the relationship off on the wrong foot. Add new subscribers to a “welcome” e-mail campaign that thanks them for their interest, introduces your cause, and tells the story of your nonprofit's impact.

With e-mail workflows, these welcome campaigns can be completely automated. Think of a workflow as an e-mail “if this, then that” flowchart. For example, new subscribers

receive an initial welcome e-mail, then an emotional appeal e-mail. Did they open the emotional appeal? Then they get “E-mail A,” containing more information on how to support the cause. Did they leave it unopened? They get “E-mail B” instead, with a new subject line that may better resonate, along with more initial information about your nonprofit's work.

Workflows are set up in advance. Once they're up and running, they're automatic, saving you time and resources.

Personalization is key.

A surprising 79% of fundraising e-mails don't personalize the “to” line with a first and last name — a huge mistake when trying to foster a strong relationship and an emotional tie to your cause. Request a first and last name at the time of e-mail sign-up, and use that information to better connect with your subscribers.

Though the introduction is important, personalization goes beyond the first few lines of your e-mail. The content of your e-mails should be tailored to the various audiences that make up your subscriber base.

Start by carefully segmenting your list into groups, such as past donors, corporate supporters, individual supporters, and volunteers. Depending upon which list someone is on, you can completely personalize their experience from the content of the e-mail they receive to the landing page your e-mail links to.

For example, those who have previously donated can get updates on how their contribution is being put to use, increasing the chances they'll donate again. Those who have yet to give can receive e-mails detailing what their contribution *could* do, clearly spelling out the organization's goals.

Personalized e-mail messages improve click-through rates by an average of 14% — meaning you can't afford to skip this step. Getting the right message to the right people at the right time is the name of the game in e-mail marketing, and personalization helps make it happen.

“The return is more than four times higher than other marketing channels.”

Make it mobile.

With 66% of e-mails being opened on mobile devices, having mobile-friendly e-mail campaigns and landing pages is vital. Yet 84% of nonprofit donation landing pages aren't optimized for mobile, making it less likely your subscribers will stick around long enough to contribute.

There are some simple rules to follow when optimizing your e-mails for mobile devices. First, your subject line should tell the full story. On a mobile device, your subscribers will see only the subject line and pre-header unless they choose to open your e-mail. With this in mind, avoid generic subject lines like "June Newsletter."

Once you get people to open, get to the point quickly. Long, convoluted copy will be difficult to consume on a small screen, particularly if your subscriber is on the move, so keep your messages short and to the point. In the mobile environment, the rules of relevance and timing are more important than ever.


Finally, carefully consider design. When it comes to e-mail design for the mobile environment, simple is better. Complex design or navigation structure will hinder engagement, so keep designs simple and give special thought to your "donate" button, which should be easy to find and easy to click.

Test it out.

You may think you've crafted the perfect subject line or are sending your e-mails at a time that feels right for your audience, but for some reason, your e-mails aren't getting opened or clicked. This might mean you don't know your audience as well as you think you do. That's where testing comes in.

You should be testing everything from different subject lines, to your body text, to your calls to action (CTAs) in order to see what works best for your different audiences. For example, nonprofits seeking donations might want to test alternatives to the "Donate Now" CTA. A suggested donation of \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, or \$100 may yield better results. The only way to find out is to test.

Simple A/B tests can help ensure your e-mail campaigns deliver the best possible impact and help you guarantee the success of future e-mails. If you haven't done an A/B split test before, the concept is pretty simple. You simply send two different e-mails to two small subsets of your list (10% is usually a good place to start), and then send the most successful e-mail (considering metrics like opens, clicks, conversions, and the like) to the rest of your list. Keep in mind: You can only test like against like (subject line against subject line, CTA against CTA, and so on).

When you're an organization making an important impact on the world, you can't afford to waste time; you need your message to consistently reach the right people. With these simple e-mail fixes, you can do just that. 

Peter Ansbacher (pansbach@icontact.com) is a senior strategic advisor with iContact, a leading provider of digital marketing solutions, which is dedicated to improving customer success in the nonprofit sector and offers nonprofits a 20% discount on e-mail marketing and marketing automation services.

Pump Up Your E-Mail Efforts

Put more energy and passion into your e-mail campaigns with the tips in these articles (NonprofitWorld.org):

Beyond the Single E-Mail Message: Running Effective E-Mail Campaigns (Vol. 23, No. 3)

Using E-Mail & the Web to Acquire & Cultivate Donors (Vol. 21, No. 1)

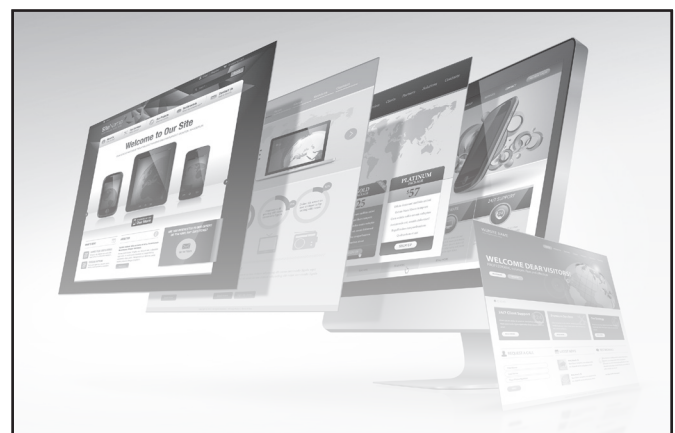
Create a Donation Page that Rocks (Vol. 33, No. 1)

E-Mail Deliverability: Increase Your Chances of Getting Through (Vol. 23, No. 2)

How to Measure Online Fundraising Success (Vol. 26, No. 1)

Two Surprising Ways to Broaden Your Reach Online (Vol. 32, No. 4)

Harnessing the Internet to Raise Funds (Vol. 31, No. 2)



WHAT'S UP ONLINE?

Would you like to discuss some of the issues addressed in **Nonprofit World** with other nonprofit professionals? Do you have questions to ask or expertise of your own to share?

Society for Nonprofits is actively engaged on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Find us on your favorite social media platform by visiting **social.snpo.org**

If you have any questions, contact Jason Chmura at jchmura@NonprofitWorld.org