



8 Steps to Fundraising Success

Is direct-mail dead? Is the Internet overrated? Here's what you need to know about finding and keeping today's donors.

BY RAJAN SELLADURAI

Donors today want more involvement than merely giving. To raise funds, you need to forge relationships with your supporters. Here are eight ways to do so.

1. Listen to Your Donors.

Today's donors want to tell you their opinions and develop their own visions for your organization. While remaining true to your organization's core values, tune in to donors' wishes and incorporate their ideas. Treat donors like customers, and view prospecting as a membership drive. Send new supporters a "Welcome Kit." Offer a "We're Listening" guarantee that lets contributors screen out unwanted mailings and asks what issues they'd like your organization to emphasize. It's vital that donors feel you listen to them and that their input makes a difference. If you involve them as partners in solving your organization's problems, they become long-time supporters rather than one-time funders.

2. Keep Your Mission in Mind.

Communicate your mission clearly, and implement your goals and objectives efficiently. Remembering your mission in everything you do will help you build long-term relationships with donors.

3. Tell Your Story Vividly.

The best people to tell your organization's story are your volunteers and clients. Their personal, heart-felt experiences make a unique impact on potential donors. To make the effect even more dramatic, put your story on video. Video overcomes the obstacles of public apathy toward print materials and the exorbitant

and offer electronic funds transfer (EFT) to make giving easy. You can use the Internet to communicate with a vast number of donors quickly and efficiently. In 1994, for example, the Republican Party produced a show via satellite and followed it up with fundraising through computer networks, collecting \$1 million in just six weeks.

Let your donors see and touch the projects they fund.

costs of personal appearances and personal contacts. When you combine the appeal of volunteers and clients with the drama of video, you make your message both credible and memorable, resulting in more dollars from donors.

4. Go High-Tech, But Stay People-Focused.

If you're not taking advantage of revolutionary developments in telecommunications and computer technology, you're shortchanging your organization. Give donors active roles in your organization through e-mail and videoconferencing,

Consider creating your own Web page. No other medium lets you contact as many people at such a low cost. If you build a good Web site, you can easily reach 100,000 people from all over the world with your fundraising message. (See Frenza in "Selected References.") A home page is an excellent way to keep in touch with your donors and strengthen your relationship with them.

5. Let Donors Fund Projects.

When donors know exactly how their money is being used, they are much more



CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Tell Stories

The best way to touch people emotionally and motivate them to give is to use storytelling in your fundraising letters. Tell stories of individuals, such as your clients, volunteers, or anyone else whose life your organization has changed. Look for these storytelling elements: close calls, dramatic “rescues,” ironies, a fighting spirit, extreme gratitude, barriers overcome, a life turned around, success against great odds.

Keep Your Wish List Updated

Try a creative approach to your wish list, as the Willingboro Shelter does. On its letterhead, the shelter highlights its wish list for the month. It notes that the shelter can always use cash donations “if you want to leave the shopping to us” but also lists current, specific needs (dish-washer soap, umbrellas, bookcases, and so on). When donors drop off donations, a staff member gives them a receipt and a copy of the shelter’s most current wish list.

Don’t Pay for Direct Mail

Ask a local company to sponsor a specific direct mail appeal. Back up your proposal with statistics, such as the demographics of your target audience, and explain how you will recognize the company, such as in your newsletter or annual report. For these and other creative fundraising ideas, write for a free sample of *Non-Profit Nuts & Bolts*, 4623 Tiffany Woods Circle, Oviedo, Florida 32765.

generous. Donors to the American Society for Technion-Israel Institute of Technology (ATS), for instance, can see and touch the projects they fund—undergraduate scholarships, research assistantships, fellowships, academic chairs, lectureships, dormitories, laboratories, equipment, and centers of excellence. Using this project-driven, people-centered approach, ATS has raised over \$400 million.

6. Target Your Audience.

Use advanced databases to target the best possible list of customers. By creating specific, refined mailing lists, you replace probability with predictability. You can send the same fundraising letter requesting different amounts to two neighbors, one driving a Lexus and the other a Hyundai. While the good old days of high-volume, low-cost, limited-competition direct mail are gone, Rob Yoegel (see “Selected References”) notes that direct mail, when modified appropriately, can still work. As an example, he describes how the Democratic National Committee used personalized-format, database-driven marketing and ZIP-code analysis for unprecedented campaign success in 1995.

7. Involve the CEO and Board.

Fundraising is part of the job description of the CEO as leader, facilitator, and communicator. In fact, many potential donors won’t give unless the CEO makes the solicitation. Fundraising should also be part of every board member’s job description. Most people will be reluctant to donate to an organization if board members aren’t active fundraisers and contributors themselves.

8. Launch a Fundraising Campaign.

A fundraising campaign should go beyond raising money and focus on building your organization’s reputation and connections with donors (see Lauer in

“Selected References.”) As part of your campaign, do the following:

- Create a brochure which presents your case statement—a brief explanation of why your organization should continue to exist. Detail information about your organization’s staff, budget, financial history, goals, and customers. List programs for which money is needed. Each of these needs must have a story behind it—preferably client-based anecdotes, accomplishments, and dreams. Highlight all the good things your organization does that make it worthy of support.
- Develop a campaign newsletter (either electronically or in print), which will keep the campaign alive and interesting over time. In it, mention events, gifts, goals achieved so far, and goals

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yet to be achieved. Use it to recognize volunteers and donors and to serve as an inspirational tool for other gifts.

- Hold a special event which reinforces your organization's message and vision.
- Send press releases to both the media and target audience (volunteers and donors). Emphasize human-interest stories.
- Reinforce your message many times through many channels. Repetition is

the way to get reputation-building messages across to donors. A well-planned, coordinated campaign is the way to build the stable relationships that lead to donations. ■

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