

# Holidays that Boost Donor Giving – & Ones that Don't

Which holidays are worth your fundraising time and which can you ignore?

By Jeff Brooks

don't want to dis Valentine's Day, but just a week later on February 23, it's International Dog Biscuit Appreciation Day. And if you can stand the excitement, February 26 is National Pistachio Day.

I'm not saying this to mock these awareness holidays. There are no doubt quality nonprofit organizations that use these days to raise funds and awareness for their issues. More power to 'em!

But if they try to use those celebrated-by-almost-nobody holidays as reasons for donors to give, they will almost surely fail.

Made-up "holidays" are almost never reasons people give.

If you're saying, "Give to help kids get good dental care because this is Children's Dental Health Month," you have a non-starter on your hands. Same with Low Vision Awareness Month, Heart Month, and Scleroderma Awareness Month.

“Most holidays won't inspire people to give.”

“You'll be spending your time with little, if any, return.”

On the other hand, "real" holidays are among the strongest fundraising dates on most of our calendars. The reason is that a few major holidays have deep emotional meaning for many people. Obscure awareness holidays don't have that. They're just ordinary days for most people – no memories, no traditions, no connection to the heart.

Even most "real" holidays have little to no emotional impact that might push donors toward giving. Even widely observed ones like Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Valentine's Day have only shallow emotional content for most donors.

That's why these are *not* strong fundraising propositions for most organizations: "Show your love by giving on Valentine's Day." "Honor your mother by making a special gift on Mother's Day." "Stand with other patriotic Americans by giving on Flag Day." "World Hunger Day is coming up, so you should give to fight hunger." None of those will inspire people to give.





## Use Humor & Puns with Caution

There's something about holidays that bring out the bad puns in everyone, including fundraisers. But humor is risky. There are some good reasons why:

- Not everyone gets the joke!
- Making light of your serious cause needs to be considered carefully. Doing so can hurt your brand and may offend the people you're trying to help.
- What you think is funny often isn't.

Humor and laughing don't encourage people to give. An appeal that makes someone cry is much more likely to elicit a reaction.

Great fundraising is all about loving your donors – not just today, but the whole year 'round!

“Great fundraising is all about loving your donors.”

These lesser holidays aren't harmful to fundraising. They just aren't sufficient to move many donors. If you do everything else right in your fundraising, the holiday connection won't hurt. But you'll be spending time and energy on something with little, if any, return.


The “real” holidays that have deep emotional associations for many people include:

- **Thanksgiving**
- **Christmas** (or, more broadly “the Holidays”)
- **The High Holy Days** in the fall and Passover in the spring for many Jewish donors.

There are other holidays that have resonance for *specific groups*:

- **Ramadan and other** religious observations
- **days celebrating certain saints and founders** of institutions
- **Easter**, which is powerful for many Christians. And because it coincides with Passover and marks the coming of spring in the northern hemisphere, it can boost fundraising for many organizations.

But if you're using a little-known holiday or awareness day as a reason itself for people to give, be ready for failure.

Fundraising is about connecting with people by the heart and giving them a way to take meaningful action. You can do that any day of the year. 

*Jeff Brooks (jeff@jeff-brooks.com) is the author of How to Turn Your Words into Money, from which this article is adapted. He has been serving the nonprofit community for more than 30 years.*

## Connect with Your Donors Year 'Round

To find out more about how to form a meaningful connection with your donors and transform your fundraising, check out these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

**Think Out of the Box for Fundraising Gains** (Vol. 29, No. 5)

**How Can You Boost Donors' Trust in Your Organization?** (Vol. 36, No. 4)

**Three Keys to Building Relationships in Life (and with Your Donors)** (Vol. 38, No. 1)

**How to Add an Emotional Hook to Your Fundraising Letters** (Vol. 37, No. 1)

**Is Your Budget Bulletproof?** (Vol. 40, No. 3)

**Revitalize Your Thank-You Letter with a Good Story** (Vol. 37, No. 2)

**What Are the Three Most Boring Words in Fundraising Appeals?** (Vol. 36, No. 2)

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

**Breakthrough Tips to Boost Your Fundraising** (Vol. 33, No. 2)

**How to Foster a Positive Funding Relationship** (Vol. 32, No. 4)

**Make Your Fundraising E-Mails Stand Out** (Vol. 39, No. 1)