

E-FUNDRAISING & COMMUNICATIONS

A PRIMER



Fundraising emails are a delicate dance with your donors and prospects. On one side, your goal is to drive action in the form of increased contributions. On the other, to stay well-connected.

This means it's essential for organizations to begin with a strategic annual plan and consider where the limits lie – your limit being the tolerance of people on your list to receive your fundraising appeals before they unsubscribe, thus discontinuing all e-communications with you.

Your limit is based on two things:

- 1) The strength of your brand. The more valued and beloved your organization is in the community it serves, and the more passionate people feel about it, the more they will be willing to accept (and respond to) multiple appeals.
- 2) Your own online generosity. In the online space, *you want to give more than you ask*. Organizations that also deliver communications that add value to people's lives can send more fundraising emails because people will be less likely to want to disconnect from the value they receive year-round.

The true benefit of email is:

- 1) It can be highly targeted to a very specific audience.
- 2) Unlike direct mail, which can be held up in a busy post office, you have ultimate control over when emails are delivered.
- 3) Email is generally less expensive on a per-email basis than direct mail.
- 4) It can be a highly responsive tool in evolving situations as they arise.

That said, it is still a proven fact that other fundraising efforts (mainly direct mail) still drive the majority of online giving. So only rarely should an email campaign be conceived as stand-alone, and most often, it should be highly integrated with the rest of your organization's fundraising efforts.

Because emails are there and gone in the blink of an eye, the more informed your strategy, the better chance you have to generate traction. This comes not only from having a plan, but also from testing relentlessly – your subject lines, formatting, messages, graphics, and tone. You want to track your open rates to find if they're increasing or decreasing, and track what people click on and where they click in order to give recipients more of what they want, and less of what they're not interested in or doesn't deliver action.

BEST PRACTICES FOR FUNDRAISING EMAILS

Even though the majority of your emails will compliment a fully developed campaign, as an amplification of these campaigns, they employ a different style.

- Effective emails are simple
- Effective emails employ short, bold, passionate copy
- Effective emails streamline the message
- Effective emails are even more direct and to the point (compared to direct mail)
- Effective emails share an obvious reason to give right up front
- Effective emails include multiple, clearly-marked links
- Effective emails have the look and feel of a personal letter, not a marketing piece
- Effective emails use one signer and a P.S., just like direct mail
- Effective emails assure ample white space – they feel easy for the reader to absorb
- Effective emails employ subject lines that say “open me!” (Generally subject lines that telescope fundraising receive fewer opens)

BEST PRACTICES FOR E-NEWSLETTERS

E-newsletters are not free, nor should they be the “free” place for everyone in your organization to promote their own project, service, event or initiative.

E-newsletters ask for attention in crowded in-boxes, which means you need to know what your strategy is, know why it’s your strategy, and then give someone at your organization the editorial control to execute the strategy (which includes saying “no”.)

Tips for making the most of your e-news:

Be a hub for amazing content

- Focus not just on what your organization wants to say, but on creating and finding content that people will find interesting, engaging, and even cool – be the one to discover and share hidden gems that will be appreciated.
- Give people the opportunity to be amazed by the world you inhabit. Let them see that you’re “in the know” and willing to take the time to share what you know with them.
- Think about your e-news as the place where you celebrate your mission far more often than you’re earnest about it.

Make it personal

- Have the newsletter come from an actual person inside your organization – a person with a name, a person who might sign a brief letter at the top or place their signature at the bottom.
- Develop a personality and even be playful on occasion to connect with readers.

BEST PRACTICES FOR E-NEWSLETTERS, continued

Make it targeted

- Too much content doesn't engage people, it overwhelms them. Choose your subjects carefully and set limits.
- Find a way to mark or break up sections so people can see where to look and follow what you're saying. Keep the sections the same from week to week so they know where to look for their favorite content.
- Print out your e-news on actual paper. If it's more than about two pages long, it's too long.

Get it opened

- Test sending on different days and different times. Continue to send at the times you receive the highest open rates. Generally, this is not evenings, weekends, Monday mornings or Friday afternoons.

BEST PRACTICES FOR LIST-BUILDING

Collect email addresses relentlessly

- In the mail
- On location
- Online
- At events
- With donations

Give people a reason to want your emails (don't just ask for an email address)

- Newsletters
- President's reports
- Special event notices
- Educational content
- Timely updates

Have fun... be creative... be personal...

Your readers will appreciate it and follow along.