

Nonprofit 911 – February 26, 2008
Bring Your e-Newsletter from Snoring to Soaring
with Kivi Leroux Miller
Sponsored by Network for Good

The MP3 audio transcript can be found at
www.Fundraising123.org or www.nonprofit911.org

Jono Smith: Good morning or good afternoon, everyone and welcome to the February 26th, Nonprofit 911 sponsored by Network for Good. My name is Jono Smith and I'm the Director of Marketing here at Network for Good. We're really happy to have you on the phone today.

Before I introduce today's speaker, I just wanted to let you know a little bit about Network for Good, in case you're not familiar with who we are. We are a nonprofit organization, just like most of you on the phone. Our mission is to help other nonprofits like you raise money online. Nonprofit 911 is just one of the many free resources that Network for Good provides to the nonprofit community to help you to your online fundraising and nonprofit marketing results.

In addition to Nonprofit 911, we also provide online fundraising services directly to nonprofits. You may have heard of Custom DonateNow, Basic DonateNow, EmailNow and our Donor Management Suite. Over 3000 small to mid-size nonprofits use those services to raise money online today. Well, this is not a sales call. We would like to mention that if you're not raising money right now on your website or you don't have a way to, we'd love to work with you. So please go ahead and visit www.fundraising123.org to learn more about how you can take advantage of our services free for 60 days.

You should also receive an email from us today with the links to the outline and other information for today's call. If you didn't receive that email, you can go right now to www.fundraising123.org, click on the training tab and you can see the notes for today's call. But if you're not in front of the computer, don't worry. You can continue your learning at www.fundraising123.org after the call.

You'll also be able to access again an audio recording within 24 hours, and we post all of our audio and text recording and transcripts at www.fundraising123.org under the training tab. We have, today, about 12 hours of free training available for you.

At this point, I'd like to introduce today's speaker, Kivi Leroux Miller. Kivi is a nonprofit marketing consultant, trainer, blogger, and she's been helping nonprofits to communicate more effectively with their supporters, online and off for more than 10 years. We're really happy that she has donated her time today.

Kivi has created e-newsletters for small community-based organizations as well as large national trade associations. Last year, she founded Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com where you can find articles, weekly webinar series and coming next an on-the mail

learning center. All these resources are designed especially for do-it-yourself nonprofit marketers and one-person communications department that's small to mid-size nonprofit.

It sounds very similar to Network for Good. We're both working very hard to help small to mid-size nonprofits. We're really, really pleased and fortunate to have Kivi on the phone with us today. So without further ado, here is Kivi.

Kivi Leroux Miller: Thanks, Jono. It's a pleasure to be here with everyone today. I want to thank Network for Good for inviting me to speak to you. I'm a big fan of Katya's blog as I'm sure most of you on the phone are. My site is Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com, as Jono said, and you can find our weekly webinar series there. I'm going to refer a couple of other webinars as we go through the course today where you can get additional information and training on the kind of tips I'm talking about.

So what are we talking about - is nonprofit e-newsletter. So first of all, let me tell you what I'm not talking about. I'm not talking about sending a PDF of your print newsletter out to your list and calling that an email newsletter. That's emailing an attachment to folks, which is not, really, a cool thing to do. You need to go ahead and create a separate email newsletter and I do have a webinar coming up on March 20 on exactly how to convert your print newsletter to an email newsletter.

I'm also not talking about just sending a link to a newsletter that you have on your website. What you want to do is actually create an email message that's full of content, interesting material for your readers and send that out to your list. So that's what I'm really talking about today - is the body of that email, how you format it, how you set it up, what goes on the subject line - all of those sorts of things to really make your email newsletter a very powerful tool for your nonprofit marketing.

I do have 10 points that I'm going to go through today and there is an article online that's, basically, the clip notes of my talk. So if you want to follow along, you can go to the www.fundraising123.org site or you can also find it on my website at www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com.

The first point is, know your audience, ask what they want and deliver it. You'll hear this advice all the time from every communications and marketing consultants on the planet - know your audience. Well, what does that really mean?

It means that you need to understand who's on your list and why they want to communicate with you and why they want to get emails back to them. It's helpful to think about the people on your list, as if they are very self-centered, selfish people. Now, of course, you are nonprofits, the people on your list support you, so in reality, we all know that they're incredibly generous.

So the purposes of your communication, is often very helpful to really think of them as very busy, self-centered, selfish people. And you've got to give them a good excuse to take a couple of seconds out of their very busy day and open up your email. What that means is that you've got to produce content that's extremely relevant and valuable to them

as individual human beings because otherwise they're just going to skip right over it and delete it.

I'm sure you know this from your own experience, going through your own email box, maybe you're getting hundreds of emails, you go through it quickly. If something doesn't grab you immediately, you don't deal with it. So you really got to know what's in it for them. There are lots of ways to do that and a lot of that, we're going to talk about it in a minute.

But as you're writing your article, keep asking yourself: "How is this going to make my readers feel? How is it going to make their lives easier and better? Does this article show our readers how important they are to us?" You really want to connect with them as individuals. Depending on why you're writing your newsletter in the first place, some of these questions maybe more or less important.

You can do newsletters strictly for fundraising but you can also do them as a relationship management tool, cultivation tool, you can be responding to donor or to add volunteers, you can use it to deliver services. There are lots of different ways and reasons to use an email newsletter and knowing why you're doing it and who you're communicating with is going to help you figure out those questions that you really need to be asking yourself as you're going along.

So that's **the first tip - know your audience**. Always know your audience and that goes for every kind of communication that you put together, whether it's offline or online. In a lot of my different trainings that I do, I ask people to actually visualize the human beings that they're sending their communications to. I ask - and this is something you might just want to go ahead and do right now while you're on the phone - actually visualize a person in your head, is it a man or a woman? How old are they? What do they look like? What's their ethnicity? Are they a big guy or a little woman or what? Actually, visualize a single person. What do they do on the weekend? How do they spend their money? What kind of car do they drive? What's their family situation? What's their education?

You really want to come up with a composite human being that represents your ideal audience member for your newsletter, for your website, whatever it is and really write for that person. I suggest that once you've got that person visualize in your mind's eye, go ahead and go online and try to find a photo that matches that person. Print it out, tape it next to your monitor or put it inside the folder that you pull out when you're writing your newsletter and actually write for that human being. You're going to be much more effective at actually connecting with your real audience members if you go through that exercise.

So **tip number two** - once you have your audience, how often do you communicate? I would say go ahead and **send your newsletter as frequently as you have good content** to sell the newsletter with. I think, in general, and this is a broad sweeping generalization that, I think, most nonprofits probably don't send their email newsletter frequently enough. More than once or week is probably too much but less than every six to eight

weeks is probably not enough. You want people to remember you, you want them to look forward to receiving your newsletter, but you don't want to drive them crazy either.

However, if you really know your audience and know what they want and deliver it, people are not going to see a frequent email newsletter as a burden or a pest. They're going to see it as a resource that they really look forward to receiving. So figure out how much good content you've got and let that determine your schedules. If you don't have enough content for a newsletter every two months, you really need to think about why that is. I'm sure you've got lots of great stuff going on. You're probably just not thinking about it in the right way. You want to think creatively about ways to talk about your work? And I've got some additional tips on my blog for how to do that.

But basically, you want to communicate regularly, you want to get that information, that valuable relevant information out to your list. So that's tip number two. **The third tip is to make it personal.** People give to and support nonprofits for very subjective reasons. There is something deeply personal when someone writes you a check. They are doing it because it makes them feel a particular way. Lots of different emotions are involved but you're really connecting with somebody on an emotional level when you convinced them to be a donor to your organization.

So it doesn't make sense to respond back with an institutional Father 123 speaking to the masses-mode email newsletter. What you want to do is connect on a much more personal level that responds back to the passion that these people are showing for your issues and your organizations.

There are lots of ways to make that newsletter personal. The easiest way is to just include lots of people stories, people articles, and photos in the newsletter. You can talk about what your staff are doing, what your donors are doing, what volunteers are doing. You can have bylines, articles where you actually put the name of the person who wrote the article link and include their little mug shot next to it.

You can include head shots of other people that are involved. There are lots of ways to interject people into the newsletter and that's what you want to be doing. Talk about your donors, especially. If you're doing a fundraising newsletter, your newsletter should be about the donors and about the works that they're doing and how their contributions to the organization make all these wonderful accomplishments possible.

You don't want to make it sound like your organization and your staff are doing all these great things out there in a vacuum because that's not the way it works. You're doing that great work because you have this very supportive community of donors around you. So include them in that accomplishment story.

Same thing goes with the volunteers, if you're doing a newsletter that's all about your volunteer efforts, actually talk about some of the volunteers and highlight some of their works in the newsletter. If you're a membership organization, once again, talk about what your members are doing and they're participating in your various projects and how they're

contributing to your accomplishments. That's how you make it personal.

If someone has replied to your newsletter, it needs to go to a human being and a human being needs to respond. I hate it when I reply to a nonprofit newsletter and I get a bounce back that says: "This is an auto-reply. This mailbox is not checked—too bad for you."

You know, it can be a little bit of a workload issue as you have thousands and thousands of people on your mailing list, but you need to deal with that and you want to deal with it because it shows you that people are actually reading your email newsletter and responding to it. So make sure that you have that set up and know your audience, send it out frequently with good content and make it personal.

The fourth tip is to make the next step as easy as possible. This is another phrase you probably hear a lot - the call to action. Basically, all the calls to action are the next step that you want somebody to take after they read your newsletter. It can be as simple as learn more about this issue. That's not the most provocative call to action, but it's a call to action and it's better than no call to action.

You may want them to donate, volunteer, register for an event, tell their friends, write an email to a legislator, make a phone call, whatever it is at the end of each of your article, be sure to include a call to action. I really like the way that Katya describes this. She says to make it a filmable moment. In other words, can your supporters visualize themselves actually taking this step? Can they see their friends and family doing it?

You want to be able to easily visualize that to the point where you could actually film somebody doing it and that's how you know that you have a clear and simple call to action. I know I've gone through this pretty quickly, but I want to save lots of time for questions because I'm sure you have a lot of them. Actually, Jono, if there are any questions now on newsletter content this will be a great time to take some of those.

Jono: Kara has a question, "Is an e-burst enough, or do I need to send out a newsletter every one to six weeks?"

Kivi: I guess it depends on your definition of e-burst. But if you're talking about a short, little announcement, those are fine as long as they are really timely and have a good call to action. You can do short e-bursts once a week and then maybe throw in a longer newsletter with more specific feature articles maybe once every month or something like that. That's all fine. It doesn't have to be the same thing every time.

You can mix and match depending on what's going on, what issues are timely, what's coming up. But you want to make sure, again, that it's always personal and relevant to the audience.

Jono: I'll throw in one more question from Lisa. Lisa asks, "Should I give up two separate newsletters for donors and volunteers or would this be counter-productive? We have a small staff."

Kivi: This is what you'll hear called "list segmentation" and the way you decide whether you need to do two separate newsletters or one newsletter is to go back to that exercise I talked about in point number one about knowing your audience. Who are these people exactly?

If you find that your volunteer folks are pretty much the same folks that are donating to you in terms of the demographics and all the other characteristics that I talked about earlier, it's OK to go ahead and do a single newsletter to them and talk about donating and volunteering and everything in the same newsletter.

However, if you find that you're really dealing with two very different groups of folks, for example, maybe you have donor who are baby boomers but your volunteers tend to be a lot of teenagers or people in their 20s, those are pretty different audiences with pretty different emotional ties to your organization. Most likely, they are getting involved with you for different reasons and in that case, you probably would like to go ahead and do two separate newsletters.

Same thing goes for a lot of social service organizations that are serving folks that are not likely to have regular computer access. Obviously, an email newsletter to the homeless is not going to work real well as a communications tool. But one to your donor base may work. So it all goes back to knowing your audience.

In terms of the workload, it's a little bit of work up front to get your newsletter set up, and get your list segmented, and get your templates all straight. But once you do that, it doesn't have to be a huge amount of work. Yes, you still have to write it, you start to put it together and go through to the steps.

But once you get your system set up and we'll talk a little bit towards the end about email newsletter service providers, it doesn't have to be a huge investment time every time you send it out. The fact is that you're probably going to be a lot more effective if you do segment your list. If you do, in fact, have pretty different audience segment.

Jono: We've got question here from Chip. Chip says, "You made a point that this is not about sending a link to a PDF newsletter on your website," and he wonders why not, particularly, if he embeds a "donate now link" in the newsletter.

Kivi: You can do that if you want, but I don't think it's as effective as actually putting content in the email because what you're doing is asking your reader to take another step to get to the basic information.

So you're asking them to click and then they have to wait for the PDF to load, it's just you're eating up seconds that people - those selfish, self-centered people who are reading their email, are not as likely to get to get to you. Instead, if you put some of that content in the email newsletter where they can see it and see that it's relevant to them and then have them click over, that's fine.

You can either include the complete article, everything they need in a self-contained

email and just have links that give them supporting information or following through on the calls to action; that's one way to do it.

A second way to do an email newsletter is to just include little paragraph teaser texts like the first paragraph or little blurbs that really excite people about the information and then have them click to your website to get a full longer article, that's fine, too. But you've got to include, at a minimum, some of that basic teaser text that tells me why this is relevant to me, the reader? Why I should take a couple of seconds out on my day to go click over?

If you can do that, I think, it's fine. But I don't recommend saying in the body of an email newsletter something that says: "Hey, our newsletter is now online. Click here with the link." That provides the very busy selfish newsletter reader with nothing to really motivate me to do it. You've got to give them a little bit of that teaser text to get them to click.

So we really talked about the content here so far - knowing your audience, the frequency schedules, assuming that you have good content, making it personal and then including that call to action.

Now, I'm going to shift into some of the more minor technical details that can actually make a really big difference in whether people open your email. **The first one is to make sure that you've got that From field correct.** For most nonprofits, I recommend putting either your organization's name or a well-known campaign or initiative title in that From field.

I usually say don't use the staff person's name unless that person has a really high name recognition. I'm talking 80% of the people on your mailing lists are going to recognize that person's name. If that's the case, and that person has some real star power in your community, then yes, go ahead and use the person's name. But if that's not the case, I'd say go ahead and make it more of an organizational title.

If you do decide to use a person's name, sometimes including an acronym after it or some other identifier that clues people in to the fact that this is from your organization - that's what I recommend doing. Now, some people would advise that you should never put organizational titles on the form field, that it always have to be a person's name because of this whole issue about personalizing the email, and I understand that. But at the same time, if you've got staff people, if your communications director is not just out there all the time, you don't want it to come from a person's name they're not going to be recognized.

The most important thing is that From field is recognizable. So for most nonprofits, I'd say that's probably going to be their campaign name or the organization's name. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is the subject line; when you just open up your email, what do you look at when you're skimming? You see the from line and you see the subject line. So the subject line has got to really hit it home. In some ways, this is the single most

important part of your email newsletter because this is already the gatekeeper of the information.

And if you don't convince people to go through the gate and actually look at the body of the email, then all the work is for naught. You've only got 50 to 60 characters which is not that much typed, maybe seven words, eight words depending on which word you use. So it's a pretty tall order; it's pretty hard to do. You really need to focus in on spending a lot of time on your subject line. This goes for headlines, too, which I'll talk about in a little bit.

These little bits of text are incredibly important. You may spend hours and hours and hours drafting this phenomenal feature story, but if you've got a crappy subject line and a crappy headline, they're not going to get to the feature story. So you need to spend some good quality time on your subject line. If you are online, I want to have you go ahead and click over to a link I have here for "Best Practices in Writing Email Subject Lines", it's on the MailChimp website. If you're not, don't worry about it, I'll go ahead and summarize what we're talking about. But if you are online, go ahead and click on that link.

This is a study that MailChimp did on subject lines and they are email service provider and they analyzed a bunch of the emails that went out over their system and looked at the open rates. In other words, how many? What percentage of the emails that were sent out were actually viewed by the readers? They came up with some pretty interesting best practices and I'm going to share those with you.

First of all, they showed best and worst subject line examples on this home page. If you look at the ones with the best open rates and these are all open rates of around 80% to 90%, which is really great. If you get an open rate that high, you're doing great things. The common element is that the subject line implies timely information, useful information, and personal information. So this all reinforces what I said earlier about really knowing your audience, getting them content that is valuable to them, that's timely, this information that they can really use in their own lives and in making themselves feel good about working with your nonprofit.

What's also very interesting and this is especially telling for nonprofits even though MailChimp is not specifically on nonprofit organizations, they do a lot of commercial works, but they found that the subject lines with the lowest open rates and these are all mostly below 10% and even lower have words that a lot of nonprofits actually use a lot. So this is a really important lesson.

According to them, if you put words like "Help" or "Donate" in your subject line, they're going to get deleted. I'm not exactly sure what their theory is on why that happens, but I'm assuming it's because, again, most of your readers are already busy people. So the thought of having to do one more thing, to help or to donate now in the subject line: "I'm just going to move on. I'm just going to delete it and not have to add this thing to my to-do list."

So it's OK to talk about helping and donating, but you probably don't want to put that right up in the subject line. You probably want to include that later in the body of your email down towards your call to action after you really got people inspired and excited about your work.

So do take a couple of minutes, even if you're not online now, to click over to this article in Best Practices in Writing Email Subject Lines. I found it to be really instructive and I think you'll get a lot out of it. There are some good examples here that, like I said, they're mostly commercial examples, but you'll be able to see pretty quickly how you can translate those to the kind of subject lines you do for nonprofit marketing emails.

So you got your phone line, you got your subject line, OK, I'm ready to open up your email. You've done a good job on those two, what's next? **The point number seven is design a simple, clean newsletter that's mostly text.** Anytime a nonprofit calls me up and said: "Aaaahh, Kivi, please help me. We've got to do an email newsletter." The first thing that they're all panicky about is the design and what it's going to look like.

I tell them: "Relax. Take a deep breath." All of the major email newsletter service providers offer lots and lots of templates to pick from. So it's not like you got to create this thing totally from scratch. You don't have to know HTML, you don't have to be a serious design wiz to pull this off and make it work. There are lots of templates to pick from, so just relax on that point.

And the next important thing to realize is that the design, in some ways, is not as important as the text. The words are what's really most critical to the look of your newsletter. When people open email, they expect to read, so they're looking for words. They don't expect the same kind of visual stimulation that they might when they go to your web page, for example.

So be timely, be interesting, make it look neat and clean and like I said, you can get lots of templates to do that, but don't get too hung up on it. What you really want to do is make sure that you've got really good, strong text that gets top billing wrapped cleanly around those graphic elements and just follow a really basic straightforward template.

You don't want anything that is just way over the top because in reality a lot of it probably won't be seen. A lot of people have images turned off. The default for a lot of the email programs now is to not show the images, so what you end up having is a bunch of text and then a bunch of boxes with red 'x's.

It doesn't pay to really use a lot of big photos that look great because for a lot of people they are not going to actually see the photo anyway. That doesn't mean you shouldn't use photos, but you want to design it in a way that those red 'x's are there instead of the photos. People still see the text. They still get the message. They can still find the call to action. In other words, the newsletter is still useful without the photos.

Which brings me to **the next point—writing and designing for the Preview Pane.**

Most people - I've seen statistics that say 70 to 80% of people - aren't actually physically opening an email message to read it. They are using some kind of different preview mechanism where in Outlook it's the Preview Pane. Most people have it open up below the list of email messages. In that space, you've got maybe a quarter of the size of the monitor, if that, that's probably a generous estimate, is actually the Preview Pane.

You have a pretty small space in which you need to grab your reader's attention. So, if you are using images in your newsletter, for example, if you want to use a header that goes all the way across the top as an image that's OK. But, I'd say keep it fairly short like under 100 pixels high. You've got that top inch of the Preview Pane filled with the image, and then right below that you've got some fantastic text that tells them what's in the newsletter, why it's valuable to them, why they should continue reading.

When you do have images, especially at the top, you want to make sure that you are including the Alt tag which is the text that usually will show up next to the red 'x'. I've got some links here on the article how to specifically do that. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that today. You do want to include them, but if you need help writing the Alt tag you can go ahead and click on those links to get some advice on how to do that.

You never want to send an all-image newsletter. I am sure some of you have seen these, either spam or even organizations that you are on their newsletter lists, where what they want to do is they are so obsessed with making the email newsletter look good that they put everything into a single image. They design it in Photoshop or Illustrator and the text looks beautiful and it's wrapped around all these gorgeous images, and they save that whole thing as one single graphic and pop that in the email newsletter.

What happens is a lot of people just see a big red box of nothing. When I get those I just delete them. I don't go find out what this person was trying to tell me. I don't click on Show Images. I'm just so annoyed with the fact that there's actually nothing in my Preview Pane but a big red box that I delete it. Never send an all image email. It is OK to include images, like I said, but make sure you've got lots of text that's really good and directed to your audience right at the top so in that little Preview Pane you can actually see what's going on.

The next tip is to appeal to skimmers. I have a whole separate webinar on online writing that. I have another one scheduled on April 24. During this webinar I explain exactly how to make your online writing for email newsletters and your web pages skimmable and scannable. That's what it's all about when people read online. They want to quickly look at a page or at their email and find out, is this for me? Is this something I care about? Is this helpful to me as a newsletter-reader at all? So, they're scanning and they're skimming.

Some ways that you can make your pages more scannable and skimmable: short paragraphs. Everything needs to be shorter for online writing than it is in print. The rule of thumb is to go ahead and cut your print text in half, before you even put it online. And a lot of people will say, "Go ahead and cut it in half one more time as you're editing."

You want short paragraphs, short sentences, bullets. You've got to really grab them with very quick, descriptive headlines that tell them exactly what it's about, get them excited in very few words. So again, you want to be doing good headlines all throughout. Use lots of subheadings.

A good test to put yourself through when you create your email newsletter, after you're done writing it, give yourself a couple hours to go away, do something completely unrelated to the newsletter and what you're writing about, and come back and read only the headlines and subheadings. The headlines and subheadings, if you read only those little bits of text, you should be able to get the gist of the newsletter. You should understand the main points that are in it. You should understand why you're sending it, and what the audience member is getting out of it, what your newsletter reader is getting out of that email.

If your headlines and subheads don't convey the content, you need to go back and rewrite them. Because in reality, that's what a lot of people are going to do, they're only going to read your headlines and subheads. Now hopefully a good percentage of those people will be drawn in to your headlines and will actually read the text that you've written, but even the ones that only skim it, and decide to delete at that point, you still want to leave them with a little bit of information about what you're doing, and what's going on with your organization, and how they can be contributing. So go ahead and make sure that those headlines and subheadings themselves tell a story, alone, even without the rest of the body copy.

You want to use really descriptive nouns, really active verbs. There's lots of advice out there about headline writing, so again, I'm not going to spend a ton of time on that, but I have included a link to several articles by Brian Clark who runs the Copyblogger blog, which is a great blog, tons of information. He writes a lot of commercial marketing copy, but, again, a lot of it can be applied to nonprofits. So go ahead, when you have a couple minutes, and read through some of his articles on how to write headlines. Some of them are going to be a little too "sales-pitchy" for the nonprofit sector, probably, but a lot of them can work with a little bit of adjustment, so I encourage you to do that.

OK, the tenth point. Now that you've got this fabulous newsletter that's directed at your audience, it's personal, your "From" and "Subject" lines are working great, you've got your headline, you've got your engaging content, it's set up in a way that's very simple and clean and easy for people to scan; what do you do with it? **How do you actually deliver it to folks?**

Well, what you don't do is send it out from your desktop in Outlook. You need to go ahead and establish a contract with an ESP, which is an email service provider. I don't care which one you use, but you've got to use one. There are all kinds of different companies that offer these services. If you're already using a service to do your contact management online, your donor prospecting work—organizations like Network for Good, everybody who does that kind of work (fundraising, consultant, client management)—they also offer an email newsletter module. So you can use them, or you

can use companies like iContacts that just focus specifically on email marketing. It doesn't matter which one you use, but you've got to use one, and there are lots of benefits to using them.

The first one is that it's going to save you a whole lot of time. Once you really get a good email list going, you don't want to have to deal with people's bad addresses bouncing back to you, somebody saying, "Oh, please change my email address for me. Add me to your list. Take me off your list." These are all huge time sucks that you don't want to have to deal with, and, if you sign up for a service, you don't have to deal with, because it's all automated. They take care of all that for you. So that's what you want to be doing.

They also help you comply with the spam laws. All of the good companies are going to encourage you to use what are called "double opt-in procedures" and I'm sure you've all been through that process before. What happens is you say, "Yes, I want to sign up for the email newsletter." And then you fill out their little form, press SEND, and then a few minutes later, you get an email that says: "Hey, you just went to sign up for our email newsletter. Please click on this link to confirm." And then you click on the link - that's the double.

So that's a very good standard best practice that nonprofits should be following when you're building your list, is to double opt-in. Right now, I'll give you a little commercial to go to my website and find out from my email newsletters which are double opt-in nonprofit marketing guide.com. I have several different email newsletters you can sign up for in the left hand sidebar and you will get a confirmation message from me asking you to click on the link. So that's the double opt-in.

Then we'll also give you very simple code that you can put on to your website and I'm always stunned at the number of nonprofits that have email newsletters and no way for people to sign up for them. So if you use one of these services, that's one of the basic things that they'll do when you're setting up your newsletter—give you the code to put the little sign up box on your website and you want to put that somewhere that's really obvious like your home page. It would be ideal if it appeared on every page of your website.

If you got a template or a content management system, have it set up so that little sign up appears everywhere. But at a minimum, make sure it's on your home page. The other great thing about using an email newsletter service provider is that they all offer wonderful tracking tools and what this allows you to do is to really figure out what's working and what's not.

While the 10 tips that I've given you today are pretty solid advice that's going to work for most nonprofits in most cases, the reality is that rules are made to be broken and there are maybe some of these things that just don't work as well for you as they do for other folks. The only way you're going to know that is if you're actually doing tracking and testing.

And all of these different service providers offer different tracking tools. You'll be able to

tell exactly how many people got your newsletter, how many went to bad addresses that bounced, how many were actually opened, a lot of them will show you which links were clicked on so you'll be able to tell whether people are actually taking that steps to follow through. In your call to action, you'll be able to tell which articles they were most interested in.

All of this information, you should be taking back -- back up to the top, to tip one, about knowing your audience and giving them what they want. All of that information helps you refine and do a better job next time. So you really want to get that service provider and then really make good use of the tracking tools because that's what really going to help you refine and come up with a better newsletter overtime. These services are really cheap.

If you just want to go to the real basic email newsletter providers that don't offer a lot of other constituent managements and fundraising, you can get it for about \$10 a month. So there's no excuse for not going this route. You really need to do it from a management perspective, from a best practice perspective, and it's also just cheap enough that there is really no excuse not to do it.

With that, I've gone through my 10 tips. I do have several articles bookmarked on my del.icio.us link, so you'll see a link to my tagged articles there. You'll find a whole lot of other stuff to go through and I'm happy to take any more questions.

Jono: Great. Thank you, Kivi. Since we're on point number 10 here, I do want to mention that everybody who registered for today's call is going to receive an email from us with a special coupon code that entitles you a 60-day free trial of our email service which is called EmailNow. You can also use that coupon to try our online fundraising service, which is called DonateNow, free for 60 days.

So at Network for Good, like some of the other organizations that Kivi mentioned, is also an email service provider and that we wanted to give folks an opportunity to try that service if you'd like.

A lot of people have been writing in to ask about industry standard, open rate and click-through rates and unsubscribe rates. One person mentioned that they're averaging about 20% and they have no idea whether that's good or not. So could you comment, generally, on this area, what should nonprofit be paying attention to in these categories? And are there any benchmarks for rates in these categories?

Kivi: Did Network for Good do a study about this?

Jono: I can tell that Network for Good's open rate is about 30% and our click-through rate is about 20% with emails we send. I have seen scam studies that put nonprofit industry averages in the 15%-20% category. But maybe, if you could comment on how to look -- what should people be looking at - open rates or they'll be looking at click-through rates, what's important and what's not?

Kivi: I think, generally, if you're getting 20% to 30% open rate, you're doing fine. Of course, you want to always try to do better and the tracking is really going to help you figure out ways to do that. Being personal, being timely, and giving people real value is what's going to up your open rate. If you get really, really good at writing your subject lines, that'll jump up your open rate. So that's one metric that's a pretty basic thing to look at.

Then it really depends on what you're trying to do with your newsletter—why you're putting it out there, what questions you're trying to ask. Is it a fundraising newsletter or are you trying to deliver information to members? Are you trying to get people to register for events? It really depends on why you're using the newsletter as a vehicle of communication and at that point, you can figure out whether your metrics work.

For some people, certain calls to action, if you only get 10% doing it, that'll be great. If you got a pretty well-segmented list of people you're trying to get to an event and you need all those people to register, then 10% is going to be pretty dismal in that case. So it's hard to say exactly what percentage is the target you should be going for without knowing how big your list is, how many of those people are really solid, firm prospects versus to just, kind of, interested in what you're doing and what that actual call to action is and why you want them to click.

As I said earlier, there are two different ways to go out in this. You can provide complete information in the newsletter article and have it be a stand alone that you deliver without a real need to click then it doesn't matter so much that you don't have clicks. But if you want people to actually click over the website and get the full article, then you're going to want to see a higher click-through rate.

So I know that's not a totally straight answer but the reality is that you do have to align your metrics with your goals.

Jono: Absolutely. And we also have several questions around the theme, how much is too much? Alex and Trish, for example, are asking, “What is the appropriate length and number of items? Is it best to put the entire article in the newsletter? Is it better to put just one or two paragraphs and put the link to your website that says: “Click here to read more.”?” What are your thoughts around that content question?

Kivi: The rule of thumb that I've seen most people put out there is that people really tune out after about 400 or 500 words. That's a chunk of text that if you use a lot of headlines and sub-heads, that's pretty scannable. Pretty quickly, people can glance at 400 or 500 words and figure out what it's about if you use some of the scannable, skimmable techniques for good online writing. After that, it's got to be really, really good stuff to make them scroll down and see what else you've got there.

So I'd say the first 400 words at the top of your newsletter need to be pretty outstanding and then if they are, people will be willing to scroll down and see the rest of it or click over to your website.

Jono: We have a question from Carol from Tennessee. Carol says, “If you are true grassroots or a budget under \$70,000 where would you suggest getting help with developing your actual newsletter template, how it looks for the first time?” And also, Kivi, talk about where Carol might be able to get some help in building a list from scratch, and whether you have any thought of what she might budget for these types of activities.

Kivi: Let's take those one at a time. If you go ahead and sign up for a service, again I highly recommend you do, the templates are going to be free. There is no additional cost to use them. If you're hunting for a service and that's going to be important to you, almost all of them offer free trials. For instance, Jono said they are giving you a free trial. So go ahead, sign up for the free trial. Look at the different templates and find one that works for you.

Like I said, it doesn't have to be this huge, gorgeous flashy thing. Simple text blocks with some nice colorful headlines and a couple of photos or graphics here and there, that's all you need. It really does not have to be fancy at all. The text is what's most important. The words that you use are what's most important. So again, don't get hung up on the template. Go ahead and sign up for a newsletter service and use one of the ones they offer to you. They all offer you templates.

List building is something that you need to be doing all the time. You can build your email newsletter list off line and online. Online when you sign up for these services they are all going to give you the code to put the sign-up box on your website. By all means, do that. That's the very first thing that you should be doing to build your list.

People come to your website from all kinds of different sources. You want to be able to go ahead and capture that contact right away so make that email newsletter box sign-up very obvious, very easy to use. You don't want to be asking for people's life history and all of their personal details because they are not going to give it to you. All you really need is their email address. You can go ahead and ask for their name or their organization but keep it to a bare minimum to make it as easy as possible for people to go ahead and sign up for your newsletter.

Put it in your email signature. When you send out an email from your office to whoever, in your little email signature at the bottom you can put something that says "sign up now for our newsletter blah blah" and give the website address where they can go and sign up for it.

Off line you can have sign-up lists everywhere you go. If you do public events, you can tell people, “Hey sign up for our list on this sheet of paper. We'll input you into our database. You'll get a confirmation message asking you to go ahead and double opt-in.” Most of the systems will allow you to import a list, and then they'll automatically send that email out to them saying, “Do you really want to join 'xyz's nonprofit newsletter list?” People can click on the link. They'll be double confirmed and then on your list. Just be gathering emails all the time.

I get this question a lot. If you have an existing email list that's just sort of random folks that you put together over the years, can you email them and add them to the newsletter list? There are two ways to go about that. You can go ahead and import your existing list into your new email service provider and have them send out that double opt-in message for you so that people will click on the link and be added to the list.

They are only going to do that one time, though, so that message has got to be crafted very carefully. They are not going to let you keep sending out messages saying, please confirm, please confirm, please confirm. They are usually going to give you one shot to do that. The other way to do it is to just email people independently on your own and direct them to go sign up at your website.

So, there's lots of ways to build lists. You generally don't want to be trading lists or buying lists from people. That's pretty frowned upon. You want to be creating your own list over time and building it up. Ask people on your current list to forward the newsletter to a friend and have them sign up. There's lots of ways to build your list.

Budget - There was a question about budget. Like I said, you can get these services for 10 bucks a month. In terms of out of pocket costs, it's not that much. There is some staff time involved, but there is always staff time involved. You have to judge how much effort you should put into your communications overall to get a return that's going to help you implement your mission.

Jono: Melissa has a question: "Is it important to have a print newsletter if you have an email newsletter?"

Kivi: You know that all goes back to your audience and how many people you think are going to be satisfied with email only. Like I said, if you can ditch the print newsletter because most of the people on your list are going to be fine with email or reading on your website, I say go for it. Print is very expensive and time consuming for a nonprofit. You can get a lot more done online.

There's always going to be like five people who are really irritated that you don't have the print newsletter anymore. I would say, don't worry about those folks. The other hundreds of people are fine. But, if your audience is really not using email a lot and not online a lot, then you probably are still going to have to do a print newsletter for some of them. This gets back to segmenting your list. There may be some portion of your audience that's great with email, would prefer email. Talk to them on email. Talk to the other folks in print.

Jono: We have another question, this time from Kathy. "I am currently listening to this teleconference on newsletters, and it's really great. So thank you, Kivi. I just created a newsletter for our volunteers with Microsoft Publisher. I am wondering what to do in order to put the newsletter into email format. So, I guess, generally speaking, you've got a newsletter that you created in some sort of desktop publishing program like Microsoft Publisher, Illustrator or whatever. Do you need to recreate the wheel here or can you move that over somehow?"

Kivi: Right. I would put in another plug for my upcoming web article, Converting Your Print Newsletter to an Email Newsletter, where we are going to talk about a lot of these issues, but in general no matter what print program you are in, to get it into an email format you either need to do it as plain text or HTML.

The email newsletters that you receive that have color and graphics and different fonts are all based on HTML. It's got to be really clean HTML. Cutting and pasting from some programs is going to work better than others. In general, Microsoft programs do tend to produce a lot of bloated HTML code that is not going to work that well. It is better to really strip it down to the real basic HTML.

Again, depending on which service provider you are using, some of them will help you do that. They will actually have a button that says, paste from Word, for example, and it will strip out the bloated code. I've never tried to cut and paste something out of Publisher, but the idea is that you want to be getting to clean HTML at some point in the process.

Jono: All of the information that Kivi talked about and all the links she's referenced you can go to www.fundraising123.org, click on the training tab. You'll see Kivi's event listed right there, and that will provide you all of the information, tips and links she talked about today in addition to that's where the audio recording and text transcript will be posted online once those are available.

We have a question from Kara writing in from Walton, New York. "Is it appropriate for a nonprofit to take a press release that they sent to the media outlets and tweak it to be part of an e-newsletter?"

Kivi: It depends on the press release, but generally there is nothing fundamentally wrong with that approach as long as you tweak it in a way that's going to work for your audience. Depending on how you are writing for the media, you may need to do just a little bit of tweaking to make it right for your audience, or you may need to rewrite the whole thing. It just depends on what kind of press release you are writing and what you're emphasizing. But, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with repurposing content as long as you do it in a way that's still going to work for that specific audience.

Jono: A couple of people have written in about this double opted-in issue. Some have even said that their email search provider gives them the option of choosing either a single opt-in or a double opt-in. One person said when they switched to double opt-in they ended up losing people. There is just general concern about losing subscribers when you have the double opt-in. Can you talk about single versus double and what your opinions are here?

Kivi: Sure. That's true, and it's a fact of life that you are making people go through this extra step so that's a little bit of a barrier. A lot of the double opt-in messages will either go into spam filters and so people really have to hunt them out which is a barrier, but the reality is that your list is going to be much more productive when it's clean. You're going to get better open rates that are actually going to be true open rates.

When you have only a single opt-in list, once the spam robots find your website your database is going to be pummeled with fake email addresses.

On the email newsletter system I use at nonprofitmarketingguide.com I see the notifications of people signing up, and I can't tell you how many 'buy viagras' have signed up for my newsletter. Now, I have a double opt-in and so the 'buy viagra' people never actually click on the link. I don't actually send them the email newsletter, and they are not polluting my click through and my open rate. It's a tradeoff. Which one is more important to you? The size of your list or the quality of your list.

There are ways that you can nudge people to go and check for that double opt-in message and click on that link, but there's no doubt about it: it's another barrier, and it's going to be harder to get people to do that. If you can work through that and get people to really click on it, the quality of your list is going to be far superior.

Jono: I also wanted to mention that when you go to www.fundraising123.org to check out some of these materials, we have a whole path called "Email 101" with articles from a wide range of email marketing experts. We've also got some case studies on there; for example, the Dance Theatre of Harlem and the success they had with raising money online through email. It's not just the large organizations/nonprofits that are using email effectively to communicate to raise money online. You can read more about that at www.fundraising123.org.

There have been a couple of questions from people talking about testing and different angles there. Some people say they have a lot of subscribers who are reintroduced that are on mobile devices, and they are worried about how their newsletter is going to come across on a Blackberry or a Palm or some other mobile email device. Generally, people want to know the best way to test their email before they send it so it appears in the best possible way across multiple different email clients or devices.

Kivi: For mobile devices the text heavy email newsletter is going to be much better than the one that's loaded with graphics. Again, this is another reason to lean towards a template that's really text heavy and has good content right up at the top, maybe including your pictures and your images a little bit lower. If you've got a lot of mobile users the short caps based newsletter is going to be much better for them.

In terms of testing, you can look at your email list. Look at the different domains that people are using. If you've got a lot of Gmail accounts or AOL on there or Yahoo or whoever, go ahead and set yourself up some addresses on those domains and send the newsletter out and see what it looks like. They are going to be different. The more complicated your HTML the more likely that it's going to look different in lots of different email browsers. Again, this is another reason to use a fairly straightforward simple template. The less crazy you try to get with lots of columns and boxes everywhere, the more likely it is that it's going to be consistent from email client to email client.

Jono: Here's a really good question from Pat. You talked a lot about how important it is to know your audience. So, Pat asks, "What's the best way to find out who your audience is?"

Kivi: Talk to them. Treat them like real people and actually call them up. There's lots of ways you can do this. You can come up with a cute little survey on Survey Monkey and email out the survey and see who replies; then, find out what they want. You can randomly pick 10 people from your contact list. Invite them to come into your office for lunch one day and sit there and talk to them about what they care about, why they are involved and just get to know them that way.

It doesn't have to be some big, huge, expensive crazy focus group or huge demographic in the office. It can be as simple as talking to five or six people about what they care about, what they want to be getting from you and how often they want to hear from you. You know, this is something you should be doing constantly, and it's not just through your email newsletter. It's for all of your marketing and your communications. You want to constantly find ways to stay in touch with your audience. Just talk to them person-to-person. You will get amazing feedback that way.

Jono: Let's see. Our last question comes from Leah, and she asks, "What do you suggest we open our newsletter with: the call to action or a story/testimonial or something else?"

Kivi: I would say mix it up and see what works best. Honestly, if you -- and this is not just me trying to weasel out of the question -- it's actually a really good practice to shake things up a little bit. If you use the exact same pattern in every newsletter it becomes predictable and people will scan over it much more quickly. If you mix it up a little bit each time they are more likely to actually spend a little bit more time looking at it.

You know, go ahead and start with a story one time and start with a more direct call to action the next time. See what kind of response rates you get when you're mixing it up over time. Again, like I said, mixing it up is not a bad thing. You kind of want to find your happy groove in between consistency which people like and mixing it up a little bit which keeps it interesting and exciting.

Jono: Great. Well, Kivi, I want to thank you very, very much for donating your time today. I know, as somebody who works on email and marketing and outreach quite a bit, I learned a great deal today. So, thank you very much for your timely tips.

Kivi: It was my pleasure. Thanks for inviting me.

Jono: I just want to remind folks again of www.fundraising123.org and the training paths. Our next Nonprofit 911 is on March 11th and we have Dan Heath, who is the co-author of the book, "Made to Stick". He is going to be talking about ways to transform the ways you communicate. It'll be a great tie-in to writing great email newsletters and fundraising emails and fundraising letters.

Kivi: I will be on that call, those guys are fabulous, so I highly recommend that everybody participate in that one especially.

Jono: And for those of you, we have several questions we didn't have time to get to today, Network for Good will be writing you back and taking a stab at answering all of your questions. You will be hearing from us within the next 24 to 48 hours. In addition to all of the information and links that I promised you, you will be receiving those in an email from us today.

So, thanks for joining today's Nonprofit 911. Have a great day, everyone.