

Nonprofit 911 – December 7, 2007

A Procrastinator's Guide to Fundraising with Mark Rovner

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The audio transcript can be found at www.fundraising123.org

Katya Andresen: Good afternoon and welcome to the December 7th Nonprofit 911 call sponsored by Network for Good. This is Katya Andresen, I am the VP of Marketing here at Network for Good and I am delighted that you are here with us today.

In case you are not familiar with Network for Good, we are a nonprofit just like you and our mission is to help nonprofits like yours to raise money online. We have a lot of free resources to help you do that. Nonprofit 911 is one of them and we hope this call and the other calls in this series, which you are welcome to join, will help you increase your online fundraising results.

We also provide fundraising services including donation processing, email outreach and donor databases. And this isn't a sales call, but I do want to mention that. And you can learn more about our services and find coupons at www.fundraising123.org.

And if you go there, you will also be among the first people to get a sneak preview of our new online learning center. It is full of free resources on fundraising and we hope you enjoy it.

You can sign up for an RSS feed of our most popular articles or sign up for articles in different content areas like Website 101 or email marketing, so that you get new content as we put it on there right into your email box. And we encourage you to sign up for that as well as to visit the learning center anytime you like.

We had over 250 people register for today's call which is "A Procrastinator's Guide to Year-End Fundraising" here with Mark Rovner.

And before I introduce Mark, just a couple of housekeeping things. First, all lines are muted. We are recording this call so that you can listen to it again later and other folks can listen to it at the learning center. You should have received an email from us this morning with a copy of Mark's guide to yearend fundraising. If you didn't get that mail, please check your junk mail folder or you can go to fundraising123.org, click on 'training' which is at the top right tab and you will see a page of all of our trainings including today's and right under the promotion for today's training, you will see a link for downloading the pdf for the Procrastinator's Guide, so you can get it there if you don't have the email.

And I like said, we record this call so you can revisit it and we put up transcripts too and you will be able to find that in the same place. If you need to reach us during the call, you have a technical problem or better yet, if you have a question for Mark, he wants to take a

lot of your questions today and leave a lot of time for questions. So if you have specific campaigns you want to talk about or get advice from him, he is offering to do that for you today.

So to get his answers to your questions, just send us an email at fundraising123@networkforgood.org. So just shoot us an email at any time during the call.

And now I am going to introduce Mark. Mark is a frequent writer, speaker and blogger and he is one of the pioneers of using the Internet for fundraising, organizing and strategic communications. Over the past 10 years, he has led communications and marketing efforts on behalf of a host of organizations including the World Wildlife Fund, Amnesty International, the Christopher Reeve Foundation and the International Campaign for Tibet. I can say I also love his recent work for the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

He is trained in audience research by Peter Hart and the Public Agenda foundation and he led the first ever national study of socially engaged Internet users in 1999, which is still viewed as the benchmark in the field. For elite Mark run Sea Change Strategies, which is an integrated marketing and fundraising services firm, you can learn more about Sea Change and read Mark's blog at seachangestrategies.com.

This is Mark's second time presenting on Nonprofit 911. He earlier led one of our most widely popular sessions of all time on Website 101, which if you like what you hear today, which I am sure you will, you can find information on that at the fundraising123.org under the 'training' tab. And if you haven't heard that presentation of his, it is great and I really encourage you to check that out after today's call.

So, we are extremely pleased Mark has donated his time to be with us today. Like I said, he is really one of the leaders in the field and we are just delighted that he has joined us and I hope you will get a lot of his advice. I am going to turn it over to you Mark.

Mark Rovner: Thank you and good afternoon. What I'd love to do is, as Katya indicated, is go through the high points of the guide. I am hoping many of you have it. There are 10 points in the guide. So even if you don't have it, I am going to be unusually linear today and leave a lot of time for questions about end of year fundraising or donor cultivation.

And I am happy to throw things wide open if people have questions about online fundraising in general or revisiting some of the website design issues we covered, actually we cover some of them in the Procrastinator's Guide. So I am just going to launch right in and I hope you all have a lot of questions and I look forward to a great discussion.

We wrote the Procrastinator's Guide because we saw the same sets of questions arising every year and pretty late in the year and we wanted to underscore the point that it really is not too late even today on December seven to make a difference in terms of your end

of year fundraising, particularly if you have done a good job of building relationships over the course of the year. And even if you haven't, January is around the corner, so we can talk about your 2008 plans and even if you haven't, there are still things to do in 2007 that should give you somewhat of a lift at this yearend.

One thing that is not in the 10 steps that I am going to go through, but it is just an important thing to keep in mind is that the vast majority of the money that comes in online to most organizations, comes in between Christmas and New Years. And I know I am personally inundated with fundraising emails from organizations I have supported and organizations I haven't and I am guessing you are too.

And in the past that used to make me feel very panicky that I was behind the 8-ball because I hadn't started sending out volley after volley of emails, but I can tell you from seeing the numbers the money doesn't really start to flow until the last few days of the year and in some cases really the 29th, 30th, and 31st of December. And that is one of the big reasons why we say December 7th is definitely not too late to be thinking about it.

So I am going to go into the 10 steps and then take your questions. The first step is "inspire your donors everyday." And the point of this and I think it is self-explanatory is that donors tend not to give to the bigger sob story, donors give to the causes that inspire them. And the chances are if someone has already made a donation to you, it is because they are inspired by your work, they are inspired by your vision, they are inspired by your willingness to do whatever it is you are doing to change the world instead of being a stockbroker or a lawyer or whatever else.

And it is something we often lose sight of because we all get stuck in the weeds and sometimes in our messaging, we take our donors and supporters down into the weeds with us. And this is a really important time of the year to reconnect yourself and reconnect to your donors with the things that make you proud to do what you do, the things that make you proud to be part of the organization that you are proud of. And we list down some specific steps you might take to build passion among your supporters. I am not going to go through all of them.

One of the ones that I am more enamored with than ever and I know you have heard this a 100 times and now you are going to hear it a 101 times, is storytelling. The chances are your organization has a really inspiring story about how it came to be. Most organizations do. Someone was wronged, someone saw an injustice they couldn't tolerate, a group of people came together and decided something had to be done about homelessness or hunger or abandoned pets or global warming. And reconnecting people with the energy of the founding days of your organization I think is a pretty tried and true way of connecting people with that underlying passion and a very, very important piece of fundraising.

We list out a lot of other concrete ideas and if you have any questions about them or want to get into them during Q&A we can feel free, but I am going to go from sort of the cosmic to the granular here, going from step one to step 2, which is "Blaze trails to your

donate page".

In the last few days of the year, the chances are that most of the people coming to your website are coming to give anyway, unless you're one of those unusual organizations that is very, very busy, programmatically, between Christmas and New Year and it really is a really small minority of you.

We urge you to take advantage of that fact by making your home page as donation-oriented as possible and to lead people who may be visiting you as quickly as possible to your donate forum. So that includes things like, if you're playing with Google Ads, having Google keyword ads that go straight to your donate form.

Making sure that you have multiple donate asks on your home page.

It's amazing how different people's eyes track in different ways and some people see the donate button that's always been there and some don't. One of the tactics, and we have a picture of it in the guide, that's become increasingly popular and we're big fans of, is what has become known as the "home page hijack".

A home page hijack is a new home page that has nothing on it but the fundraising ask, along with the button that says: "If you want to see our normal, everyday, boring old home page, you can click here," so you're not making your usual home page inaccessible, but you're making them click through a yearend ask.

Our experience is that's been very successful, particularly with people who, as I said, would come to the site with the thought of giving, to begin with, and that's a really, really important group of people.

Along similar lines, Step three: Optimize your donate form, is kind of the flipside of getting people to the form is getting people to complete the form, obviously. There are a lot of usability best practices that to a large degree are still not followed on donate forms. And again, we list out the details.

I would say the two things, as I look through the action steps that we offer, that really jump out at me as important ones to obey, is don't ask for more information than you need. People get bogged down in forms when they're asked for their fax number or their office phone number or other extraneous bits of information that you're not going to use and just makes them feel like this is laborious. People will go: "I'm going to go to another place and give where it's easier".

I have to say, and they don't pay me to do this, but Network for Good forms are very, very good. So if you're using Network for Good as your donations processor, this isn't where you need to spend a lot of time.

So number one is asking for too many pieces of information. Number two is giving people too many choices. I want to give, I click on the donate button and it says: "OK,

here are the 32 ways you can give to us". I don't want to hear it. And we've tested this, donors will space out. More options increases the likelihood that people will choose "none of the above" as their choice.

It doesn't mean you can't have a couple of other options, maybe in the left navigation. If the stock market continues to rise, you might want to put a link in about taking stock gifts, assuming you do take stock gifts. But really, keep the focus on that one shot gift and you'll bring in more money.

Number four, and again, this is more of a testing thing, but it's not too late, even on December 7th. Test drive your online donation process. Give a friend or a spouse or a girl or boyfriend or a neighbor a 10 dollar bill and sit down next to them while they go through the process of making a donation. They're going to see things you didn't see. They're going to point out little things that could make a big difference.

When we do formal usability testing, we rarely do it with more than four or five people because that's really all it takes to pick up those little usability glitches. It could be little things like the submit button says "submit" instead of "donate" or it's at the bottom of the page below the scroll line and they can't find it, or there's some piece of language that confuses them or they're wondering if this is a secure transaction. Really, that little bit of mother-in-law testing will cost you nothing but a couple of hours and 10 bucks and it will give you some really, really great information.

Number six, this is one of the biggest pieces of low-hanging fruit in all fundraising, not only online fundraising, and that is thank your donor at least three times. There have been an increasing number of studies that have shown two things. One is that donors are less likely than ever to continue giving to organizations once they've given. And when they're asked why they're less likely than ever, one of the most common things is for them to say: "First of all, no one told me that they appreciate it or acknowledged, in any particular way, my gift and nobody came back and told me what they did with my money".

These are addressable issues and they are especially addressable with email because it doesn't cost you a couple of bucks, like it does to send the direct mail package. We think your three "gimmees", your three easiest ways of thanking an online donor is the result screen at the end of the giving process on the web page. The auto responder that goes out, the automatic email that goes out, acknowledging the gift.

And then, we recommend another email go out a day or two later with the second thank you, and all three of those should be equivalent of a hug. It shouldn't be: "Here's your receipt" as if I just bought a book on Amazon.com, but: "Here's how the money you just sent us is going to change someone's life," or change an animal's life or change the world or whatever it is.

It's not a bad idea to also make your tax ID number is somewhere on there, and if your donation system can give the amount of the gift, it's perfectly fine and much appreciated by the donors if it can be used a tax receipt. But the key thing there is to make an

emotional connection and to turn that donation into an important moment. And I would guess that is one of the number ways in which you could get a one time donor to become a repeat donor.

Number seven: Provide for a warm welcome. This is kind of the follow-on to the thank you. I was just in a conversation among direct marketers who work with nonprofits and we've all acknowledged that we've done kind of a not good enough job of giving people a welcome experience before they're tossed into the usual flow of communications.

There was a lot of confession by a lot of these very experienced direct marketers, that because there's no series of welcome emails or welcome communications in place, the first thing a new donor might get is a renewal notice a month later, if that's the next communication that's going to the whole house file.

So the recommendation here is hold new donors out of whatever your communications plan is, at least for a couple or three weeks and make sure that you send them two or three emails that welcome them, that acquaint them with your work, that give them options for engaging with you. And also, that maybe ask their opinions about what they'd like to hear more about or what kinds of issues they're interested in.

So, following on that, you've thanked them, you've welcomed them, the next thing is to launch a cultivation plan. Back in the old, old, old days of direct mail and this is even before my time, there was such a thing as "cultivation mail" where people would get something in the mail that was intended to thank them.

It might be a packet of clips, it might be a recent speech the CEO made. Well that all stopped because it is so expensive to send a piece of mail that nobody sends mail that doesn't have an 'ask' in it. As a result of which indirect mail, there stopped being a stream of communications that was purely about making people feel more connected to the organization.

And that bad habit has tended to carry over a little bit mindlessly into the online sector. And so one of the best things you can do is plan a series of email communications that has no 'ask' in it whatsoever and that purely has its intent, connecting people, telling people stories, telling people 'hey here is an example of how your money made a difference,' 'here is how we have spent our money.' It can even have a disappointment or two. Anything that gives people a sense of being an insider and that has an authentic voice will have a cultivation effect.

So we only have two more and then I'd love to take your questions.

No. nine is "measure and test throughout the year," it is kind of self-explanatory and we list out some of the different kinds of things that you might test and track. Certainly the amount of money that comes in in December, certainly the seasonal pattern of your giving is something you want to benchmark or you like so many organizations and that it all comes in at the end of December or is there a different rhythm to your giving.

It is important to have a sense of the rhythm of your giving, so that you know if you are having a particularly good year, particularly bad year, it is compared to something and not just compared to your new CEO's expectations or anything like that. We do lay out some specific testing issues. There are a lot of unresolved "best practices" out there in terms of how to do online fundraising. So almost any test you run at this point is going to break new ground.

And then the No. 10 point and yes, we included it just because we felt like there should be 10 is "avoid procrastinating next year." And what we mean by that is if you have done nothing to cultivate your donors this year, December 7th is the best time to be thinking about what you are going to do to create much more of a connection with your donors and potential donors in 2008.

That said, things like a home page hijack, tweaking the donate page, making sure that most paths on your home page from now till the end of the year lead to that donate form, simplifying the form, taking away extra choices, all of those steps are going to help, whatever your situation is, are going to help you get the most out of the yearend fundraising.

So I am going to stop there, I have been babbling for about 22 minutes and Katya, I'd love to take whatever questions that come in.

Katya: OK. First of all, I want to remind everyone that this is a rare opportunity for you to get your direct questions answered by Mark and the way you do that is you email us at fundraising123@networkforgood.org.

I want to kick it off Mark with my own question actually, which is sometimes it helps to make things tangible or to have some examples. And so, can you tell us what is your favorite email appeal, end of your email appeal that jumps to mind and why it was good and illustrate some of the principles you have here? And then if you are feeling in a caddy mood, maybe you can tell us about one that was less effective and why?

Mark: Let me flag a couple of things. It is easier for me to flag the giving pages I like best because the best email appeal is one that is well timed and doesn't offer too many choices. Let me tell you one email campaign that I like a lot. Actually it is a combination of things. It is one that we have done in partnership with Environmental Defense a couple of years running and I will walk you through the elements of it and why we like it.

What we did last year and we are doing it again this year is we went to the donors who have already been giving and asked them to put up a match in small dollar increments that we will use later in December to turn around and ask for split, some people who haven't given before. It is kind of a rip-off of some of the things that we have all seen on public radio and public television. And so we sent a couple of emails starting the week after Thanksgiving. We are doing it again this year, asking the donors to be challengers and then we set up a blog for them to put up their own comments about why they are doing this and what they hope to achieve by making donations to Environmental Defense.

It is a very nicely optimized donate page. So if you go there, it is a good example of a well done donate page. And then starting next week, I believe, we will start sending out emails to the non-donors saying your friends and neighbors have put up this match, so that your gift will be matched dollar for dollar, a yearend match is always a good idea in terms of getting people to give and including some of the quotes they have put on the blogs. So it is very personal, it is very authentic, it is very neighbor-to-neighbor feeling and it engages people who are already committed at one level and engages new people at another level. So that is one of my favorite campaigns.

Katya: That sounds like a good one. I am ready to get out my checkbook.

Mark: Excellent, please do.

Katya: [laughs] I want to remind everyone you can email your questions to fundraising123@networkforgood.org.

Mark, I want to ask you this time of year, this year, is there anything going on regarding the national mood or things that have been in the news that might be useful for people to think about? I am thinking about in particular, this year we are hearing a lot about the rise of the conscious consumer, concern about the environment, global warming, concern about toxic toys, plane parts from china; lot of attention to that.

One of the pieces of advice I know that I give a lot and I have heard you give as well is, it is important to think about things that are already on people's minds and give them away to act on them. What are your thoughts on that and is there anything timely that folks might be able to think creatively about tying into this year?

Mark: You know, I am really glad you brought that up and Katya, if you disagree with what I am about to say please chime in. Katya is one of my favorite people and I consider her very much a mentor in many ways in marketing. So I am curious what your response is to this as well. I am not a big fan of organizations latching on to the cause of the moment. There is no question for example that global warming has a level of visibility it has never had before and it is capturing public concern in a way that it has before.

And there is no question that there are lot of organizations including development organizations that are trying to sell their global warming friendliness as it were. I am not convinced it works and I am concerned that it is going to cause a certain amount of blurring of people's perception of who you are. I am a big believer in having, as I know you are Katya, in having a very clear, very well defined brand identify.

So if you are working on five things including global warming, by all means talk about global warming; but if you are a pet shelter, don't talk about the carbon footprint of your shelter and raise money for compact fluorescent light bulbs. I don't know, maybe that's a good idea, but it doesn't strike me as a good idea.

Katya: I think you make a great point there Mark. I am actually for it in general if it meets with the criteria Mark put out there, which is, it is not forced. I worked on a couple of campaigns, I had really national clients and I used to work promoting an organization that did living wills. And the Terri Schiavo case came about in Florida around then and that could not be more relevant to living wills.

Talking about animal shelters, we saw a lot of successful fundraisers in the wake of the Michael Vick scandal, the football player from Georgia who had been accused of abusing dogs and using them for fighting and really galvanized people. So I am with Mark, if you have a really natural nice alignment with something in the news, I think it's a great way to engage your supporters. You don't want to stretch it too far and start talking about carbon imprints, if that's not what you're about. Which gets back to the point Mark always talks about, which is authenticity: being true to your organization and truthful in your messaging. That's really important.

We have some questions coming in here, Mark. Gianna from here in Washington says, "Mark, would a new e-newsletter be a good way to accomplish the cultivation goal? Can you recommend some good sample e-newsletters?"

Mark: What a softball. Thanks for that one.

Katya: You can thank Gianna.

Mark: Thank you, Gianna. I think most newsletters are bad and I'll tell you why. The short answer to your question is yes; it is a good vehicle for cultivation, if you do it right. Most people do not do it right and here's why. Most newsletters are assembled at the last minute by junior staff people who are on deadline, who look at the website and cut and paste a bunch a stuff off the website and off press releases. You end up with a 'dog's breakfast' of different features and featurettes and things that are relatively easy to put together, without any great deal of thinking about what it is people are interested in and want to hear about.

We went through an exercise with the Monterey Bay Aquarium where we totally revamped with them, their email newsletter with a single question. Their senior most communicators get together once a month and they ask, "What is the single thing we could share with our audience that is the most inspiring?" One month, it was a short story about a disabled kid who went through their junior scuba diving program. Another month, it was an amazing picture of a young white shark that was being released to the wild after being in captivity for a while.

These are the two keys to making an e-newsletter great: The decision is made every month by the senior and best communication minds in your organization, and the only real question about what to put in is what will be inspiring, entertaining, moving or powerful for your audience. I'll give you another clue. Usually, you can be more inspiring by telling one great story than having five little squibs. So that's my newsletter rant.

Katya: Couldn't agree more. Jane from Minnesota asks, "What are some good ways to drive Internet traffic to your organization's website? Our donor demographic skews heavily to 35 and over. I'm interested in attracting the 35 and under crowd. Any advice on that?"

Mark: Well there's only two ways to drive traffic to a non-profit website, other than your own email communications. One is PR, paid or earned media, and the other is search marketing. It really almost boils down to those two. We could devote a whole hour to the connections between PR and site traffic because it's another under-utilized area by most organizations.

It can be as simple as making sure that all of your spokespeople plug the url in their speaking. Try to get the url into news interviews. Try to put as much newsworthy stuff on the website and plug it to reporters as much as possible. It's not a slam-dunk, but it all moves toward tightening that connection between your media exposure and your website traffic.

And then the other is search marketing. Google is very generous with their Google Grants, if you're willing to go through the paperwork, you're 501(c)(3) and you're a small non-profit. I'm guessing many of you are because Network for Good has a particularly strong following; as well it should amongst small/medium non-profits. You should be able to get a Google Grant, which will give you, for all intents and purposes, unlimited search marketing around terms that are relevant for your organization.

So those are the main two. The other thing I would urge you to do, when you're thinking about under 35's, is ask yourself why you're doing it. If you're trying to attract donors under 35, you are swimming upstream, at least a little bit. Under 35's are at points in their lives where they are raising families and are just getting into the thick part of their career. I don't think we can expect them to manifest, to a large degree, as donors for a while. It doesn't mean 35 year olds don't donate, and if I've offended some of you, I apologize.

But there's this tendency to overlook the early 50-somethings - and I don't only say that because I'm an early 50-something - as a very important source of donors for three reasons. One is there is a ton of us. Two, we're online in gigantic numbers. And three, we're going to be giving for another 30 years. So if that focus on under 35's has as its main goal fundraising, you might want to think it through. Katya, do you have any thoughts?

Katya: No, that's an excellent point. That's what I was thinking even as I read the question. You need to manage your expectations and set your goals for what you're really trying to accomplish with those under 35. They're never going to be huge donors, but maybe you'll start to raise awareness or cultivate a relationship there a bit, but look at that realistically.

Mark mentions Google AdWords and Google Grants. I just wanted to say if you want to learn all about how to do that, just go to Fundraising123.org. You'll see in our new learning center the most popular article is "Searching Engine Marketing 101", which

explains exactly how to go about doing this and how it works. And so if you were intrigued by what Mark said but unsure about how to get started, that might be a useful resource to you.

Mark: I think I'm going to have to read it myself.

Katya: I have some more questions here, but before I get to them, a reminder that you can email your questions and Mark will answer them. Just email Fundraising123@networkforgood.org. OK, I have a question here from Jesse. He says, "Can you speak specifically about how your ideas relate to arts organizations rather than humanitarian ones?"

Mark: In many ways, it seems to me that it's easier for an arts organization to be inspiring because that's your business. For example, if I was a symphony - and I understand the copyright issues and that the lawyers are going to be all over this with the long knives - but I'd be podcasting. I would give people a taste of whatever arts are the focus of your work. I'd be doing holiday e-cards with visual art. I would do kid art. I'd really focus on putting the beauty and inspiration that is your reason to exist on display.

Katya: Great point. Actually I was just at an awards lunch recently, and the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra from Virginia won an award for their podcast. Somehow they got around the lawyers and are doing that successfully. So that's a great suggestion, Mark. I have a question here from Lisa from New Jersey. She says, "In answering the first question, Mark mentioned giving pages he liked best. Can he list a few of those or point us to those websites?"

Mark: Environmental Defense definitely has a good one. Wildlife Alliance, which is at WildlifeAlliance.org, has a good one. Last that I saw, CARE had a really good one. They're at CAREUSA.org. I'm glad you flagged that because no one pointed out that I skipped #5, as I went through the Top 10, which was 'Create a Why Donate Page', a summary of the most important reasons to give. CARE does that really well too, which includes what they have accomplished and the fact that they have got four stars on Charity Navigator and the fact that 91 cents of every donated dollar goes directly to program etcetera, etcetera. So while you are checking out Care's really great giving page, check out their really great "why donate" page as well.

Katya: That is great, thanks. I agree, I am a big fan of Care's work. So yes check out careers.org or I believe it also works to go to care.org. We've had a couple people email actual campaigns for you to look at. Unfortunately, we can't easily show those to every one online, but I am going to tell you about one of them a little bit, just ask for your reaction Mark.

Nicolau says, "Thank you so much for this presentation, it is very clear and very helpful. I am new to my organization called Summer Search and we have no email marketing service and have never done an email solicitation." So she is putting together her first one which she is included. Do you have any pointers for folks like Nicolau who really don't have much experience and never done one before. What is a good way to get started with a strong set of messages?

Mark: Well, first of all, I am going to point out that no one does better campaigns than you, Katya. So I am going to turn the mic back over to you in a sec.

I think that most campaigns stumble by being too complicated, having too many moving pieces and trying to reach too many target audiences. There is always this desire to "not preach" to the converted. Trust me, you haven't preached enough to the converted. No one preaches enough to the converted. So really think about who your most important target audience is, talk to them and keep it simple. And Katya, you might want to do a little story telling around some of the campaigns you have done.

Katya: Yeah. I am happy to tell some stories around that. And before I do, Nicolau I will email Mark your email. But one thing I noticed right off the bat which is going to lead into my story here, is Nicolau starts out her email note talking about it is coming up to New Year, you may be thinking be about New Year's resolution. This January you can not only change your life, but also completely transform someone else's and then you talk about what you do.

I used to be a journalist and we recall something like this, a buried lead. In other words, I got to tell you Nicolau, I loved the second half of your first paragraph, but the first paragraph is almost identical to a ton of appeals I have gotten in my mailbox last month. And the story I am going to lead into is we have a real - you are doing the right thing in that you are trying to relate to your audience about the time of year and what they may be thinking about and you are starting out in a mindful way with your audience which is great.

But you don't want to sort of beat around the bush in getting to your point. If you have a fantastic human interest story, dive right into it. Don't bury it behind a paragraph that just talks about the time of the year, how you are going to be asking for money. Try to pull people right in with a story, with a motion because people are going to be going through their emails, listing through them, hardly glancing at them and you kind of need an arresting opening or an arresting first sentence, that is really important.

I like some of the testimonials and other things in your email, that's great. The story I was going to tell was that I had to send an email last week. I had to draft for a CEO from Network for Good and it was an email going out to our friends - we call our friends of list, basically all of our big funders as well as people who have been friendly to us or provided support, some people who started Network for Good, various influential people in our field etcetera.

And there has always sort of been a tradition in our office where we send out a note around our anniversary every year which is late November. And it is so easy for me to tell you what to do, but I always forget these things when I apply them myself. And if I sat down and I started to write a note about, oh it is our sixth birthday and here are all the great things we have done this year. And then I stop myself and said, what am I doing? Who cares that is our sixth birthday? Who cares? Just like who cares that it is new years or who cares that it is a giving time of year.

That is not the point and that is not the point why you are writing to somebody, I thought well that is news to us that we are six, hey we can have a birthday party here in the office, but no one in the outside world is going to care and then I started thinking about my audience, who I was writing to. And then that took my thinking a step further which is do I really want to send an email to all these people saying, oh we did all these great things this year, is that what this is really about, no it is about something Mark talked about in his opening remarks in this call which is, you know, where is the gratitude.

This list of people that I was sending to just like your list of donors, are the people who made this possible. And I wrote a completely different email and the email started out by saying, "We are writing to thank you for your time, your moral support, your money, everything you have done to help us because it has had the most unbelievable return on investment in the past year. And we want to tell you what you have made possible, the staggering amount of things you made possible this year and how grateful we are."

And positioned it all that way and we got the most unbelievable response to it, so many people wrote back, so many people said it was unlike any other communication they had from a non-profit in a long time. And so, it is easy to over think these things and really useful to come back to Mark's basic principles which are: be appreciative, be thankful, be grateful, talk as you would to the donor if they were sitting across the table from you. And you would be telling them great stories, you would be expressing gratitude, you would be speaking from the heart. And if you start in that place, that is always a better place to start than worrying about filling up a newsletter.

So easy for me to stay, always have to stop myself and throw out my own [inaudible] but those are good things to keep in mind.

Mark: You and me both. And if you all do nothing else, go to the nearest mirror after this call, look in the mirror and say to yourself, you are not the target audience.

Katya: [laughs] there you go, that's a good one.

Mark: Your daily fundraising affirmation.

Katya: Exactly. Here is a question from Daniel for you Mark. He says, do you have any suggestions for small non-profit membership organizations. Many of our members do not want to donate because they feel their membership dues are enough. Our consumers do not want to donate because we are not the direct service provider. We basically spread awareness about dispute resolution to the public, support our members through a variety of benefits and secure consumer programs and manage them for our members. Do you see any opportunities for us to develop an individual donor campaign and.

Daniel's was something called the New York State Dispute Resolution Association and I will just read the description that is on this email. It is a nonprofit professional membership organization committed to the promotion of quality conflict management and people dispute resolution.

Mark: You know, getting extra donations from membership organizations is always a tough one. I mean we work with the Monterey Bay Aquarium and people who join the Monterey Bay Aquarium think they literally and figuratively pay their dues. And the number of people who actually make donations isn't that great, however and I think this is relevant to your situation, the few who do, make substantial donations.

And I think that would lead me as kind of a first line of attack, strategically would be the focus on smaller bigger donations from the legal community and others who have money, either law firms or individual practitioners who are involved in conflict resolution or even, I don't know, if companies are involved in your work. But I'd focus on a smaller group of high potential giving rather than try to get every single member [cross talk] opportunity.

Katya: That's a good idea and it is closely related to another question from Lee, a question that has quite a bit to do with the previous one. He says he had a great reply for arts organizations, but what about making strong email and pages for legal advocacy and policy organization, who have no direct services and complex issues.

Mark: Yeah. You got a hard one, but again you need to get behind the policy issues, you need to get behind the daily nitty-gritty and talk about the values, the issues of justice, the ways in which the world would be a different place if you and like organizations weren't there. Look for your charismatic founder or your chairman of the board or someone whose personal testimony about your work has made a difference.

I just got an email appeal that made the rounds of the fundraising community - oh, and this answers your question, Katya - of a not-so-good example -it is a policy-based organization. And, they sent around an email last week, saying, "We have a policy emergency..." and, then, the next sentence says, "Many people think policy is BORING..." - all caps - "but, we know it's the key to this particular issue." And, it's just not going to raise money.

It's every policy wonk - and, I'm a former policy wonk and, I still got a little bit of that in me - it's every policy wonk's giant fantasy that the policy issues can raise money, but, we know that they don't.

So it's the value - go to the values. Go to the charismatic people, I would say, is the short answer.

Katya: That's a great idea. And, I know - I remember from some workshops I've done. You know, there are a couple of organizations in your shoes, Lee, and, they did a really nice job doing what Mark's talking about. They had some extraordinary people and advocates working for them. And they built their brand around those people. Because the process and the policy part was a little bit dull or hard to understand for some audiences. And that brought the human face and made their organization far more relatable.

Mark: Even...

Katya: Yeah?

Mark: Even, the word "policy" makes people's eyes glaze over. Even, eh, so, it's just, it's - for fundraising, it's toxic. And, it's not to say you shouldn't be trying to communicate more in flavor what you do over the course of, of the year. But, not in fundraising.

Katya: Right. Meg want - from California - says, I hesitated to send emails to one-time donors other than the automated thank you note because they haven't opted in for my letters. Can you please comment on opt-in versus opt-out options and should those appear directly on the Donate web page link?

Mark: First of all, this is not legal advice and, we're basically,- because I'm not super-versed on the ins and outs of canned spam. But, but, I will tell you - you have two choices and the choice is really yours. You can, you can use what is called an opt-out strategy - which is the donor has to affirmatively tell you that they do not want to receive emails from you after the auto-responder. Or, you can use an opt-in strategy where you say - only if you check the box or tell me - I'm not going to send you any email. Now, as a marketer, I favor the opt-out strategy. I favor the strategy of - if you have a box, have it pre-checked.

People may tell you - God, I don't want any more email. I don't want to hear from you. I just want to make my gift and go on with my life. But because I know all of you are incredibly inspiring people and you're going to start writing really inspiring email newsletters, they're going to change their minds when they see the newsletter.

The critical thing is that every communication have a very clear and straightforward way to get off the list. But I wouldn't, I wouldn't bend over backwards to have the most pristine opt-in process because you're just going to get a lot of people not volunteered.

Katya: Yeah, I really agree with the opt-out route being, being a little more attractive as a marketer. And, don't forget to market your opt-in or opt-out. Don't say - yes, send me your new e-newsletter. That just sounds like another piece of mail coming my way. And, that works for good. We did a lot of testing. And, you know, the way we phrased our option which is actually an opt-out. It's a pre-checked box.

And it says, "please send me my year-end donation history and other useful updates." And that really elevated our option because people wanted their donation receipt at the end of the year. By the way, that's a nice service you can provide to them at this time of the year and remind them to give again.

How can you position what you're going to send them in a way that makes them less likely to say "I don't want to be bothered"?

Mark: Yeah. In fact, we just completed a huge study of high-dollar donors who are getting emails from various organizations. And, the number one thing they said they would like is an email in January with their giving history in it, so... That's already caught

you. You're ahead of the curve. But it's a pretty simple thing for people to emulate and it's very worthy of it.

Katya Andresen: Yes. Our most successful email campaign every year is our Donation History email which goes out in mid-December, so it's not too late for you to do it - and we send everyone whose not opted-out from hearing from us, their giving history. so, they can be reminded when they last gave and easy, one-click through to give again. Last year that raised two million dollars that email alone. So, I'm a big fan of that.

Uh, Beth wants to know - are there any tips for being inspiring when we're not a direct service? We're hearing this theme a lot today.

Mark: Yeah.

Katya: we are a volunteer center who refer our volunteers to other organizations and offer capacity-building training services to non-profits. Any tips on making a strong piece when we don't have juicy stories?

Mark: I would imagine you do have juicy stories given what you do both in terms of the transforming effect the volunteer experience has, and, the, and, the service they provide to different non-profits. And, you don't need a hundred stories, you just need two. But, but, there has to be a charismatic volunteer or the organization that sent you the heartfelt letter because they got the help they needed to do whatever they do. I just think you've got to have - there's, there's got to be something there.

Katya: Yeah. I agree there's got to be something there. And, also, it wasn't clear in me from your note, but back to Mark's earlier point: who your audience is. I mean, who are you trying to get to give and, and, how are they deriving benefit from the fact you're getting more volunteers out there efficiently. and, and, to think about, maybe a smaller, more highly-qualified audience who really places a lot of volume, value on that - sorry - and, and put those controlling stories, in front of them.

Mark: And, it could even be, you know, it, it could even be a profile of, of a volunteer just, just to give - and, again, I am very obsessed with authenticity as [indecipherable] suggested - just to give it a sense of reality and a sense of immediacy and a sense of personal-ness.

Katya: Yeah. well, we're running out of time. Mark, do you have anything you want to say we haven't gotten to today? Or, any points you want to - any points of inspiration or wrap-up that you want to leave us with?

Mark: I, I think every non-profit can be inspiring and is inspiring. And, and, and, I think it's, I think it's important to, even if you've got a complicated, abstruse, policy-based, legalistic mission, somewhere in there, there's some real emotional passion and, connecting with it is, is going to be the key and finding a way to convey it. The most cerebral organization raises money on emotional appeals.

Katya: Absolutely. Thank you. That's a great note to end on. And I just want to remind everyone on the phone about our great new resource which will include a Procrastinator Guide by Mark and hundreds of other articles. It's our new learning center at fundraising123.org. We hope you enjoy checking that out. Rate the articles. Give us feedback. Let us know how you're liking it. we really look forward to, hearing from you on that.

And, if you are such a procrastinator that you don't even have a way to collect online donations right now, call us and then work for good. We can have you up, with a custom "Donate Now" page within 48 hours. So, you'll have plenty of time to get your page up and to fundraise with Mark's great tips all by the end of the year. It can be done.

So, thank you very much for joining us. I want to thank Mark again,.

Mark: Thank you.

Katya: You've been wonderful. You've gotten lots of positive feedback here via email. So, thank you so much for joining us.

Mark: Well, I hope it helps. I really do. And, everyone have a great year end.