

Nonprofit 911 – October 28, 2008
**Going Beyond the E-Newsletter: Five Essentials for Crafting an
Engaging Email Marketing Program**
with Jim Hitch and Suzanne Norman
Sponsored by Network for Good

The MP3 audio transcript can be found at
www.fundraising123.org or www.Nonprofit911.org

Rebecca Ruby: Hello everyone. Welcome to the October 28 Nonprofit 911, sponsored by Network for Good. My name is Rebecca Ruby and I'm the Marketing Specialist here at Network for Good.

We're really happy that you joined us for today's call, "Going Beyond the Newsletter: Five Essentials for Crafting and Engaging Email Marketing Program."

Now, you recognize that this is obviously a bit of a scary time for fundraising and marketing. Perhaps the most terrifying that a lot of us have ever experienced, given what's going on with the economic climate today. Everyone is fearful about their financial future and here we are unfortunately on the verge of fundraising season.

We've been hearing from a lot of non-profits who feel worried and maybe even inadequately prepared for this. But, even when the economy looks bad, your online fundraising and marketing don't have to suffer. And that's one of the reasons we're having our call today.

In fact, we think the important fact about economic downturns is that they regularly come and just as regularly leave. But, downturn or not, it's important that we don't assume a defensive posture. As fundraisers and marketers, we really need to create plans and strategies for dealing with the downturn that are as detailed as those drawn up for normal times.

With that in mind, we're thrilled to have Suzanne and Jim with us on the phone today. They are email communications experts and they have got some great advice to share today to inform your email marketing strategy. And you're not alone. We've had over 150 people register for today's call.

Before I introduce our speakers, I just want to welcome everyone who is attending their very first Network for Good Nonprofit 911 call. As you probably know, Network for Good is a non-profit organization, just like most of you on the phone. Our mission, quite simply is to make it easy and affordable for non-profits to raise money online.

Nonprofit 911 is one of the many free resources that Network for Good provides the non-profit community to help organizations like you increase their online fund raising and non-profit marketing results. In addition to Nonprofit 911, we're also providing

online fundraising services. So, if you are not raising money right now on your website, we hope you will consider Network for Good for your online fundraising and email marketing needs.

And since today's call is about email marketing strategy, I have to put in the plug for Network for Good's email outreach service called "Email Now Powered by Emma." But, don't worry, this call is not a vendor review or a sales pitch. It's about email strategies. Just have to throw that in there.

Just a few housekeeping items. All the lines have been muted and the call is being recorded. So, if you do need to jump off early or if you want to send the call to a colleague later on, you'll be receiving an email from us within about a day with the links to the audio file, which you can download it as an MP3 file to either play on your computer or on your personal listening device.

I'm thrilled to introduce our presenters, Suzanne Norman and Jim Hitch. Suzanne works for Emma, a web based email marketing and communications company that helps small businesses, designers and agencies create, send and track direct email campaigns.

As Emma's Director of Community Relations, she oversees efforts to assist and educate the Emma community. She also works extensively to promote and develop Emma's brand and as the editor of "Ask Emma," an email newsletter with email marketing best practices and how to information.

She is also a regular contributor to email marketing websites and blogs and has a recently appeared as a guest speaker at AIGA events, the 2008 New Media Expo and the 2008 HOW Design Conference.

A graduate of Baylor University with a BA in language, literature and linguistics, the three "L's" here, Suzanne lives with her husband Brian in Nashville, where she enjoys cooking and camping, but not oddly enough cooking while camping. So, welcome, Suzanne.

Suzanne Norman: Thanks, Rebecca.

Rebecca: We also have Jim Hitch on the phone. Jim is the agency relations manager at Emma. For the last two years, Jim has worked with Emma's agency partners to help them provide email design and delivery and strategy services to their clients. Outside of work, Jim sits on the marketing committee for Barefoot Republic Camp. And helps plan their fundraising efforts for a fellowship drive that makes summer camp possible for many Nashville area kids.

So, thank you both for being here and without further ado, I'd love to turn the floor over to Suzanne and Jim.

Suzanne: All right, thanks so much, Rebecca. We're thrilled to be here. Couldn't be happier about sharing about best practices for email marketing with all of you non-profit

folks out there. We want to start with just a quick introduction to what we are going to be talking about today, what you can expect to leave the call with.

We're going to start by basically going through some big questions that a lot of people have when they start with email marketing. We're going to orient the conversation to help you think about your email marketing program beyond the newsletter.

Whether you are just getting started or whether you have been doing email marketing for a while, most people start off with a newsletter. We want to share some ideas for how you can develop your email strategy around that newsletter as well. And create an email marketing program that engages from the start with the sign up process to the end, with follow up after the email itself.

So, that's where we're going to be heading today.

Jim Hitch: I'll just walk through. These are the five big questions that we are going to tackle today. And these are really questions that any non-profit has when they start and improve an email program.

First is, how do I inspire people to join my list? The second is, how do I keep my content fresh? How do I focus my email strategy? How can I add style to my campaign? And last, but not least, what do those response numbers mean anyway?

So, let's jump right in. Lesson number one is, how do I inspire people to join my list? And this to us this really is the foundation of any good email marketing program. It's all about having a high quality list of people that they know you, they are onboard with your mission and they are engaged to help whether it is to donate money or time or however your particular organization works.

You'll notice that's all about relationship and people that are onboard with your vision. Rule number one is not buy or rent the list. You want to make sure you are building that list in the right way. And once the foundation of that is one your website. It's one of the main opportunities other than the places where you interact with people at fundraising events or whatever, where you are actually able to meet and convey your vision and engage people there.

So, you really want to turn them into, not just the one time visitor, but a relationship where you can make it last for weeks or years even.

Suzanne: If people are never more interested in your cause, when they are first being introduced to it there, and they want to find out more, giving them the opportunity to, like Jim said, turn that 30 second visit into a relationship that lasts for months or even years, a great way to do that is with the email newsletter.

You can see here, a screen shot from our local national public radio station. When you visit their website there are a lot of different options for what to do next, but one of the things that they give a lot of prominence to is that e-newsletter link.

That's actually how I got to become a member of WCLN. I signed up originally because I am interested in some of their programs. And over time, just developed more and more of a relationship through that weekly newsletter as a member, a subscriber.

For me, this is an example that is near and dear to my heart, because it really did extend into a relationship that grew over time.

Jim: I think, even if you are already doing it, this is one that always... never a bad time to review this. To go back and check new few pages on the website, maybe a blog, maybe a new content, or can you make it easier for people to sign up. Always work in review for sure.

Suzanne: Let's go the next line if you are following along with this. And look at another place where you can add a signup screen. Your blog is another very important place to make sure that the people who maybe don't visit your website regularly but who follow along with stories on your blog have an option to sign up there, as well.

When you are thinking about your blog readership, and the people who are already coming and getting to know your content there, think about how you can invite them to join your email list as well. You don't know that everyone who is subscribing to your blog or visiting that page regularly is also on your email list. You want to make sure they are in both places.

So, feel free to add another way for people to get that content from their blog, from your blog to their email program. We know that about 92% of people have an email address. Not everybody out there yet is quite there with getting a feed reader or a way to subscribe to a blog.

Giving people the option to get blog content over email is a really, really good idea.

Jim: That's right. Then the next slide there is a page from the Seattle Art Museum's website. And I think, there are two things that we really love about this platform. They're going to grow their website faster because they are offering an incentive for people to sign up.

So, Unicom already logged their catalog museum. There's an option to win some pretty cool stuff, a night at the museum and things like that. So, you can get more to sign ups that way if you have things to offer, special things just for email subscribers.

And then, the other thing that we really paid attention to here is that they are not asking for email address only. They expanded it to mailing address. You can have a print campaign. They are asking if you are a member or not. All of it is great information to know about people who are coming into your list.

Suzanne: One of the things that you will hear us talking about over the course of this call is to think about your email program and your email strategy as a way of developing

a relationship. It's what non-profits are so good at already is developing relationships with donors and with the subscribers and volunteers with the people you are helping.

And here you are also developing relationships through email. And it's not just about someone giving you their information, but you are also giving them a chance to get valuable content to win something special here like the Seattle Art Museum is doing. As you think about your email program from a high level, think about it as that relational give and take. And think about things from the perspective of your subscribers, as well as you own internal marketing perspective.

Jim: The relationship, some pieces of it happen online. Those of you who can't talk about [indecipherable 12:35], but there are also things off line as you know. And this is kind of a list from the next slide.

There are some things that might work for you off line. Maybe it's your fundraising banquet. Anytime you take a call, at an auction. I would think about... I think, Suzanne made a great point. Think about it from the perspective of an experience of your constituents and you'll come up with all kinds of different points where you can ask for email addresses.

Suzanne: The important thing to keep in mind to ask people when they are already having a great experience with your organization, when they are most excited, when they are most likely to say yes. When it's really relevant to them to think, 'Oh, well of course I would love to continue to receive valuable content from them.' I have just had a great time at this fundraising event.

Think about it really is a matter of just building the process of asking for email addresses into the culture of your non-profit. And looking at every different angle for when you can ask people to join your list.

Jim: Let's move on to the actual email content. So, our big question number two: how do I keep my email content fresh?

So, what we're going to do is look at some examples and a lot of them are going way beyond the newsletter. We're going to take some ideas and it really is at different points of the experience of your audience. We're going to interject emails there to deepen the relationship, just make better communication, keep people up to date.

And enter that experience word, it maybe a little bit overused, but that's really what we are doing thinking about that from their perspective.

Suzanne: That's what Rebecca was saying earlier. We're looking at an economic downturn. If you have been doing email for a while this is a great time to reexamine your program and to think about fresh content to see fresh engagement from your subscribers.

If you've been doing the newsletter thing for a while, we are not here to knock newsletters, because we love them. We send them. But, we do want to help people think

about the email communication strategy beyond that. So, we've got a lot of different ideas to help you kind of spark a relevant conversation with your subscribers.

If you are not very newsy and you don't have a lot of new, exciting updates to share, there are still plenty of things you can use email to send out updates about. So, we want to go through a few of them with you. If you want to move on to the next slide.

The first example, of course, is the newsletter. We want to just want to show you exactly what a good newsletter looks like. This one is from the YMCA here in middle Tennessee where we're based. Where you see a lot of links. You see this newsletter not chock full of text in article after article with thousands of words. They are quick links that allow people to easily navigate and chose what it is that they want to find out more about.

They even use consistent headings there. "Be active, be healthy. Try the Y" that recur in each of their newsletters. So, they're setting expectations of subscribers up front to know exactly what it is that each section is going to give them information about. It's a really great example of how a newsletter can drive traffic to your website and drive membership to a new program. Behind every link you see a little bit of a goal and a strategy. It's not just about the news or about the article, it's about getting people to click through to learn more.

Jim: OK. And then, the next example is an example from the Boys and Girls Club. This is a welcome note. Back to that experience, a lot of times the very first part of their experience is when they get to meet you and they give their email address. I heard someone recently refer to this as the "honeymoon period."

There really is a couple of months there when you first meet someone where they're engaged with you. They're going to read every email. You have the best opportunity that you're going to have right there to build a good relationship and to build a good foundation.

So, this doesn't have to be new content. This is kind of a set it and forget it strategy. And email service will make this easy and automated. So, once you have this email set up, it's ready to go.

Suzanne: That's right. We've learned from statistics, because I love statistics, that people are more likely to click and open their emails in those first 50 days and by sending a welcome note, you are starting that relationship off.

Like we said from the beginning, there was a give and take that shows that here you're greeting your subscribers at the moment that they join. They were just at your website. They are probably super interested basically in what you have to say. By following up immediately with that welcome email...

Here the Boys and Girls Club is getting those really interested new subscribers that have quick access to support our mission and tell a friend, help kids. The tools that they need

that they are most likely to take advantage of right away are in their hands instantly after joining.

Jim: OK, let's look at slide 12, that's the next one. And this is still in that same line of different ways that we can use email. One is, we just encourage you to do ahead and use email to directly ask for donations. Sometimes, people don't know that there's a current need, or that there's an upcoming event where you need to raise funds to put it off, put it on. This is one where this organization, Cobalt, right now in 2008 is coming up, and you're asking for funds for that. It's really direct.

One thing that's great about this "donate online" button is that it's in the top couple of inches of the email. That's something that's unique to email, because a lot of people view their email in what's called a "preview pane." Most of the time, 85% of people will only see the top few inches of your email. So, Cobalt is accommodating that in a great way, because they've got the option to donate right up top, or maybe they have some groups that read the whole email, and they get down to the bottom, and at the bottom left there you see there's another donation option.

Suzanne: One of the things we really like about Cobalt's strategy here is that they didn't just full-button-eye into the third well of their newsletter. By calling it out here and devoting an entire email campaign to it, they're more likely to give people a direct call to action to donate now. People are more likely to respond. It's really the only thing you can do out of this newsletter.

They have really thought about the experience of their subscriber, and they want to make sure that they've made it easy for them to donate, and they've made it clear what the goal of their campaign is. Just like Jim said, balancing it with one at the top, one at the bottom, one with an image, one in text, really sort of rounds out that whole experience in this email as a call for donations.

Another great example we see of nonprofits using email to stay in touch is sending confirmation emails after people have donated. Here's one from Giving Tree, another local nonprofit here in Nashville, where after donating, this email comes automatically with all of the relevant information about the gift that this person just made: the date, the amount, who it's to, and it even gives their identification number there for tax purposes.

So, it's great because it's personal content, it's not just the newsletter content that people have to sift through to find out what's relevant to them. They know that this is meant just for them. It builds trust too with your organization, when you're able to instantly send them an email that tells them their subscriber information. They really see how much value it is, and how valuable their contribution was to you as an organization, when you're able to send this right away.

Last, but not least, something like this helps you to remind your resources, for both staff, and money, it costs less to send an email than it does to mail all these out at the end of the year, and it also puts less strain on your staff. It works officially like a mail-merge works where you store the information in a database and you set up those fields in an email, and

all of that goes out at one time.

So, like Jim said, there are some things that are unique to email, like those preview panes. There are also some technologies that are unique to email that can really help you to simplify the process of staying in touch with your donors.

Jim: But, if that feels overwhelming, all the data integration and everything, feel free to use a more general format. Just, next time you need to send this thing to your donors, if it's a more general email, but it's a followup that tells how much money they raised, what the project is, really involves people and lets them know where the money is going. Even though you'd love to thank them in person, right, this is a great way to still follow up with people, let them know where the money's going, and that you're excited to have them on board.

Suzanne: That's right. Another very common way to use email is to send an invitation. Here's a great invitation from one of our nonprofit customers for Washington National Cathedral, and they're inviting people to the West Virginia Major State Day, I don't know much about that. But, you can see in the email that they are giving you the option to click here to register, or to get more information, so they're giving you the opportunity to respond right then and there.

Again, this is one of those types of email campaigns that, by pulling out of the newsletter and giving it its own email space, you're able to really underscore the importance of the event, and direct people's attention to RSVPing right then, right there, which is great, because that way, you can actually plan more in advance, by having those RSVP details a little bit sooner. It helps you to create offers, to entice people to join ahead of time by sending to, maybe, your most loyal donors, you can give them VIP access to a special speaker who's going to be in your event, or give them a VIP table.

Whatever you're can create to incentivize your event as another really great strategy. Email will let you call that out a little bit more.

Jim: OK, let's look at the next one where it says "Highlight Your Sponsors."

Suzanne: And this is slide 16 that we're on right now, in case you're looking through the slides.

Jim: Ever think about how to get more sponsors? So, your email newsletter builds and develops and your audience grows, this would be the right way to even attract more sponsors, and bigger sponsors, because you can actually go to them and say, "Our newsletter goes out so often, and we sent so many emails, and it goes to 762 people," they'll want that exposure for them so that they can go internally, "This is a great organization sponsor, we're going to get some exposure there."

So, we just encourage you to build the email newsletter and fall into that, along with brochure placement, a logo on a website, whatever your sponsorship packages look like. You just want an example; Safe Haven actually features the representative that came to

the event. So, put the great face with, "to the sponsor" and show that they actually really are engaged and care about Safe Haven.

Suzanne: It's a really great way, and it would just be a terrific way to go beyond the link or the logo placement in an email newsletter, and really create, again, back to that experience for your subscribers, where they're seeing more of the faces and the people that are sponsoring and behind your organization. In fact, you can even tie that back to an email marketing - that's practice.

People are more likely to respond to email with images than without. Even on top of that, they're more likely to respond to images with people than images without people. Of the images with people, they like images of real people - not the glossy, super, way too attractive stock photo people. They like real people like you and me, and those candid shots, it's a really inviting medium.

Plus, you have to think about how people are looking at your email campaign. They're signing into their email inbox and they've got a message from Mom, and they've got an invitation from a colleague to a Halloween party, so these types of emails are still relational, and they show that real people really go right in hand with the way that people are already interacting with their email inboxes.

This is actually a nice tie in here to another type of email you can send: featuring your volunteers. This one is perfect if you're sitting there on the other end of the line thinking, "I have no idea what to email my subscribers," if you've got volunteers and you have pictures of those volunteers at your events, you are ready to send an email. People love to see themselves featured in an email.

You can send this email out to your volunteers to thank them, and it's easy for them to pass it along and say, "Look how goofy we look, look how we're covered in pain in this picture," and they're going to forward it to the friends that they've brought along, and hopefully help you grow your list that way. You can even use emails like this to ask people for their pictures to use. You can send them to a Facebook page, if you've developed a Facebook page, or somewhere else that you've got other photos posted.

So, think about the interactive element of things like photos and stories, if you can get from your volunteers and donors. And feature those in an email newsletter as well.

Jim: In our last email example, it was actually an internal newsletter. And this was one - not everyone thinks of this - but when you send your internal newsletter, they are a fully designed, HTML newsletter that looks great with the logo. You get a little extra weight in the inbox of your team there, I think.

So, it is better than just firing off an old-hand email. It actually gives it framework. You have the design and you get better participation and can communicate the vision a little better internally that way.

Suzanne: And here, in this particular example from the YMCA in Oregon. This is not only the staff picnic. This is the staff and family picnic. So, it is going to people beyond just on staff.

So, if I am on staff, I get that email and I want to invite my whole family. I have got this really nice looking campaign that I can send along, forward. And hopefully, that helps to build that trust and loyalty there in-house as well as outside like Jim said.

So, the next big question that we want to tackle is how to focus your email strategy. We have just seen a lot of great examples of different ways that you can put email to work. You saw how to craft the experience for your new subscribers and how they are joining your list.

Now is the time to think about how you manage that with your team or with yourself, if you are the team. They are in-house, and how that all translates into how often you send...

So, let's take a quick look at some of the elements of an email strategy. There are a lot of moving parts in an email strategy, but we wanted to boil it down to three things for you.

Your email strategy is "what" you are sending, the type of campaign. "Who" is sending, the person in-house who is managing all of your email marketing efforts. And, "how often" you are sending, so how frequently you are sending that newsletter or campaign of any kind.

Jim: That's right. So, what you are sending...

We kind of wanted to highlight that first. We just looked at a dozen or so creative examples of different ways to use email. Some of those may have hit home with you, or really resonated with things that would be useful for you and some didn't.

So, that is probably the first question that you want to tackle is the newsletter and event invitations. You will kind of figure out the big categories for you.

And then there is... Maybe it's just you. I know that happens a lot of times.

But, maybe there is a team involved. Maybe there is a volunteer coordinator and a development coordinator. Sometimes, there is some cross over on that list, right? And there are also different goals for those different kinds of emails. So, you kind of want everybody in one room and start the direction here.

Suzanne: Yeah. The big goal there is to make sure that one person knows exactly how long it takes to send out an email.

We also send email to our mom or we dash off these quick five-minute emails to our colleagues. Sometimes, it is hard to remember that we need to keep in mind that we need a well-crafted HTML email that is a marketing message. The intention of that and the time it takes to put together one that really does well is a lot longer than the time it takes

to put together that five-minute email to staff.

So, make sure that you know how long it takes to put that email together. From writing the content to composing the email to finding the images to building the right list of people who need to receive the email... And even beyond that! We will touch on this a little bit later, but also how the follow-up effort works.

Think about the entire time for all of the moving parts of the email. And make sure that there is one person there on staff who knows how long it takes and who knows how to coordinate all of the different parts, so that you can meet your deadlines.

Because all of that is happening in the middle of the actual events that need to have invitations sent by a certain day. So, certainly, to really set up a program for success, think about all of those different parts so that you can create something that is nice and sustainable for you, your team, and your subscribers.

Jim: Certainly, that has a huge effect on how often you send. Let's talk about that, and a couple of ways that you can go about that.

The next slide here which says sustainable expectation. That is slide 21. Oh, I'm sorry, part 20.

So, this is a newsletter strategy. This is one that you may be familiar with. It is a regular monthly strategy. So, that's what Rachel Ray's organization has done here. They have organized their team. It shows a newsletter with this one strategy. And they are committed to produce this every single month. And you see that where they number their issues and date them. That is one definite way that you may go as a part of your strategy.

In the next example is for when you have something to say. So, this may be two times in one day. It may be two times in one month, or once a quarter. This may be that event promotion that you do, where there is a build up and then a follow up. It is all based around a fund-raising event.

But, think of features of... What is that element for you? What is that event or what is that... Maybe it is a press release or a particular cause that you have to rally around to call congressmen and congresswomen - I am not sure what the example would be for you - but kind of the other foundational, frequency point, assuming that you have something relevant to say.

Suzanne: And like Jim said, how your organization is structured will really influence which one of these options work for you. When you sit down and say, "We are going to do a monthly newsletter," be sure that you can actually handle the workload of a monthly newsletter.

It is very easy to start off and say, "Now, we are going to send it every second Tuesday." And that works for a couple of months. Then after a few months... We have all been there. You know, you just kind of push the deadline back a little bit. And then another

week... Before you know it, two months have passed and you have not sent out anything. So, think about what that expectation is for you in-house and what you can really handle.

One of the things that is so great about sending when you have something relevant to say is that it allows you a lot of flexibility in the type of message that you send.

If you do an event that is really important one month, but then you really need to dramatize donations the next month... You are not working within a newsletter format, if you send these shorter emails that really focus on an invitation as the call to action. Or, focus on a donation as the call to action.

You have a lot of flexibility on sending, based on relevancy. If you are thinking about a general rule of thumb though, if you are just getting started, we recommend staying in front of your subscribers every three weeks or so to begin.

You can sort of adjust that, based on your organizations. Because we know that everyone is different - different goals, different staffing and different resources... But, I would at least kind of aim for that three week mark, just so you are staying in front of your subscribers. Reminding them of who you are, what you are doing, and that you are there...

The next point that we want to talk about is how to make sure that the email campaign you send looks good.

As you are thinking about your... How you come across to your donors, your supporters, or the people who are just getting to know you. You can do great looking campaigns. It not only shows them how professional your organization is and builds trust with the work that you are doing, but it can also really help you increase the impact of your newsletter or your campaign.

Like Jim said earlier when we were looking at that email example from Cobalt where they had the "donate now" button there at the top. Jim talked about a preview pane. It was because they knew about the preview pane that they were able to sort of structure that email accordingly.

So, we want to talk about a few of the best practices with email design that will help you think about how your content, the great content that you are developing, fits into email uniquely as its own marketing medium.

Jim: The first piece of that really actually starts before the creative pieces of the email. It is the first thing and it is the subject line. These are quite possibly the most important eight to 10 words in your campaign.

So, our first point I want to drive home is write an impacting subject line. You may be competing with up to 135 plus messages in your existing inboxes. That is the average of what we get per day.

So, this is so important. You have to engage people with even just this one bit of hobby.

So, if you are looking at the slides, there is one example here, and it says "On the Wild Side: What happens to Birds during Hurricanes?"

You have heard about nature and those kinds of things. They gave a great, specific subject line that engages you, that asks the question and draws you in to want to know the answer.

So, our recommendation really is to sit down with an egg timer and sit down for 10 minutes. Write as many different subject lines as you can think of in those 10 minutes. I promise you, after you do that there will be a couple stand out winners. You will know which one feels best.

Suzanne: That is right. One of the things that is great about the subject line is that they take the time to brand the subject line as well. They could have put enature.com. That is the sender here, but they have also actually given their email newsletter a brand name, and that is on the wild side.

They put that as the beginning of the subject line. So, over time as you get to know enature.com and the On the Wild Side newsletter, you can instantly identify this is as a newsletter that you trust.

I would actually recommend going and sort of putting the full brand name in there. This is also a really nice approach as well.

The second thing that they do really well here is impacting people to open without giving too much away. They ask a really impelling question. What happens to birds during hurricanes? Obviously, you want to find out the answer. If that sort of peaks your interest then that is the thing that is going to cause you to open.

Just like Jim said, there is so much value in those eight to 10 words for your overall email campaign. We will talk a little bit more about that later as we will talk about how you can test those different subject lines to see which one works best for your organization.

But, for now, let's move on to slide number 24 and give you the second big piece of advice when it comes to great email design. That is to create a consistent look with fonts and images.

It is tempting, when you get into commercial HTML email, when you see that you have got tons of colors to work with and tons of fonts to work with, just to create a rainbow of colors and a whole array of fonts.

But, when it comes to readability for your subscriber, going back to thinking about your email campaign as an experience, it is so important to pick a font for your headline and for your actual copy. Pick a couple of colors to accent your links or your headline and then just stick with them. It is going to really aid people's ability to navigate your newsletter so they know exactly what the headlines are just based on the color. It also makes it easy for them to quickly read that copy.

People tend to retain a little bit less when they are reading on a screen - about 25% less. So, as much as you can do to aid the clarity with a nice dark background and large text, that is how people really do like to read email campaigns. So, it will draw their eye in and allow them to engage and not get distracted by too many fonts and colors.

One of the other great things about this example here from Love Help is that they have also taken the time to make those images a consistent size. You see a nice consistent line there where the text begins. You see consistent sizes on the left. It really gives a nice, neat appearance; very professional.

It is nothing fancy. Your design doesn't mean that you are going to win a lot of awards. It doesn't have to have a lot of layers and reflections and shiny things. Something as simple as consistent fonts and images really does go a long way towards making a professional looking email newsletter.

Jim: I don't think so. I just love how whether it is an image or a logo, the left pane column complement the right pane. It doesn't get in the way. It is not overly image heavy.

The other thing this makes me think of is image - it is called rendering in the industry, but basically about half of the recipients on your list will get this email and their images over on the left will not show up by default.

So, this is huge with email. You have to design with that in mind and actually even plan that a lot of your images won't show up. They can get there. Your recipient can view them with an extra click, but you don't want your message to be hidden because it is in an image. That is one other thing that this email makes me think of.

Suzanne: That is a great point. As much as we see a lot of newsletters that begin with a lot of text heaviness there at the beginning, we also see newsletters that begin with a huge image at the top.

Like Jim said, if their images are turned off, then it is tough for people to immediately engage with the content of your email because they don't see any text immediately.

You may have some subscribers who are on a dial-up connection or who aren't connected to the Internet. Those image heavy emails can be problematic for them as well. So, like Jim said, balance your text and your images. This example here from Love Helps is a great example.

Jim: That is true. That is one thing that is unique to email. You don't have to think about that when you are designing your direct mail or a fundraising letter. That is genuine to email.

The next point is also specific to email. It is keeping important stuff at the top. This is back to that preview thing we kind of talked about earlier. A lot of folks don't see the full email at the beginning. They get your subject line and then the first top few inches of the email.

So, put a lot of attention, a lot of time, and a lot of thought into what you put in those top few inches. This email is done in a really classy way, and the main goal is to get you to pledge. They put that right underneath the header. So, I think that is a great idea.

This one in particular is an image, you will notice. That is definitely a little bit of a calculated risk. Or maybe you put it in image and text, but it definitely draws attention to "Pledge Now."

Suzanne: That is right. There are a lot of things we could talk about with email design, but if you want to focus on three things that will create the most impact on your readers and on the effectiveness of your campaign, those are the three that we would recommend: focusing your time on the subject line, the consistent fonts and images, and making sure that the important stuff there is at the top to accommodate for preview.

So, this is the last section we want to talk about. After you have got your subscribers, you have got your plan in place, you know the types of emails you are going to be sending, and you have even started to think about the strategy of your email design, you are ready to hit send. That is the fun part.

You can check that off the list. You have done a lot of work and you should be proud that you have got an email out the door. But, it is not the end of the story.

When you use an email service provider like Email Now, or Powered by Emma, you are able to actually see who is opening your email, who is clicking your email, what they clicked, and a whole wealth of information that you can turn around and provide to your organization and say "Look what content people like." Or "Look what content people don't like." You can really start to tailor your follow up efforts.

So, we want to give you a few ideas on how to make the most of those response numbers.

Jim: Let's do it by looking at the next slide, which is slide 27. It shows just an overview page of the basic feedback that you get every time you send an email. It takes us about 72 hours, so a few days there to get there... it's kind of like the Death Star is the way I think of it.

Let people check their inbox, interact with the email, maybe even come back to it when they have more time. Then you get this feedback and it shows everything, from how many people open the email to how many people clicked. Did they forward the email? Did they opt out? And in that bottom section shows every single link in the campaign.

So, like Suzanne mentioned, if you are highlighting two or three different projects that you have going on, you get to take the temperature of your audience here to see what they're most interested in and what they are reading about the most.

Suzanne: Any time you get to look at numbers obviously you can't help but ask the question: well are my numbers any good? How do I compare to other people like me?

So, if you are looking at response numbers and not sure how you are doing. You're about to start an email campaign. Keep in mind that you've got to ask yourself what "good" means for your organization before you ask what it means across the board.

So, if your goal is to drive traffic to your website, look at the links that go to your website and say: did a certain percentage of people click through? OK. Then, it was a success. If it's about promoting a specific event, and you saw a certain number of RSVPs come through that's your benchmark.

Generally speaking though - and of course this is across all different types of senders - the average open rate is around 20%. And the average click through rate is around 5% of people who opened. And all of these are to be taken with a giant grain of salt. It's really like more a mound of salt.

Because the open rate is not entirely accurate. It's not accounting for people who didn't display their images or people who maybe saw the plain text version of your email as well. We can talk a little bit more about what that means if you send an HTML email, you're also sending a matching plain text version for people who can't see an HTML.

So, all of that is to be taken with, like I said, a mound of salt. The most important thing is: did you meet your goal? Did you know what your goal was ahead of time? And were you able to measure your goal? And then how did you do?

Jim: Right, the goal is really taking these numbers out of context is pretty much useless. You want to put these next to the context of the email and say: what does this all mean?

And this example, is perfect for us, because just an event invitation. So, we had links that said: yes, I will attend. No, I will not or maybe, send me a reminder. So, it was really easy for us to hop in and if you look at that next slide, which is 28th. It's real easy for us to hop in and get a list of all the yeses and all the maybes and follow up with them a couple days before the event.

Suzanne: In our case, we sent follow-up email to our yeses and maybes. But, depending on how your organization works, you may have a very short window reserved for volunteers to call people. And if you want them to make the most of those phone calls, try forming a list of people who clicked or opened your last email campaign.

You know that they are more engaged than another list of people who haven't or just a random sampling of your audience. Here you are able to actually measure the most engaged members of your audience. You can use that information to tailor your other marketing messages as well.

Particularly handy if you are working on a short budget and you want to make the most of your resources, whether that's a direct mail piece that you can't quite afford to send to everybody on your list, if you want to make the most of it. That's why this response information numbers are just so valuable, when it comes to finding out what your audience likes.

Jim: Last, but not least, the last big tip we would leave you with, I guess, is experiment, try new things. Take those numbers and commit to constantly improving them. Follow-up questions about how will I do that. And our number one favorite thing to test is subject lines. It's so easy.

You have already got your email created. That doesn't change. You can just try different subject lines and try to get your open rates up, you can get your click rates up, highlight different things in the newsletter. And the short explanation of how you do that is you take your list and you divide it into two pieces. And then half the list gets one subject line and half the list gets the other.

And we've seen some great success with this. One test we did was a long subject line, versus a short one. The long one was really detailed and had a lot about what was in the email. And the short one was... the idea was we're just going to engage people, say who we are and give a quick intro and get to form the email that way.

But, the long one got actually a lot better results. Not just those and neither is quick.

Suzanne: You might think that just by creating a more engaging subject line you are just going to get people opening your email. That might be the only statistic that changed. But, we were so thrilled to see that, it not only engaged people to open, but also to interact with the email in a totally different way.

So, as you're going through and making that list of possible subject lines, you got your timer set for 10 minutes and you can't quite decide between the final two, whether you want to call out the invitation first or call out your volunteers first. Just try both and see what happens.

Everyone's audience is different and yours will be different from ours and from everyone else's, too. So, experimenting is really a great way. People call it A/B testing, split testing. But, it's a great to find out what is unique about your audience.

And that concludes our thoughts about "Going Beyond the Email Newsletter and Creating a Really Engaging Email Strategy." We would love to hear questions.

Rebecca: All right. So, our first question comes from Angela. She says:

"I have a question for the speaker. How do you recommend coordinating e-communication with hard copy communication? How much contact is too much?"

Suzanne: That's a great question. And I would say that using your print and hardcopy newsletters or direct mail, anything like that, to promote your email newsletter and vice versa is a great thing, especially depending on your costs.

So, if you send out your email, your direct newsletter, be sure that there is a link to invite people to join an email newsletter, as well. And if you wanted to create a way for your email newsletter subscribers, like we talked about with your signup screens, be sure and

ask for their mailing address when they sign up for the newsletter. You can turn around and send them direct mail promotions as well.

People don't tend to think about getting a newsletter and getting a flyer on the same day the same way they think about two emails. So, I think you can think of them strategically as one piece to help grow the other, but you don't necessarily have to worry too much about whether you are overwhelming them by sending an email and a direct mail piece at the same time.

Jim, would you add anything to that?

Jim: The only other thing, what I've seen some people do is give people the option and say: would you like to... Let's say you want the transition some people from the print newsletter to the email newsletter, you can just use an option. Put a little return postcard in and give them a new way to give you their email address.

But, that's just a preference thing, a way to give people control.

Suzanne: As always, and I would just say, going back to that first point about developing your list. Anytime you are sending... I know, it's sometimes easier to request donations through the mail, so people can write a check and they don't have to worry about the online thing. It kind of works with, based on your demographic.

Make sure that, when you do have those attached cards, put an option on there that says: sign me up for the weekly email newsletter. To make sure that those things work in tandem on both the print newsletter side and also the print donation side, as well.

Jim: That's a really good question. And it's also a good time to, maybe, even ask some of your supporters. It can't hurt, ever, to ask. Just make a phone call and ask, ask them about frequencies and what they found valuable.

Rebecca: That was perfect and actually helped answer half of Christine's question that she sent in. So, in addition to wanting to know more advice about how to integrate email with print, which you just did, Christine would like to know, "Should you always have a donate link in your email or will your audience get sick of all these fund-raising appeals?"

Suzanne: I think that there are some consistent elements to any email campaign. And you never know what it is in your email campaign that's going to motivate someone to donate. A lot of people will keep that recurring donate button along side contact information there in the footer.

So, when you don't necessarily want to call it out there in that preview pane, if you're not necessarily making a big - you don't have a big campaign or capital push right then and there, keeping it as a recurring part, you want to make it easy for people to donate. These are your email subscribers, after all. They're interested in what you have to say.

And making an easy and consistent place for them to go, they know exactly where to go to donate from an email newsletter. It's a great idea. We've seen some people also use the sidebar real estate as something that's recurring for a table of contents. Maybe a quick overview of the board, as well as a link to donate. Making it... I would say if you decide to keep it as a consistent part of your newsletter, keep it in the same place. But, I think, it's a great idea, personally, to keep it in there.

Jim: I don't think it feel overwhelming or annoying at all, especially if some of your content will be, maybe, about an invitation to an event or something. This goal of this newsletter, it may not always be a direct request. Just keep leaving it there as an option.

Rebecca: Great, great. All right. We have a couple more questions. This one in from Sonja, and it was a follow-up to when you mentioned experimenting with subject lines. Sonja's concern is, "Aren't long subject lines caught in SPAM filters?"

Suzanne: That really depends. That's a great question. But, when we say long subject lines, we're not talking about anything more than about 80 or 90 characters. That's about as long as you'd want to go. Through the best practices for email campaigns will tell you that the best subject lines are around 30 to 50 characters.

That was the specifics that we were out to test. Because we weren't sure that it was going to be the case for us. So, when we said a long subject line, we were talking about 90. You're absolutely right that if you create "War and Peace" in a subject line, you are definitely going to get triggered by spam filters. Choose wisely; edit when you can. Make every word of your subject line count, no matter how long it is.

Rebecca: Perfect. OK. This question comes from Reid, and Reid's question is, "How many email lists is appropriate to manage? Should you send out certain messages to one group of constituents?"

Jim: That's a great question. Maybe you've got volunteers, maybe you've got supporters, people who have been to an event, people who have donated above a certain amount, below a certain amount. There is no magic answer to how many you should have. You should have as many as you need to practically manage your audience.

I think that goes back to the strategy idea. So, if you have a certain thing that you want, what you want to pay attention to is communicate with donors that give above a certain amount. You've got to have that group in your email database. And if you have messages that just go to donors and the message is totally different for volunteers, you've got to have those two also. No magic formula, unfortunately. Sit down and think about the ones that you know you'll use and build the whole thing around it.

Suzanne: That's right. And what's great about email is that it makes it really easy to do that. There are quick little searches that you can do once you've imported all of that information about people's donor levels or geography or gender - anything you want to search by. Email programs make it easy to create those quick, at a glance, segments of your audience, and then send accordingly.

We were looking at some of those email invitations earlier, the ones from the National Cathedral. Those are probably going to craft a different message to donors who are invited versus community members who are invited. So, I think, it's a great idea. And you see more success, better open rates, better click-through rates when you segment your audience and target your content accordingly.

Rebecca: Great. And this one is a great one to end on. Just from feedback and questions that we get fairly often here at Network for Good, I think this will apply to a lot of folks on the phone. The subject of Trista's email is bailing on the printed newsletter. She says, "I'm struggling with diving completely into a e-newsletter and bailing on our printed newsletter. We have over 2500 donors and prospects in our donor database that we send the printed newsletter to three times a year.

"I started the e-newsletter about six months ago and added any donor emails we had into the database, only about 150. My e-newsletter list is growing. It's more than 500 now. But, since Open to the Public is all over the place, actual patients, referral services, donor, volunteers, shoppers from our retail stores, etc. I'll be alienating the other donors if I cut the printed one out.

"Do you recommend having both? Should the printed one be sent electronically, also as a link to the PDF? Should I just simply recreate that printed data in my e-newsletter format? Help!"

Jim: Fantastic question.

Suzanne: It's a great question, indeed. And I think there are a lot of little sub-questions in there as well. Do you want to start, Jim?

Jim: Sure, sure. I'll take a swing at this one first. I love the idea of having both, especially the way you described your strategy, and what's going on so far. This is a great way to keep your donor database. Just know who's on that list and also who may have come from different places out on the web. I love the idea of keeping both, and I think if it were me, I would really try to create that second version as a full HTML email so you get the benefit of email tracking so that you can.

And maybe people get both versions, that's fine. I have some things that work that way in my life. But, that way you get the tracking and you get the benefit of delivering that HTML email rather than the link to PDF. And Suzanne may have a totally different opinion than me.

Suzanne: No, I completely agree. I would say, too, in addition, going back to what we were talking about earlier, give people a chance to choose. I think, you're right to say that you would alienate your print subscribers if you just did away with that newsletter. It's valuable content. Print is great. There is a certain subset of anybody's list that is going to prefer getting things by print. They want to hold it in their hands and sit there in their recliner and read it. They can't do that on a desktop computer.

I think, it's absolutely fine to continue to send that. But, I would try devoting, say for the next three newsletters a consistent part of real estate to say sign up for the email newsletter if you prefer. Give people the option. Because it does reduce the cost for you, and you may have some people on that list who don't prefer the print, who would rather have email and they just don't know.

I would make the concerted effort to get the word out to print subscribers about the email newsletter and give new subscribers a chance to choose. Also like Jim said, consider it as a different mediums for sure. Your PDF version is just not going to perform in the inbox and give you all the same options for engaging people with the preview panes and the image and text balancing. Email really is its own animal and I would keep the same content, but just design it a little bit differently in your email.

Rebecca: OK. Well, thank you both so much for donating your time today. We really appreciate it. And we're so excited to have the content to share with everybody who is either on the phone or who can go download it later. So, thank you both for being here.

And just so everybody knows, just as a reminder, we are going to be sending out a link to download the audio after today's call, and the text version will be posted in the learning center, probably within a week. We usually have, I think, a seven-day turnaround on that. And that should be it. So, do you guys have any closing statements that you'd like to make before we sign off?

Suzanne: No, just happy emailing.

Rebecca: Thanks everybody!