

**Nonprofit 911 – October 2007**  
**Email Fundraising on a Tight Budget**  
**With Katya Andresen & Marc Lee**  
**Sponsored by Network for Good**  
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**The audio transcript can be found at [www.fundraising123.org](http://www.fundraising123.org)**

Katya: Good morning. This is Katya Andresen. I'm the Vice President of Marketing here at Network for Good. I'm delighted that you're joining us today for the October edition of our "Nonprofit 911" series sponsored by Network for Good. If this is your first time joining us, welcome. If you are a repeat visitor, we're happy that you found these valuable enough to return and we welcome you as well.

If you're not familiar with Network for Good, we're a Nonprofit ourselves, just like you, and our mission is to help organizations like yours to raise money online. We do these free training calls one to two times a month to support the Nonprofit community in raising money online and helping you improve your results.

We also offer some services to help you fund raise; this is not a sales call where we're going to get into our services a lot. I just do want to mention them though. We notice that when a lot of you register for the call, you don't have services for raising money or sending out emails, so we are going to give you a couple of comments on that at the end, because we do have some low-cost, useful resources for you.

I'm very excited today to be focused on the topic of successful email fundraising on a tight budget. I think everyone on the phone, us included here at Network for Good, has a tight fundraising or marketing budget, and we're struggling to figure out how to have great results with little money, and email is a great way to do that.

I think enthusiasm for the topic is shown by the number of people registered for this call. We have over 800 people registered for this call today. That's fantastic and we hope it's of use to you. A couple of housekeeping things before I introduce our speaker, Marc Lee.

We're recording the call and what's great is within twenty-four hours you're going to be able to access an audio transcript. So if you want to listen again that will be available at [Fundraising123.org](http://Fundraising123.org). You'll find that starting around this time tomorrow.

Now I'm going to introduce today's speaker, Marc Lee. Marc Lee is founder and president of Affinity Seminars and Affinity Resources, which

is a fundraising consultancy specializing in Internet communications for Nonprofits. They are particularly focused on the opportunities and challenges of Marketing and fundraising online.

I'll tell you a quick story—the reason we are so lucky to have someone of Marc's stature on the phone, and have sort of the “dean” of Internet communications on the line, is because he invited me to do a seminar for Affinity Seminars, his organization, and I did based on the condition that he'd do one for us.

So today we are all going to benefit from that barter we did and I'm absolutely delighted to have him because he is such a sought-after speaker and workshop leader, and we're lucky to have him. Marc's going to speak for about 40 to 45 minutes today, and then he's going to take your questions. Without further ado, I want to turn things over to Marc Lee. Marc, thanks for joining us today.

Marc: Thank you, Katya. Folks, welcome to this session. I'm going to go through an awful lot of material and today we're working without a net. There is no PowerPoint or handout, so you haven't missed anything so far, but I hope we can do justice to everything.

The subject of email lists is near and dear to my heart. The lists, in my view, are the most important part of your online Marketing and communication. Whether you're a large or small shop, you can not only afford a listserv to make your email communication a breeze, you can probably move up some in terms of what you're doing and do it even better.

I'm going to try and cover some areas so that you'll know by the end, the options that are available to you for inexpensive email lists and how little a good program can cost, or how much. Then I want you to be able to understand the limits and opportunities for using email in your fundraising.

I want you to be able to discover how to collect addresses and avoid being labeled a spammer. At the end, if we've got time, I'm going to talk about how to compose emails so they get opened, read and clicked on. Let's forge ahead. The biggest question that some people have is: “What is a listserv? Where did that name come from?”

It's just a list of email addresses that are held on your web server. It's software designed so you can send one email and have it delivered to all. We're all members of different kinds of lists—broadcast lists, discussion lists—and we're talking mostly about broadcast lists today. They're all

provided by what we call an ESP: an Email Service Provider. I hope this isn't too basic for some of you; I know that it is right at the start.

The first listserv was created in 1984 by a group called L-Soft. They are still in business and don't like us using the word "listserv." That's their word and their copyright [LISTSERV<sup>®</sup>], so we'll try not to use it, but frankly, it's stuck in my brain. There are six requirements for success in email fundraising as I see it.

**1.)** First of all, in your organization you have to have a sensitivity to the medium. You can't just crash in and expect it to do everything for you.

**2.)** Second, it's not a situation where one size fits all. There's no vendor that does everything right for every level of every organization. You need to beware sometimes, that the "easy" fix or the "easy" solution, the one where the vendor says, "Oh, yes, everybody can do that," can be a problem for you.

**3.)** If you're going to have success in your email Marketing, you need to have senior-level buy-in. It's really hard to sell it in your organization from the bottom up. You've got to find a way to get the top-level people involved. One way to do that is to have an email audit done. Have someone come in and take a look at the full range and scope of your work in email and make some specific suggestions about what you need to do—someone who has some credibility that your senior level can buy in to.

**4.)** You need to have appropriate budgeting. Let's face it, everybody is on a tight budget. I don't care if your budget is a half-million dollars a year or \$500 a year, you see it as a tight budget. You want more to work with, but we've got to be able to appropriate money for email Marketing because like any fundraising program, it does cost money.

**5.)** There's got to be a commitment in the organization to internal cooperation. Folks have to want to make this succeed. There's got to be a willingness to change.

**6.)** Success takes time though, and the final point is that you've got to have some clear agreement of what success is going to look like. You need to set some good benchmarks right from the beginning so people can share in that success together. What is a good benchmark? It depends on your organization.

We've seen groups that have gone from raising \$8,000 in 2001 with their emails, to raising about \$50,000 in 2005. That's successful to me. Maybe you want to grow with more than that. We've seen folks start out at the

\$30,000 level and grow to \$180,000. The important part is that wherever Internet giving is growing, it's because people are working at it.

Be sure you don't oversell expectations and undersell the hard work that it takes. There's word on the street now that the Humane Society of the United States has had some real success in what they're doing in the wake of the Michael Vick scandal. They apparently sent out a lot of emails to their folks right after the story broke and they say it resulted in 300,000 calls to the NFL, urging them to suspend Vick. That's a lot of calls.

Then they took it a step further and urged Nike to end its relationship with Vick and 168,000 people responded and contacted Nike a few days later. Supporters of the Humane Society of the United States sent more than 421,000 tell-a-friend messages and they got 168,000 new people who joined. The reality is that they didn't just start this over night.

They had something in place that they could work with. They had to have an incredible database of email names and addresses. They made a success but it was because they had done their planning and preparation. Your organization may not be anywhere near that sophisticated but where we think in terms of getting 300,000 calls, maybe you should think in terms of getting 300 calls; if you're just starting out, maybe just 30 calls.

That can still make a difference in fulfilling whatever your mission is. What's success? I don't know. My experience is that \$5,000 donated online is a very large gift and the typical gifts range from \$25 to \$250. Katya can tell you better. Network for Good has lots of experience in this. But there's no sign that this kind of growth is subsiding. It's really moving forward quickly.

Obviously you've got to have a website in place and the ability to accept credit cards online and on and on. That's important to you, but it's not the subject we're talking about today. Just focusing on the email, let's think in terms of some of the aspects of your budget. You need to have these elements:

First of all, you need a business plan. You need to know how you're going to get from point A to point B to point C. If you don't have a business plan, it's not going to work for you. If you don't know anything about writing a business plan, try going to [NPSolutions.org](http://NPSolutions.org), Non Profit Management Solutions. They give you the opportunity to build your own business plan right online and they'll take you through it, step by step.

You need to modify your website so it's friendly to the donation and email process. Again, I can't go into all of that today. You want to have a budget for graphic images and you want to have a budget for your donation

engine provider and your credit card processing fees. You need to know that those are going to be expenses.

You need a budget for your email strategy and for technical support and staffing. You need to have counsel and also email service provider fees. These are all expenses you'll encounter in doing email Marketing. Remember, when you're processing credit cards, these processing fees are an administrative expense, not a fundraising expense.

The basic budget looks like this—I'm going to divide this into four levels and I'm not going to talk about the fourth one very much, but I want you to know what it consists of. The first level is really the *shoestring* budget. The shoestring shop probably has in the neighborhood of 200 emails, maybe 500, but not much more than that. The website is being done by volunteer or by an overworked staff member.

Your e-donations are coming in, in probably a mall-like fashion, maybe the earliest manifestation of e-donations for Network for Good. Your email is going out right over your desktop using Outlook Express and any e-staffing that you've got is volunteer; it's just you and you're stretched pretty thin and trying to go it alone. That's the shoestring. Figure out where you fit in here.

The *small* shop is going to have up to as many as 5,000 emails. Your website is probably do-it-yourself in-house. Your e-donations may have jumped up to PayPal or Google Checkout or something that gives you a little bit more control over what's going on.

Your email provider might be Constant Contact or Topica. (Please don't take any of these as endorsements; I'm just trying to identify the level of sophistication that people might have.) Your e-staffing is either volunteers or maybe some in-house expertise growing as well.

The *medium* shop is going to range somewhere from 5,000 to perhaps 75,000 email addresses. Your website is going to have a designer, probably an outside person at this point. Your e-donations may be done by an application service provider that processes donations for you. Your email service provider now comes in to play in a larger way. You might have some e-staffing that extends to some consulting going on with you or at least consultant work provided by your email service provider.

The *large* shop, for purposes of this presentation, is really 75,000 email addresses or more. Your website is going to be done by your in-house staff. Your e-donations may be bought or built in-house. Your email is going to integrate with your donor database and you're hopefully going to

have at least one full-time staffer working on it; more depending on how big the organization is.

In that shoestring budget, you're probably looking at annual hosting fees maybe for your website of \$150. I mean this is really shoestring. Your e-donations monthly are probably a free installation and then as much as 5% of every dollar given. Your email cost is probably free and your staffing for e-staffing is free.

In the small shop, your website might cost you about \$500 annually, maybe \$1,000. Your e-donations are 2% to 3% of the cost of every dollar raised. Your monthly email costs are probably \$50 and your email staffing is volunteer and in-house and an indefinite amount.

I'm trying to describe all of these in detail so that you can understand where you are and understand where your next steps might be in terms of moving up from shoestring to small shop to medium shop, which is going to see more on the order of \$2,000 to \$5,000 at least in its website costs annually.

It's not going to see a whole lot more for its e-donations, maybe an additional \$25 to \$50 a month. The email monthly costs could range anywhere from \$250 to \$1,400. Depending on what your spending and depending on how big that list is, now your email staffing is going to move up to anywhere from \$1,000 to \$25,000.

In a large shop, of course, everything goes up. You have to have a lot of money going into your website in terms of the in-house staff. You have money going into your e-donations and your email monthly and your overall staffing as well.

Everybody's trying to figure out where to move up next. Where do we put the money and how do we make it work? The first place you've got to be sure you put your money is into establishing your metrics. You've got to have counters on it. If you don't already have them, be sure you go to [Google.com/analytics](https://www.google.com/analytics) and get counters for your website.

You can't manage what you can't measure. There's a lot said about what you're actually measuring out here. The real comparison that you want to keep doing in your email Marketing is year to year, campaign to campaign, and email to email. The counters aren't perfect. The information that comes back through your email service provider isn't even perfect.

While the overall numbers might be imperfect, the numbers remain pretty much the same from one campaign to another and from one email to

another if you keep all of your variables constant. Look at those and know what it is you've got. You can plug in all sorts of things. The more sophisticated your email service provider is the more counting options they'll give you.

What does an email service provider do besides help you count? An ESP helps you with CAN-SPAM compliance. Of course, you're all non profits so technically CAN-SPAM doesn't apply to you. The reality is that people expect you to abide by the basic rules there and you should. Deliverability is something that ESPs help you with.

Much of what they do for you is behind the scenes and a major task is maintaining the highest possible deliverability rates for their users. They've got full-time personnel who manage relationships with all of the major Internet service providers. They ensure that their IP addresses are white listed.

They resolve spam complaints for you either automatically or personally. They stay abreast of the changing rule of the ISPs that effect deliverability. They are invaluable from this perspective. They help you with tracking. The whole point of having an email communication program is that you build stronger customer relationships.

You want to reach out to more people than you could with an offline budget and you want to increase your revenues. If you don't have access to those statistics, you're flying blind, as I said. When it comes to the ESPs, they'll rescue you with detailed, real-time statistics and really tell you what's going on with your subscribes, your unsubscribes, and your bounces. If you can see me leaning toward getting a significant investment in an ESP, you're absolutely right.

Management—trying to keep up with all of your contacts and keep them up to date can quickly become an onerous task. Once that list gets over 200 names, it's almost impossible to keep up with in the fray of what's going on in your daily life and work. Critically, that updating has to be done automatically so it's not prone to manual mistakes that can impact what you're doing.

You want to be sure that you have an email service provider. It's basically sophisticated database management solutions that automate time-consuming housekeeping tasks. It does it very well. The email service provider can help you with formatting and design. It can help you test things before they go out to be sure that they are going out in a standardized, readable format.

There are folks, too, who read their email on their Blackberries or their Trios or their iPhones and you've got to be sure that that beautifully formatted HTML message that you've got is going to get through to those people because they may be some of your highest value donors. The ESP can help you with that.

Finally, they help you with privacy issues. You want to be sure that when people ask to get off your list, they are taken off the list. No one's going to send you to jail because they're not but that's only because you're Nonprofit organizations and they don't send you to jail. They just give you a big, hefty fine in the range of \$50,000 to \$70,000. You want to be sure when somebody asks to get off the list that they're off.

There are many email service providers. I have a list that I keep and at the moment it has about 40 on them. In your registration for this seminar, there was a dropdown that had many of those names on it. If you're looking for lists, find out what they are. Some are also donation engine providers and that's not necessarily good or necessarily bad, it all depends.

Most of the organizations are doing reasonably good work, but always ask to talk with somebody else who's using that service and find out what the issues are from a customer's perspective. The kinds of issues that I like to ask about when I'm moving toward an ESP are: Can it integrate original HTML easily?

Can I design my own or do I have to use a template that they've provided? What do they count? Do they count deliveries, opens, reads, and click-throughs? Do they count click-throughs on specific links? Do they give you all of the data that you want there so you know exactly how many people are coming through to your site?

Segmentation—can they do segmentation for you? Can you send out half of your list with one subject line and another half of your list with another subject line and compare the results of the two of them and keep those random and segmented? Can you segment by multiple variables? Can you segment for folks who have clicked on an email in the last two weeks and live in specific zip codes?

It may not be important to you but then again it may be. Can you get timed autoresponse tools from them? In other words, if you have an email that is a reply email when somebody registers on the list and they register right then and there, does the reply go out automatically, instantly? Or if it's done on a Sunday, does it wait 24 hours until Monday in order for that reply to be delivered to somebody's email inbox?

Can you delay that reply a little bit so that people get a second time when they are made aware of your organization. Finally, I ask whether there's a unique IP address. Unique IPs affect deliverability. I think that's an important issue that different services need to provide and you need to be aware of.

You want to look at pricing too. The email service provider pricing is really hard to get a handle on. Different organizations price by different kinds of things. The only way to look at it and know what you're going to be paying and what the relative costs are is that the number of email addresses may not be the same pricing as the number of emails you're going to send per month.

There may be a variable in there as to the size of the emails sent per month. When you look at all those together, the price difference can be absolutely vast. The only rule of thumb that I'm absolutely certain of is that organizations generally don't like to put their pricing on their website so that you can go in and make an easy comparison.

They want to get the salesman involved and that's okay. Salesmen have to make a living and they're good at what they do. Always assume, until you learn different, that whatever the salesman tells you is the price is negotiable. If it's not published in black and white on the website, assume that it's negotiable and try and work for the best deal you can get.

Now, another word about deliverability: Deliverability depends increasingly on the reputation of the server that is sending your emails. You can get your domain name blacklisted because of server reputation problems that have nothing to do with the domain name. You can get your domain name blacklisted, as well, for its own reasons.

Many organizations have had trouble with their reputation in the past and still continue to suffer for it. I'm working with one organization like that now. You want your server reputation clean on blacklists. You want it on white lists. You want to be sure that you have a good history. You want to look into that IP address that may get assigned to you and see what its prior history has been because they do get recycled and used for different organizations.

You want to pay attention to your domain reputation and the number of complaints that happen to you because you sent an email and somebody on AOL, for instance, hits the "This is spam" button. You want to have an ESP that's going to have the process automated so that when that person hits "This is spam" it's reported back to your ESP and taken off your list right then and there so you don't send to them multiple times and they hit that "This is spam" button multiple times.

Frequency and volume affect your deliverability as do layout and content. In the grand scheme of things, the most important issue anymore is server reputation followed by domain reputation, followed by the complaint volume, followed by your email frequency and the number of emails that you're sending through any ISP, then layout, and then at the very last content.

Do you want to know what your server reputation is right now? You can go to one of two places that I know of, there are probably more. There is [SenderScore.com](http://SenderScore.com) or [Habeas.com](http://Habeas.com). Both offer services for identifying what your current server reputation is. It is essential. That thing that I mentioned about layout, it may have changed but I know last spring BellSouth as an Internet service provider was trashing all HTML email.

If it was HTML and it was being sent to a BellSouth customer, it wasn't getting there. If you're looking at Google, Google puts 100% of its deliverability analysis on your reputation and 0% on content. There are a few out there that still have portions usually in the range of 20% or 30% or maybe as high as 50% that still look at content.

That old Viagra filter is just not going to do it anymore and it's not something that you really have to worry about as much as you used to. We're sending it out, it's getting through the filters, and it's being delivered. How do we know that it's something that we want? The problem is that for all of us who receive email, we can sign up for a newsletter one time and we can even read it two or three times and then we're not interested so it becomes irrelevant to us.

If it's irrelevant, basically, it's spam. How do you control that? The answer is you don't, except by driving content at levels that people really want. How can you determine whether somebody's going to want it in the first place? The most effective kind of email source that you can get is to have people sign up on your site in a double opt-in process.

This means that they submit their email, your email service provider immediately sends them back a confirmation email, and they have to confirm that they want in by replying to that email. This says that they're pretty good to go right from the beginning. Then there can be the confirmed opt in; that is you are opted in right away and they just send you a confirmation that, yes, you made it.

That works but it tends to allow some spam addresses to get into your system. There's an opt in at registration where you have to choose when you're registering for a product or to make a donation or to receive

something from the organization that you yet want to receive this other email from them.

There's the other side of it which is you're registering for the same information or product and you're opted in automatically unless you chose to opt out. That's not as effective as having folks chose to opt in but it is one way of getting email addresses. There are two others and I'm going to say a couple of things that are fairly controversial here.

There is the harvested prospect and there is the purchased list. Harvesting generally refers to going out to email addresses that are online and grabbing them up the way a spider does and then using them that way fairly indiscriminately. I don't advocate that at all. I do think that there are occasions when harvested email addresses can be a useful tool for adding to your database even though they may not be completely kosher in terms of what we know about spam.

If, for instance, you are in charge of a large faith-based organization which is providing particular services that folks in your denomination should be aware of, you might be in a position where it makes sense to collect email addresses from other folks in that denomination. If you are a local area church and you wanted to go around and collect all of the addresses from the Lutheran churches in the area, that might be okay. I'm not saying it is; I'm saying it might be.

There are some areas of spam and opt in that I think are beginning to weaken in terms of our opposition to them. The other is in terms of the purchased list. Very recently, I saw back in August some research on a case study where an organization had gone out and in their traditional fashion had used direct mail to get people to sign up for an event—a run, a walk—and they had used email in conjunction with it.

This was a Nonprofit organization. If you read the fine print in the description of the case study, it said very clearly that they went out and they purchased direct mail lists from their usual vendors. Then when you read about how they acquired their email addresses, it said they acquired their email addresses by similar means.

I don't know about you but I read that to mean they had purchased lists from their usual vendors. Purchase of email addresses from lists to which people had previously opted in where if you read the fine print it said that their address could be sold or reused, many people would consider this spam.

The reality is that this organization said that using the email lists in conjunction with their direct mail increased their return on investment

30%. Those are pretty good numbers all in all. I put that out there simply to let you know I think perceptions are changing. We all think that spam is a bad thing but the definition of exactly what spam is, I think, is beginning to shift both from the point of view of the person who receives it and from the organization that sends it.

How can we collect email addresses? It's getting harder and harder; there's no question about that. We can purchase lists. It's not really a very good idea. It's better, I think, to go to another organization and say, "Will you chaperone us?" In other words, "Will you send an email to your constituents on your legitimate list that talks about our organization and recommends that they go to our website?"

That's a great way to get people to come to your site and then to invite them to join the list. You can offer something of value. I don't know about the iPods anymore. People were giving away iPods if you signed up enough people for your list; maybe not so much anymore. You want to be sure that you offer people easy opt in and easy opt out and collect a lot of emails offline.

The bottom line here is that you don't need a huge list. You need a quality list. It's much better to have a list of a thousand names that has a 100% open rate than to have the list of 10,000 names that has a 1% open rate. Collect email addresses wherever you can and however you can, but do them legitimately.

If, for instance, you're working for a youth-based organization where you want to attract younger people to your site, particularly people who are of a high school age, offer a scholarship. I worked with one organization that in 12 months went from a list of 50 email addresses of young people to over 10,000 because they offered a scholarship and they got in contact with people that way.

You can get people to co-register between your list and another list. You can develop business partnerships and those businesses might chaperone your mailings for you. You can ask people to register for information of value. The only study I've seen, and it was quite some time ago, said that 80% of people who give out their email address for registering understand, whether they're registering or purchasing a product, that they are by implication consenting to follow-up contact.

In all of that, what do we do about sending out emails and what day is the best day to send them out? I'm going to touch on this just briefly. I think the answer is that it doesn't matter as long as you don't send it out late Sunday morning and expect people to read it first thing when they come into their office on Monday.

My experience is that most of the deletes that happen happen first thing Monday morning when people look at that email. We know that when you do send out an email, from the studies we've seen in the for-profit world, you're going to get somewhere on the line of 50% of your conversions of people who actually open, read, and come to your website.

You're going to get about 50% within the first 28 minutes of that email and you're going to get 75% of those conversions within 24 hours. This is information that now is probably a couple of years old but I think it's probably still accurate. The more expensive the gift you're expecting or the conversion, the longer it may take for people to decide that they're actually going to do that.

Does the day of the week matter? Yes. You don't want to send on weekends if you think you're sending mostly to people's office addresses. Probably Friday afternoon right after lunch might be a good time for people in their office when they're coming back and trying to figure out what they're going to do for the rest of Friday afternoon.

I find that just about any day of the week will work as long as it's not too late on Friday or too early on Monday. One word about the right format: There are beautiful, gorgeous, HTML emails that you're sending out just aren't being seen. I've been conducting an informal survey for the last six months and it supports the information that's being published, which is that most folks when they're looking at their email do not have images turned on and so they're not seeing what you send them.

They're seeing any text that's there but they're not seeing all of your pretty graphics. My responses from people say that about 60% of the people—these are all folks who were working in the Nonprofit world—replied that they have to right click on their email in order to see the images, that they are not displayed automatically.

As far as I can tell, that number is going up all the time. As you're looking at trying to get those emails delivered, you have alternatives that include plain text or plain text with a link that will take people to a pretty graphic, or plain text with a link to a PDF. You can send it rich text, although I suggest that that's probably not the best way to do it.

You can do some simple HTML that has the HTML but just doesn't include graphics and you use HTML in order to create the look without using graphics. That seems to work and be pretty effective in getting things through. The bottom line is that the templates that many of the ESPs provide, that are all so pretty, are all graphic based.

If you're sending them out, people just aren't seeing them. Another problem with sending out a template that someone else provides is that there are other people who are using that template. Pretty soon, people begin to see what looks, pretty much, like the same email again and again and again.

You really want to be unique and stand out and be different. Another place to put that budget that is so important to you is into designing your emails in such a way that they're going to be seen and read and they get through. One last, final word is that you've got to test and retest those emails. If you don't have them now, you should have an account for email delivery with Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail, AOL, Outlook Express, and with MacMail.

You need to be able to look at your emails through the eyes of all of your different recipients to know what it is they're going to see and set all of those to default to not display your images because that's what most of your customers are doing as well. Don't use single, large images because they just don't get through.

Maybe you want to have an image that's there that says, "Click here to see the discount code." That may help. Without people seeing those images remember, they're not being counted by your email service provider. People may open your email and read it and look at it, but if it doesn't get clicked on or if it doesn't get opened using graphics, then it doesn't get counted.

There are 60% of your emails, probably, that are going out and you really have no idea what the results are for many of them. Katya, I think I'm about at the end of the line here. We've been going for 43 minutes. Are you there?

Katya: I'm here. That's perfect. We've got a bunch of questions for you. First of all, I want to say a lot of people are writing to say how you told us this and great and they're following up with some questions. I'm going to start posing those questions to you, Marc. In the meantime, for the rest of you on the phone, keep the questions coming.

You can email them at [Fundraising123@NetworkForGood.org](mailto:Fundraising123@NetworkForGood.org). As a reminder, we will be posting an audio transcript of this call within 24 hours at [Fundraising123.org](http://Fundraising123.org). One note, quite a lot of the questions were pretty nitty-gritty about different email providers. You probably don't have time to cover that in depth on this call.

There are a number of resources to go to if you want to look at mutual write ups of different email providers like Idealware. You can also look at TechSoup. I did mention again Network for Good does have some email

solutions, online fundraising solutions, and an integrated solution with [SalesForce.com](https://www.salesforce.com) where you can have a donor database and send emails from that database and it segments them and will do all the things Marc was recommending you look at with VerticalResponse.

Just before I go into the questions, I wanted to let you know we have those resources. If you'd like to know more about the [Integrated Suite] and VerticalResponse email system that I mentioned, you can go to [Fundraising123.org](https://www.fundraising123.org) where there's a link for signing up for a free webinar next week or any week after. We're running them weekly.

It goes through a product demonstration, which it sounds like many of you are looking for that kind of thing so that might be useful. I'll also note as a "Thank You" for joining the call today we're also offering a 60-day free trial of "Custom DonateNow" our online donation processing service.

You can find a link to that at [Fundraising123.org](https://www.fundraising123.org) as well. Onto the questions, Marc; the first question I wanted to pose to you is from Mike. He wants to know, "What do you do when your email list is tapped out? We seem to be at the limit where no matter how many times we send out a request for donations we hardly get any response after the first half of the year and I think everyone has given as much as they're willing or able to give for the year. Do we then look to expand our list? What do we do?"

Marc: What do you do when your email is tapped out? I think part of it is you give it a rest. The problem is that you've told folks that you're going to be able to raise all of this money and there are a couple of issues. The novelty of giving online has worn off. People aren't doing it just because they haven't done it before and they'd like to try it or they tried it once before and they want to try it again.

You need to look at both the appeal that you're making and is it appropriate and is it getting through. I think also you need to look at the frequency with which you're sending to folks. It's really unusual for most donors to give every month. If we had a situation where all of our donors were giving every month, we wouldn't be struggling as hard as we are.

Focus your energies where they're going to do the most good and put those energies there. You're going to raise the most money from your donors at year end because that's the way it happens online or offline. You want to be sure that you have a clear [portable] appeal there. In the meantime, send them something that is of value to them.

If all you're doing is asking them for money every time you send them an email, they're going to get the feeling that all you want from them is money, money, money, and people resist that. You've got to have another

basis for your relationship than just they're, metaphorically, writing you a check.

Katya: Great response there. A few people wrote they were pretty fascinated about what you had to say about images being blocked and some of the hazards of HTML and they were wondering about what were alternatives in sending text emails. A third person wanted to know why you recommend not sending rich text format emails.

Marc: Let's start with rich text first and then you can remind me the rest of the question. The rich text format displays differently on different machines depending on what your monitor settings are and whether or not you're using standard PC settings or standard Mac settings or any standard settings and exactly what mail reader you're using.

What may look to you like a perfectly readable font size may in fact be miniscule in size when it comes to other people's screens. It's much harder to test those than it is to test HTML emails and they tend not to look professional. It's easier just to send emails of one look that are HTML or that are plain text and everybody's pretty much seeing the same thing. What was the other part of the question, Katya?

Katya: It's related and an overlapping question from Dave: "Given that many folks do not have the ability to see photos in their emails, do you recommend sending text versions of emails rather than HTML or does the track ability trade off make it not worth doing," which you sort of addressed just now.

Marc: I do recommend sending HTML but I recommend that you find a way to use your HTML such that you don't rely on a lot of graphics. Obviously, like any entrepreneur, I think that I do it as well or better than anybody so if you want a sample of what we're doing at Affinity Seminars, go to [AffinitySeminars.com](http://AffinitySeminars.com) and register for the email alert and there will be one coming your way soon.

You'll get a sense of what we do. You have to remember little technical things like you can't use cascading style sheets in your HTML emails because the likes of Google, for instance, will never even look at them. You have to go back to the old way of doing things which is to embed the detail of your HTML style within the lines and the font statements of your HTML.

For those of you who don't understand what all of that is about, don't worry about it. For those of you who do, it's an important lesson that you get to—forget those beautiful, cascading style sheets.

Katya: Someone asked another quick question: “What about Unicode text?”

Marc: I’m not familiar with it so I can’t answer that one.

Katya: Me neither. We have a good question from [Deborah], a nice meaty one: “Can you give any brief does and don’t on content, size, and subject line of emails?”

Marc: Ah, the content and size and subject line of emails. First of all, the fewer characters you have in that subject line the better but you’ve got to relate it to what’s going on in your “To:” and “From:” lines. You want to be sure that your “To:” line includes not just the email address of the individual but you want to have on your database the first and last names, usually in separate fields, so that it says “To: Marc Lee,” and then “Marc@AffinityResources.com.”

Then you want to be sure that maybe you use even a generic “From:” It doesn’t have to be “From: Katya Andresen.” If you’re sending to a group who doesn’t know Katya, it can be “From: Network for Good,” if that will encourage people to open the email, or “From: The Humane Society.” So someone can say, “Oh, I know who it’s from,” and it’s a legitimate “To:”

In the subject line itself, you need to test different subjects within your database to see what works best. Obviously, if you only have 200 emails, you can’t test it very effectively. You need to have 1,500 in each side of your sample in order to have an accurate [AV] test, pretty much. You want to frontload the subject line with the important words upfront and then let it trail off.

The number of characters that you can use in a subject line, I’ve seen it vary. I’ve seen some folks say that you’ve only really got 30 to work with. I’ve seen others say 50. I tend to set it up so that we divide it in half and I frontload the first half and then my secondary topic is in the second half.

Katya: Great, thanks. Kelly wants to know, Marc, could you tell her what is a good open rate. She’s saying she’s getting between 15% and 23% of her emails actually opened and read. Is that good? What’s a good a gauge there?

Marc: First of all, opening has nothing to do with reading. If somebody is actually opening your email, what it means is that they have graphics enabled on their email reader. Okay, you’re seeing a 15% open rate. That may be open just long enough for somebody to click delete. Delete, delete, delete, delete, delete, and you’ve got that many opens that go with it.

Each one of those emails gets an “open,” assuming that they all have graphics embedded in them. The graphic request has been sent at that point so all you’re really measuring is how many people actually saw what you were working with.

If my numbers hold true and 60% of the people have graphics turned off and you’re seeing 15% open, that’s all coming from only the 40% of people who are actually receiving your email with graphics turned on. You’re probably actually doing better than that, but it’s still just click, click, click, click. It could be people reading it; it might not be.

Katya: Great, thank you for clarifying that. [Cameron] wants to know: “Can you comment on whether there’s a different response rate for email sent to home versus business addresses? Our direct mail sent to homes has a 3 to 1 better response rate than the same mailing sent to a person in a business.” So she’s wondering does the same hold true for email.

Marc: I don’t have any data that would support that. I would suspect that it does and the reason I think it does is because people are very careful with their home addresses because they know what they want and they ask for it judiciously. When people are working for an organization, your boss does not care whether you’re getting my email delivered to you at work if that boss doesn’t see it as work related.

They could care less whether you’re receiving the latest catalog from J. Jill or the latest request from Habitat for Humanity. That has nothing to do, in most cases, with business so they’re doing their best to screen those. I would expect that between people’s general personal preferences and the preferences of the employer that there’s a lot more being screened going into the work address.

Katya: Jennifer was wondering, “Do you have any experience sending invitations via email, for example, to gala fundraisers?”

Marc: No, but I’ll tell you who does and they are a lot of the application service providers. Donation engines also offer event registrations. Idealware might have some experience in having looked at that in terms of what works. The more novel your approach, the better it’s going to work is my suspicion but I can’t back it up with any data.

Katya: [Travis] has a question. He says, “We recently sent our first ever e-appeal and got not a single gift. We have a list of about 5,000 to whom we’ve been sending monthly information newsletters but no appeal for over a year. Is this normal for a first e-appeal? Incidentally, 1.5% of our recipients clicked through on our links.”

Marc: That sounds low and I wonder about several things. You may have a 1.5% click-through rate, which is a little on the low side, but I think also I'd wonder about the timing of the email appeal and the readability of the email as it was delivered. It does sound on the low side like there's something that doesn't ring right there.

Once upon a time, I consulted with an organization that was a public library and they did the same kind of thing. They did an e-event and they got nobody, absolutely nobody, who registered online. I looked at those folks and said, "Nobody?" They said, "Nope." I said, "Didn't any of you give to the event online?" They said, "No."

I said, "For heaven sake, why not?" They said, "Well, we weren't sure it was secure." If there were any security issues whatsoever, that can drive donors away in an instant.

Katya: That's a good point. We're just at 2:00. I'm going to ask one more question and then have some wrap-up remarks. I like the last question because it's about your site, Marc. Gary already went to your site. He liked your nice email sign up. He knows that you also requested his first and last name. "Is this standard?"

He also wondered about the email confirmation requirement. You've touched on this earlier an importance of email confirmation, but he wants to know, "Is that standard, required, ethically imposed, legally necessarily? What are the reasons for doing that?"

Marc: The first and last name is simply our preference so that we can try and have that first and last name. My sense is—I don't have anything more than anecdotal evidence—that adding first and last name into the address of the recipient improves deliverability. It improves it more on the recipient and, "Ah, they really know who I am. They haven't just harvested this someplace."

We do that but we also like to know people by name. In terms of the confirmation that's out there, that's a double opt-in confirmation process that we are doing by choice. It does a couple of things: It slows down registrations but it does keep the list clean. It means that if someone comes in and puts in a bogus address that they're never going to look at or if a Spider attacks it, which can also happen, that that address never gets through.

It gives us an opportunity then to communicate back with the individual. You would have noticed when you signed up that the confirmation came back to you and said you've got to complete this confirmation form and if you do you're going to get a coupon.

You're encouraged to confirm and then you would get a welcome message that has the discount code in it as well. It's a multiple part attempt to begin to build a relationship with the person. That works whether it's a for-profit enterprise, as this one obviously is, or whether it's non profit where you're providing information to people that they might not already have that is key to fulfilling your mission.

Katya: Great, thank you so much, Marc. That's an excellent note to end on. That was a superlative presentation packed with information. We got to most of the questions. There are a few that we did not. Have no fear, we always personally answer every single question, even ones we don't get to, and so you'll be getting a reply via email.

We always take the time to do that after the call. My closing note is please go to [Fundraising123.org](http://Fundraising123.org) to follow up on anything we mentioned today. You're going to find coupons on there for Network for Good's services. You will find a sign up in the top right corner for getting free fundraising tips via email every week.

You will also find information on signing up for that training I mentioned, the free demonstration of our database and email outreach, as well as transcripts, audio, and in some cases slides of all of our "Non Profit 911" calls that we've had over the last three months. If you missed any, you can catch up on them there.

Again, if you want to hear Marc again or share it with colleagues, you're welcome to do that starting tomorrow when we have the audio file up. Thank you very much for joining us. We were delighted to have you. Marc, thank you so much for donating your time to all the folks on the phone today. It was a real privilege to have you on the line today.

Marc: You're entirely welcome. I was delighted to be here. Thank you.

Katya: Thank you, everyone, for taking time out to join us today. We hope you'll be on the line on our future calls.

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