Network for Nonprofits for Good™

The 2008 Online Fundraising Survival Guide

12 Winning Strategies
to Survive & Thrive in a Down Economy

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Are you fretting this online fundraising season?
Don't worry, we're here to help.

This survival guide will help you launch a great online fundraising or marketing campaign in quick order. Despite the limping economy, you can successfully stride through fundraising season if you follow these steps. These quick tweaks to your online marketing and communications efforts will make a big difference.

Remember, it's important to start NOW! More than 40% of online donations for nonprofits like yours are made in December. In addition, almost 70% of adults plan to donate the same amount online as they did in the 2007 holiday season. So the rest of 2008 is very important. Let's be sure you get your share this year.

Step 1: Diagnosis time. Let's make sure you're not making the four most common mistakes in online fundraising.

If you've been disappointed with your fundraising results, it's probably due to one or more of these four factors.

Mistake 1 - "Field of Dreams" syndrome.

We'll illustrate this problem with a story.

Last year, Network for Good's COO, Katya Andresen, was leading a session on fundraising at a major conference. Midway through the presentation, she described Network for Good to the more than 100 nonprofit professionals in the audience. A man in the middle of the room raised his hand.

"I have a DonateNow button from you," he said. "But it doesn't work."

It was a dark moment for Network for Good. Our buttons weren't working?!?

Katya said to the man – and everyone else in the room – that she was anxious to fix the problem and would get to the bottom of why people could not make donations from his website as soon as she finished her speech.

"No, that's not the problem," the man responded. "You can make a donation. The problem is no one is clicking on the button."

That was a problem indeed.

The story of the "broken" button eventually led us here at Network for Good to create guides like this and our Learning Center at www.fundraising123.org. Because we don't want to just give you a Donate button, we want to make sure it "works."

This Guide will help you get people to click; but remember, you have to do the work we describe here. It's not enough to post a button on your website or in your emails and think the money will roll in. You need to proactively build your email list, drive traffic to your website and make the website experience and donation process easy, informative and compelling. And above all, you need to tell a great story.

Fundraising is not like the 1989 movie, *Field of Dreams*. If you build it (an email, a website, a Donate button), people won't come. You have to go out and get 'em.

Mistake 2 - "It's all about us" disease.

"All about us" disease is also known as "nonprofit narcissism." If your homepage or your email newsletters read like an "about us" page or self-portrait, you may have this problem. If your appeals simply talk about what you need, and you keep telling your donors what your need over and over again, you have a problem.

What's the problem? You're having a one-way conversation. Here's an example: We wouldn't come up to you at a Starbucks, hand you our life story and say, "Hi, I'm so and so. I was born in 1967. I care about good causes. I work in marketing. I'm a really good

person; therefore, you should be my friend. Won't you be my friend right now?" You would think we were nuts.

But how many times do we do this in our materials? We cite the year we were founded, our mission statement and then ask for money. That's a monologue, not a true conversation – and we want to have a conversation with our donors.

There are 119 new nonprofits being formed every day. All of them need money. All of them are good causes. All of them have mission statements. It's just not enough to assume need alone will get someone to pledge.

You'll learn how to have a better message here: You want to talk WITH your audience about how you are personally relevant to them. You want to paint a picture of what they can accomplish, together with you.

In other words, you want a message that's all about them, not simply about you.

Mistake 3 - "Call to inaction" problem.

A lot of campaigns fall down because they lack a strong or clear call to action. If we went up to you carrying a banner saying, "Save the Earth," you would smile and say, sure I want to save the earth. But what would you go home and do? That's not a specific call to action. Good calls to action are highly specific, easy and very feasible for someone to do.

If we say to you: "Would you commit to rolling out a blue recycling cart on Wednesdays with your paper products from your household?" That is a very specific call to action (unlike "saving the earth"), and you are much more likely to do something that doesn't sound that hard.

Here are the four ways to craft a great call to action:

- **Be highly specific.** Having large global missions and lofty goals for changing the world is great, but you need to put those aside. That can have the effect of making a potential donor feel like they can't make a difference or it can leave them wondering exactly what steps they can take. Instead, focus on a very specific action somebody can take to help make the problem better.

- **Be Feasible.** Your action needs to be something that is very easy to do so as to not overwhelm any potential donors. Create a momentum of compliance, wherein once somebody does something small they are more willing to do something larger later. Not everybody is ready to donate right away and it's important not to alienate those people.

- **Have a first priority.** As in, you should have a first priority beyond getting donations. Again, momentum of compliance comes into play. Not everybody is ready to donate or volunteer right this very second. Think about how you can build

your community of potential supporters and about enticing ways to get a person's email address.

o **Be free of barriers.** This is where usability of your website and the actual donation process comes into play. Watch somebody go through the steps involved and see where they get hung up, if there are unnecessary steps or if everything is easy to understand. Honor your audience's time by making everything as straightforward as possible.

Look at your home page. Do you have your donate button in at least two places? It needs to be very easy to find. When someone goes through the donation process, is it easy?

Our favorite marketer, Seth Godin, always says, "Everyone is busy, lazy and in a hurry." If you make it complicated and time consuming to help, even the most generous of people aren't going to lend a hand.

Clearly state what you are asking and appeal to prospective donors to do that simple act.

Mistake 4 - Death by thanklessness.

The number one reason people stop supporting a nonprofit is how they were treated by that nonprofit. Donors complain about too many appeals and not enough information on

what their money accomplished. Thank your donor at least three times - when they complete a donation, when they get your email receipt and when they get your full thank-you via email a few days later. Then update them regularly about the amazing things THEY accomplished.

Give the donor the credit. Treat the donor like a hero, not an ATM machine. Here are three ideas:

1. **Thank your donors three times as often as you appeal for donations.** You read that correctly: Three times as often. Say thank you. Send an update. (Heck, you might even drive up your website traffic in the process!) Highlight a program, person or other aspect of your organization that the generous donation went toward. Think about the last time you received a thank-you note--didn't it just make you feel all warm and fuzzy?

2. **Make your thank-you message personal.** A person cannot be thanked enough, unless the thank you is a corny form letter. You can spare your supporters from receiving a single one. (Trust us: Donors can tell the difference.) Consider hand-written notes, phone calls or some personalization in your email message at least. When crafting your letter, check out the four parts of a great message and don't let another "Dear Donor" message happen to you!

3. **Show your donors their impact: Be transparent!** How did your organization spend their money? Who did they help? Be accountable. If I know that I saved Spot the dog from being euthanized, show me a picture of Spot. The most important thing is to be genuine.

Step 2: Now you've avoided the mistakes. Let's turn to winning strategies.

1. Start with a compelling message. (Hint: a message is not a re-worded mission statement)

A compelling message can generate fundraising success even with modest marketing budgets. But when people are bombarded with thousands of messages a day, how do you make sure your messages rise to the top? There are four components to a great message: connecting with an audience based on their values, rewarding your audience, asking for a specific action to get that reward, and making the message memorable. If you do this in your online fundraising appeals, you will vastly increase the appeal of YOUR appeal. Remember this rule with the mnemonic device, CRAM, and these four easy steps:

- o **CONNECT:** Connect to things your audience cares about: changing the life of someone, looking good before peers, feeling innovative, saving time, feeling powerful, etc.

- o **REWARD:** Identify and offer a compelling reward for taking action: Good rewards are immediate, personal, credible and reflective of audience values. What's in it for the donor if they support you? This isn't just about a coffee mug or umbrella for giving $50. It's about what feeling you can give them.

o **ACTION:** Have a clear call to action: Good actions are specific, feasible, and filmable (in other words, easy to visualize doing). They should also measurably advance your mission. The more specific your request – and the easier it is to fulfill – the more likely you are to spur action.

o **MEMORY:** Make your message memorable: It's memorable if it's different, catchy, personal, tangible, and desirable. A word of caution, however: Memorable elements should always be closely tied to your cause. Think of all the advertisements that were so funny or memorable that you told a friend about them, but when asked what product the ad was for, you couldn't remember. Your goal: Stick out from the crowd in a way that reflects the essence of your organization.

A great way to think about being memorable is to examine the cross-section between what you're good at, what makes you truly unique and what your audience cares about. Show how you're different and personally relevant to folks. If you stick to this territory, you're going to stick in people's minds.

2. Double-check your message – does it answer the four questions required to get a donation?

Now that you have a message, make sure it answers four questions required to turn interest into a donation. Here's the checklist:

o **Why me?** Does your message connect on a human level? Use pictures, tell stories and do anything that can help your audience relate.

o **Why now?** Create urgency around your message – why is the gift important right now?

o **What for?** Show what specific and tangible result will come from a donation - for the donor and for your programs. People give because they want to do something good, so give assurances that good things will happen due to their donations.

o **Who says?** The messenger is often as important as the message. Use trustworthy messengers - people you've actually helped or other donors instead of just you. People say friends and family are the most influential in determining where they give money, so also think about how you can get your supporters to speak for you among their own circles of influence.

Step 3: Make sure your website is all it could be.

Our friends at Sea Change Strategies point out that one of the easiest and most overlooked ways to improve your website and your donation process is by putting it through some basic testing. Here is what they have to say on the topic:

People hear "testing" and often get scared off; afraid they will have to hire some expensive firm to perform weeks of scrutiny. The opposite is true for usability testing; all you need is somebody who isn't already familiar with your website. Your mother-in-law, your neighbor or even in some instances a coworker from a different department are all acceptable testers. Gather up a handful of people and perform the following three tests, all of which will give you great insight.

1. **The Trunk Test:** For this test you don't want to use a coworker so find somebody a little farther removed from your organization. Imagine somebody being locked up in the trunk of a car and being dropped off onto your website. How quickly could that person figure out what site they are on, what page they are on, what the major sections of the site are, what the navigation options are and how to get home? Simply watch a person on your site or even a printout of your site and have them answer those questions.

2. **Task Testing:** Have somebody go through the process of making a donation on your website. Have them talk about where they are going and what they are doing, where they are having problems or are confused and what they are clicking on and why. This can

expose any difficulties a potential donor may have or show you what the overly complex portions of your donation process are.

3. **Hypothetical Testing:** Give your subjects a hypothetical situation - they have heard of your organization and are considering donating to it, but first they need to get on the website and do some research to see if everything's on the level. Again have them talk through the process, what they like and what they don't, what caught their eye or drew them in, could they find everything easily and what if any information is missing that they were expecting?

In one afternoon of usability testing you can effectively gather all of the information you need to drastically improve your website and gain more donations, for free!

Step 4: When people land on your website or read your appeals, inspire them!

Sea Change Strategies has something called the Passion Principle. It holds that online giving is a function of both donor passion or intent on one hand, and good website usability and strategy on the other. But passion counts more. How do you build passion? Here are some concrete ideas from Sea Change:

- o **Tell your organization's founding story once a year.** Communications guru, Andy Goodman, calls this one of the "sacred bundle" of stories - a profound reminder of the deep values and moral struggle that gave rise to your organization's existence.

- o **Have a genuine cultivation strategy and calendar.** Send emails to donors that thank them, that report back on how you've spent their money and that offer an inspiring anecdote or factoid. You can't thank donors enough, and chances are, you don't. Make it a point not to ask for donations in these communications.

- o **Ask your donors for their feedback and opinions on a regular basis.** Remind them that you know there are people behind those email addresses.

- o **Offer periodic live chats or phone-in briefings with your Executive Director or CEO.** This is a staple of major donor fundraising, inexplicably absent from the online

giving scene.

- o **Offer real-life glimpses into the life of your organization.** We are entering an era when authenticity is arguably the paramount value in marketing communications - a potentially massive shift from the fakey-fake formula that still guides most direct mail.

Step 5: Use a big, colorful donate button. And make sure it's above the fold.*

Make it easy for donors to give by making it easy to find your site and your Donate button. Research shows that size DOES matter: bigger donate buttons helped convert more donors! * *(Above the fold is a concept in web design referring to location of an item near the top of a web page, which can thus be viewed in a browser without scrolling. This is originally a reference to the way in which newspapers were folded and creased.)*

Here are some examples of big buttons:

Need a button? You can use one of ours:

- Network for Good Buttons:

  http://www.fundraising123.org/article/network-good-donatenow-buttons

- Holiday Buttons:

  http://www.fundraising123.org/article/holiday-fundraising-buttons

Step 6: Optimize your donation page.

Invest in a customized online donation page that looks exactly like your website, branding, and general style, says Sea Change. If you have a Custom DonateNow page from Network for Good, you will be in good shape. Here are the 7 deadly sins of donate page design:

- o   Scary, long forms with unnecessary fields

- o   Multiple non-giving options

- o   Long text, weird formatting, reversed-out type

- o   Amateurish looking design

- o   Layout that is not intuitive

- o   No security or privacy policy links

- o   No address or phone number

Step 7: Turn one-time givers into recurring givers.

Thinking about monthly giving is one of the smartest things you can do as a fundraiser. At Network for Good, we find that 30-40% of the donation volume for a nonprofit website is monthly giving, and that would be a great situation to find all nonprofits—thanking people every month instead of asking them for donations every few weeks.

How do you do that? How do you turn your annual givers into monthly supporters?

1. **Make sure your donation form asks what type of gift the donor wants to make** ("Do you want to give us a monthly gift?"). Whenever you're asking for money, ask for the monthly pledge, not just a one-time gift.

2. **Revisit the language you're using in your appeals**. Frame your ask in such a way that it's a win-win situation: monthly donations for you, convenience and budgeting for your donors.

3. **Package the appeal in an exciting way**. For example, some organizations have an ambassador program or a sponsor-a-child every month program. Put a face on that sustainable gift. This way you're creating some tangible tie to the idea of giving every month.

4. **Don't be afraid to ask for a monthly gift of support after someone completes a one-time transaction**. It can be ingrained as a nice thank-you message: "Thank you so much for making a one-time gift. This is how you can put your support to work for us each and every month. Would you consider becoming a monthly supporter?" We've seen great success in converting first-time online donors into monthly donors by doing that within the first three days of them making their first online gift.

Step 8: Put your website address on EVERYTHING, this winter and forever.

Sea Change advises you put your URL everywhere (emails, letterhead PSAs, search engines, etc.) and use every opportunity to drive people to your website and/or donation page. Need help? Start with this to-do-list:

- **Create "keyword" ads on Google and Yahoo! Link the ads straight to your donate form.** This is especially important at year-end and during intensive fundraising campaigns. Make sure the ad language is clearly fundraising-related. If your pay-per-click ads go to your home page and not a specially-designed landing page, your money would be better spent on lottery tickets.

- **Drive traffic through other advertising and outreach.** Keywords are high quality but can be low volume. Do you have a group on MySpace, Facebook, Care2? Add a link. Also, consider selected advertising from high affinity sites through blog ads, email marketing from the right third parties, and other selected advertising (the key to finding the sites that work best for your cause).

- **Make sure you have multiple donate links on your home page that go straight to your donate form.** In our experience, more links means more traffic to your donate page.

o **Consider a "home page hijack."** In the dark age of web 1.0, this was known as a splash screen. By either name it's a special version of your home page that has its sole purpose generating donations. A year-end splash screen should be big and brassy and offer no more than three options: donate now, learn more, and click to the usual home page. Or you can go for broke—make the splash screen your form!

o **Use consistent language for buttons and links.** Focus on the words "Give," "Donate," or "Contribute"—and stick to that one word throughout the donation process. Asking people to "join" is problematic unless membership is truly core to your brand, e.g. ACLU or Sierra Club. Asking people to "support" you is largely meaningless to most users and does not connote giving.

o **Ask them to change channels.** Ask your offline donors to donate online. This will convert donors into using your least expensive giving channel, saving you money and allowing you to do more with theirs. And ask your email donors to give via the mail. The myth that email donors only give online is not true—multiple opportunities to give can frequently lead to multiple gifts.

Step 9: Dust off your existing email lists for your campaign.

A fair number of the email addresses in your list - if they've been sitting in storage for months or even a couple of years - ARE going to be dead by now, so don't be surprised if your list shrinks noticeably after this first mailing.

This is a healthy part of the email-marketing process, to weed out people who aren't there - or aren't at all interested in hearing from you - and let you focus your efforts on those who are.

Here are a couple of additional tips for reaching out to people who might not have heard from you in a long time, courtesy of our partner Emma (the engine behind EmailNow powered by Emma):

- o **Start by cleaning up your list.** Before you import your list of names and addresses into your email outreach tool, spend a little time cleaning it up. Be on the lookout for generics (info@companyblah.com, sales@companyblah.com, etc.), which are not worth trying and can often result in spam complaints, as well as any addresses you know shouldn't be there (one-time donors who opted out of your emails, etc.). Here are a few tips to keep that list tidy once it's set up.

- o **When you send, clearly identify yourself**. People are quick to delete or opt out of emails from senders they don't immediately recognize. So use an obvious "from" name and address, both of which should ideally include your organization name.

o **Remind your supporters that they're your supporters.** People have short-term memories. Some of your supporters may not remember they donated to your animal shelter over the one in Neighbortown. So connect the dots for them, either in the greeting ("Dear Bob, As a past donor to Organization X...") or at the bottom of the campaign ("You're receiving this newsletter because you're a recent supporter of Organization X...") or both. If your organization name happens to be Organization X, then this example worked out really well.

o **Let 'em know it's voluntary**. Make it clear to the members of your email list that they're free to leave it at any time. If people trust that the door really is open, should they ever decide to exit, they're often more comfortable sticking around. Here's a CAN-SPAM review.

o **Above all, be human.** This is not to imply that you're a robot. Or that you fraternize with robot friends on the weekends or like to attend Robot Poker Night every Tuesday around 7, and isn't it Ted's time to host? No, we're just reminding you that you have a relationship with these people, so take full advantage when crafting your campaigns. Instead of throwing an indiscriminate pitch at them, give things a more personal, conversational touch. These are your people, and if you treat them as such, we think you'll be pleasantly surprised with your results for this campaign and the many that follow.

Step 10: Build your email list – make your signup enticing.

You don't want to just email your existing list. You want to increase the size of your list. Here is how you do it, courtesy of our partner Emma:

- o **Make sure that all your media mentions are driving people to your website** (make it a call to action)!

- o **Why should someone sign up?** Tell them. Ask yourself why someone should sign up to get your emails. Is it because they'll get tips that can help them improve their health, or access to articles before they're published, or alerts about the environment? And then make your case clearly to prospective subscribers. Don't just ask them to sign up for your emails; instead, ask them to sign up for your emails to get exclusive, email-only information (or whatever the reward might be).

- o **Ask when they're most likely to say yes.** In life, timing is everything. So make sure you ask people to join your list when they're most likely to say yes: after they've just made a donation, just filled out a survey for you or when they've just read the most fascinating article on your website. So be sure to incorporate your 'donate now' or 'join now' link and teaser into the parts of your website where people are most likely to jump at the chance. We call these open-minded moments.

o **Make it super easy.** The people who love you will be perfectly content to fill out three screens of information and take a short survey to join your list. The people who like you may not. So keep your signup process short and sweet. Minimize the clicks, and ask only for the information you truly need (if you're not planning on using people's birth date information later, don't trouble them for it). And by all means don't mislead people into thinking the process is short and sweet only to hit them with a 20-minute routine. (You've seen signups that ask only for your email address followed by a 'join' button - but instead of joining you're greeted by 20 more fields and a citizenship test.) Make signing up a pleasant, fast experience, and you'll lose fewer people along the way. (This concept shows up a lot in tips for improving your website in general.)

o **Offer something in return.** It's possible the content of your emails is reward enough. But you might also consider offering people a bit of instant gratification for joining. Remember that you can customize the thank-you screen that greets new subscribers. Get creative and make the thank-you screen itself a printable coupon to your next event, or include a link to premium content (say, a download for 10 Ways to Manage Your Diabetes, if your organization is concerned with diabetes).

o **Collect emails from donors via direct mail** - Maybe they'd rather hear from you electronically.

o **Use your email signature** - It is a great tool for doing marketing, whether it's promoting an event or asking people to sign up to hear from you on your website.

o **Ask people to sign a petition** with their email address and with permission to contact them.

o **Collect email addresses at events.** I have been to 10 nonprofit events in the last 18 months, and I can't think of a single one that collected my email address. Lost opportunity!

o **Optimize search:** When a prospective donor or volunteer types the name of your nonprofit into Google, is your name near the top of the list? More importantly, for those who don't know your name, if they type your keyword or description (for example, "Pittsburgh group home" or "Boise AIDS services"), will they still find you? These are called your organic or natural search results, versus paid search results. For example:

In just a few steps, you can improve your website's performance in search engines by optimizing both your paid and organic search results. First, we recommend taking advantage of Google Grants, a donation program that gives nonprofits free promotion in the search engine's online advertising platform, Google AdWords. Second, we recommend giving your website a quick search engine optimization (SEO) health check. Follow the

linked articles below to learn how. And if all this sounds too confusing or time consuming, reach out to the business school or computer science department of your local university or community college or a local online marketing agency and ask for some pro bono help. If all else fails, the nonprofit Grassroots.org provides free SEO consulting. Visit http://seo.grassroots.org/ to learn more.

- **Google Grants for Nonprofits: Getting Started:**

  http://www.fundraising123.org/article/google-grants-nonprofits-getting-started

- **Spreading Your Nonprofit's Message with Google AdWords:**

  http://www.fundraising123.org/article/spreading-your-nonprofits-message-google-adwords

- **10 Steps to Being Found on Google:**

  http://www.fundraising123.org/article/10-steps-being-found-search-engines

- **Google's Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide**

  http://www.fundraising123.org/article/googles-search-engine-optimization-starter-guide

Step 11: Make your emails snap and sparkle.

A well designed email is a great place to show off your brand, and a campaign that's easy on the eyes - and a pleasure to read - builds trust and loyalty with your readers. So if creating great looking campaigns is one of your style goals (along with other fashion mantras of "less spandex" and "maybe not so much on the fringe there, tiger"), then we're happy to share what's on the horizon for email design. Here are ten trends to get you started, and yeah, good call on the fringe.

o **Getting serious about the subject line.** It's the most important sentence of your entire email campaign, and yet too many otherwise creative people are content with the most banal of subject lines, like "February Newsletter." February may indeed be an exciting month for your organization, but busy readers with two seconds to decide whether to stop and open your email need a little more enticement. Keep your monthly label, but add some color, like "Initech's February Newsletter: How Good is Your HR team? Take Our Quiz and Find Out..." Now, we're intrigued. Nice work, Initech.

o **Striking the right balance between images and text.** Emails with images in them perform better than their graphic-less counterparts. But how many images are too many? The general rule of thumb is to avoid sending one big honkin' (it's a technical term) image and strive for a healthy balance of graphics and text. Not only does that create a pleasant viewing experience, but it also avoids serious trouble in cases where an email server

doesn't accept large files, or the recipient's email program doesn't immediately display your graphics, or your reader is on a slow Internet connection and, well, decides to run out for a sandwich before your large image files have time to load. It is lunch time, after all.

o **Branding more than just the from name.** By now, most marketers know to brand the two from pieces: the address (newsletters@julies-hats.com) and the name (Julie's Hat Emporium). In addition to those two obvious branding slots, make sure you're including your logo or graphic branding prominently in the campaign, and consider branding another inviting slot: the subject line. By starting your subject with consistent branding (think "News from Julie's Hats: This Week Only, Sombreros Half Off!"), you'll make it even easier for recipients to identify your emails amidst a cluttered inbox.

o **Focusing above the fold.** We assume that most people use a preview pane when perusing their inbox, and recent studies by MarketingSherpa confirm that fact (their research indicates that more than half of email recipients use a horizontal preview window of varying height). So it's important when laying out your email's content to put a lot of attention on the top four inches and use that prime real estate to the best of your, well, realty abilities. Make sure your logo is there. Make sure you've introduced your email's topic or theme. And make sure you start the conversation early - that way, folks are more likely to feel inclined to read on and let you finish the thought. Is there an important link or action item in the body of your email? Don't bury the lead; instead, put it near the top

in case a quick preview is all someone needs to inquire, donate, sign up or learn more.

o **Designing for three display possibilities.** You're probably aware of the two primary ways an email shows up in inboxes - as html or as plaintext. And you probably know to fine-tune the latter just a bit, keeping in mind that without graphics or columns to work with, a plaintext email typically requires a bit of repositioning or rephrasing. But there's a third display possibility to consider, and it's the Images Not Displaying scenario. Many email programs let recipients decide whether to view an email's images, which means many of those lovely html masterpieces you send at least start out minus the graphics. To design for that possibility, make sure your campaign still makes sense - and makes its point - even if the graphics are, ahem, out of the picture. Sure, the hope is that everyone views your art the way you intended it to be seen, but even if they don't, your email can still do its job.

o **Personalizing beyond "Dear Bob."** In Network for Good's EmailNow, it's easy to add personalization to your campaigns so that your recipients see their first name at the top of your campaign. And we know that, as much as recipients aren't tricked into thinking you somehow took the time to create this grand newsletter just for them, a bit of personalization really does boost response rates. But don't stop at a personal greeting. Think about other personal details you might be able to drop into your email. Try segmenting your list by gender, geography or anything else you know about your recipients, so you can personalize the content based on the people to whom you're sending. And then make sure the email feels personal (more on that below). After all,

showing that you know someone's first name is great; showing them you really know, respect and care about them is even better.

o   **Writing in a warm, personal voice.** With inbox clutter on the rise, it's never been more important to make a personal connection with your subscribers and recipients. Email provides a rare chance to have one-on-one conversations quickly and on a grand scale, and it's downright essential to think of your campaigns that way - as lots of personal conversations with people you know and like - rather than an indiscriminate blast (ick) to a database of email addresses (ugh). How does your brand speak to your audience? Give your next campaign a quick human-or-machine test (does it sound like a person wrote this, or does it sound like a machine spit it out?) and look for ways to up the human element. No offense, machines.

o   **Sending timely, targeted follow-ups.** In addition to personalizing the greeting, content and feel of your emails, you can also personalize the timing with which your emails are sent. For instance, EmailNow's trigger emails are an easy way to send campaigns that go out on your recipients' schedules, not yours. Why not have a welcome email queued up to send the moment someone new joins your list? Nothing feels more personal than a note Bob gets - just to Bob - welcoming Bob, thanking Bob, offering Bob something, and basically giving Bob even more reason to like your organization and brand. And with our trigger feature taking care of the delivery for you, you can stay in touch with Bob even when you're actually doing something completely unrelated to Bob like, say, napping.

o **Making the most of landing pages.** Remember that your email is a front door to other things - a website, a signup screen, a landing page with video content, a confirmation email and more. These landing pages are great opportunities not only to reinforce your branding, but also to take advantage of the moment of undivided attention you have once someone takes the trouble of clicking one of your links. Make sure your branding - and your brand's voice - carry over to those supporting screens, and use the opportunity to present your readers with even more content, or product links, or anything else that's relevant and useful. While you're thinking about landing pages, take a moment to revisit (or visit) your signup screen. What kind of information are you asking your readers when they subscribe? Make sure you're asking enough to learn about the people joining your list, but keep in mind that too many fields might discourage a would-be subscriber from, well, subscribing.

o **Above all, experiment. But not with actual chemicals.** The great thing about email is that so much of what happens can be tracked. People tell you how interested they are in your emails, how interested they are in specific stories, programs or other links, and they occasionally tell you they were so excited that they forwarded your email to 10 friends.

Use that tracking to learn what your audience likes - and doesn't - and mix it up from time to time to see how small tweaks affect those response numbers.
Here are a few examples:
- Try two different subject lines
- Try flipping stories one and two in the body copy

- Try sending to half of your list on Tuesday morning and the other half on Thursday, etc.

In the end, the only way to really find out which subject lines work best, or whether longer or shorter content is the right approach, or which day really is the best for sending is to try it all for yourself. Email marketing is like your very own laboratory, just without all those pesky chemistry classes or unflattering lab coats.

Experimentation works: Just ask the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), an international animal rights group. IFAW recently partnered with Common Knowledge to test an email marketing program called Rapid Donor Cultivation, inspired by best practices in the online retail industry.

In this sector, savvy retailers noticed that online prospect affinity is typically highest for the first 30 days after the visitor opts in to the retailer's email list. This honeymoon period—the high-affinity phase—is characterized by higher email open, click, and conversion rates. It turns out that this behavior is also demonstrated by new nonprofit e-subscribers. You can capitalize on this high affinity period by sending a stream of carefully crafted emails with select content and calls-to-action to the new subscriber over the first 30 days. Common Knowledge recommends a ten-email stream, ending with a targeted fundraising ask. You can learn more about Rapid Donor Cultivation here.

Step 12: Mind the downturn.

Many nonprofits are wondering what impact the economic downturn will have on online giving. Here are some tips for dealing with tough times:

o **Don't curl into a fetal position.** In other words, do not stop doing things that are important or even risky to raise money. The same old same old isn't going to cut it this year. This is not the time to be steered by fear. You need to be aggressive about acquisition and creative, and you need to be new and different in your asks.

o **Set realistic goals.** The numbers are likely to be down. So manage to that. Do what you can to make them go up, but also be responsible and help everyone in your organization plan how you'd react to various fundraising scenarios, from decent to mediocre to dire.

o **Don't abuse your existing donors.** If fundraising isn't going well, the temptation may be to go back to the well again and again, hitting up your donors left and right. Yes, you should ask them for money. But not every five minutes. You should spend more time thanking them and making them feel great. Then they'll tell their friends about you. Which gives you new donors.

o **Don't undersell yourself.** In an era when so many investments look like they're offering low returns, you are priceless. Remind your donors of their amazing return on investment

(ROI) with you. For a few dollars, they get a helper's high. They feel good because they did good. It's cheaper than therapy. Their investment in your organization doesn't yield paper profits. It changes lives. Always. Be passionate and persuasive about your emotional ROI - and your human ROI. Those who can afford it will get it and give.

Give people vivid examples of how their donations will be used. So if your audience has given before, tell them all the great things they've done - then all the wonderful additional things more support will bring. As one donor pointed out, "I give money regularly to groups where I have been able to see what they accomplish. I'm not impressed by marketing appeals; what interests me is being able to see the impact in action."

o **Admit to donors that it's hard.** While explaining that you're a great investment, admit that your numbers – and the numbers on your donors' investment portfolios – are down. Everyone feels the pain. Share the pain. Note that every tiny bit helps, however tiny the bit. It's harder to turn down someone who is understanding of constraints and asking for even the smallest of donations. It's a great time to ask for recurring gifts – just $10 a month. Ask now, because things are going to get worse before they get better.

o **Change the messenger.** The messenger is key during tough times. One idea would be to frame fundraising appeals such that they come from other donors talking about why they gave. Their reasons for choosing your particular organization elevate the value of your nonprofit in the eyes of the recipient.

o **Be relevant.** If you can plug into topical issues, your message is more likely to get through. Another hot point is to try to key into some of the issues that are front and center in the news.

o **Emotions are what triggers the impetus to help.** Remember, emotion motivates. People are more inclined to give if the cause is local or if they know the person asking for help. This holiday, ask some of your biggest supporters to invite their friends and family to support you. The passion they feel for your cause is incredibly compelling to their circles of influence. Bloggers may be a good target.

o **Don't forget: trust is sacred.** Be honest and transparent about your programs, your spending, your impact-everything. Show exactly where the money goes and what the donor's investment will do. And then report back on that investment, again and again.

Next Steps: Don't be stunned into inaction!

Thank you for downloading Network for Good's 2008 Online Fundraising Survival Guide! This is obviously a very scary time for fundraising - perhaps the most terrifying that many of us have ever experienced. But even when the economy looks bad, your online fundraising and marketing don't have to suffer. Downturn or not, it is important that we don't assume a defensive posture: Times like these really demand that you go about fundraising and marketing your organization smarter and more effectively than ever before. As fundraisers and marketers, we need to create plans and strategies for dealing with a downturn that are as detailed as those drawn up for normal times. That's why we created this guide, to give you 12 real-life strategies and tactics to go about marketing and fundraising your organization more effectively during these difficult times.

But this is not the end of the conversation, and there are many more great ideas we didn't have room for. Be sure to visit our Learning Center at www.fundraising123.org for more tips and tools designed to help your become an online fundraising superhero, even in the most difficult of financial times.

And most importantly, we'd love to hear your feedback about this guide. Please email your thoughts to fundraising123@networkforgood.org or call us at 1.888.284.7978. And look for our next eBook in January 2009: The One-hour Guide to Creating a Nonprofit Marketing Plan.

About Network for Good: the home of easy & affordable online fundraising.

At Network for Good, we don't just give you a DonateNow button--we help you make sure people click on it. And we don't just give you an email tool--we help you run a great campaign. We help you become an online fundraising and marketing superhero without superhuman effort or a big budget.

If you're a **charity that needs support for your vital mission,** we're here to help by:

- Processing donations for your charity with DonateNow
- Enabling you to email your supporters with EmailNow
- Providing free training, tips and best practices through our:
  - Weekly tips newsletter
  - Nonprofit 911 series
  - Online Learning Center

If you're **someone who wants to help your favorite cause**, we're here to help by:

- Enabling you to research and give to any of 1.5 million charities, in one place online at www.networkforgood.org – we also store your donation history for taxes and save your favorite charities lists
- Allowing you to choose from among thousands of volunteer opportunities at www.networkforgood.org or www.volunteer.gov

- Helping you fundraise for your cause with charity badges at www.sixdegrees.org
- Enabling you to give the gift of charity with the Good Card, a gift card that the recipient can use to give to any charity

If you're a **company that wants to do good**, we're here to make that happen by:

- Enabling you to collect donations for any charity at your own website or among employees via Web services
- Providing you with branded fundraising widgets
- Giving your clients or customers the gift of charity with Good Cards, a gift card that the recipient can use to give to any charity
- Allowing you to give grants to nonprofits in your field for our fundraising services, so you can help them help themselves

Special Thanks to:

- A Procrastinator's Guide to Year End Fundraising by Sea Change Strategies and Care2. Details here.

- *Robin Hood Marketing* by Katya Andresen. Details here.

Other articles related to this guide:

- Bring Your e-Newsletter from Snoring to Soaring
  www.fundraising123.org/article/bring-your-e-newsletter-snoring-soaring

- 11 Steps to Success with Social Networking
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- Should You Send Emails to Supporters via Outlook?
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- 33 Ideas that Change the Fundraising Game
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- Seth Godin's Guide to Becoming a Purple Nonprofit
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- Email Signatures: A Missed Marketing Opportunity
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- 9 Email Do's and Don'ts for the Sender
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- 5 Deadly Sins of Website Design
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- To Increase Charitable Donations, Appeal to the Heart -- Not the Head
  www.fundraising123.org/article/increase-charitable-donations-appeal-heart-not-head

- Can donation page optimization boost online giving?
  www.fundraising123.org/article/report-can-donation-page-optimization-boost-online-giving

That's all, folks!