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# Fundraising Success

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## 10 Tips for Fundraising in Tough Times

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[This is] a challenging year. In addition to the recession, we are also seeing some other troubling indicators. Direct mail-based donor acquisition is getting harder and more expensive due to postage rate increases, mailing list fatigue and postal mail delivery challenges. Many nonprofits have cut back on direct mail-based acquisition efforts as donor files shrink and current communication approaches fail to align with a more empowered “new breed of donor” — constituents who value transparency about how their funds are being applied, are increasingly taking an active role in their philanthropy and have high expectations as to how they should be communicated to online.

Current economic conditions, the shift toward online marketing and the trends in donor empowerment make a strong case for investing in an effective online marketing program.

Money raised online can now more than justify the start-up costs for your online marketing efforts, and is just the tip of the iceberg of the true value created by effectively integrating online marketing with your direct mail and major donor development efforts. Here are 10 basic best practices for nonprofits to get started:

- 1. Ensure your Web site makes the right first impression.** Prospective donors, including potential major donors, are very likely to visit your site before making a gift in any channel.
- 2. Collect e-mail addresses for current donors.** Communicating online with donors enhances their value. Few organizations have e-mails for more than 30 percent of their active donors.
- 3. Optimize your Web site to convert visitors to e-mail subscribers.** Most nonprofits still do a poor job in this area. Target a 3 percent conversion rate of unique visitors to new subscribers.
- 4. Make every communication count.** Consumers are inundated with marketing messages. Write e-mails with a constituent-centric view and steer clear of sending non-compelling material just because your calendar indicates it is time to send a newsletter.
- 5. Inspire, provide value and be transparent to your donors about how funds are spent.**

**6. Ask for money, regularly.** Include a soft ask in every communication and send direct e-mail appeals at least four times per year — as long as you are providing updates regularly outside of appeals.

**7. Use multiple e-mails in a series to lift appeal response rates.** Suppress those who respond to earlier appeals in the series. Software tools make it easy to automate this process.

**8. Make fundraising appeals tangible and compelling.** People are presented with lots of appeals and offers. Does yours stand out? Does it compel an immediate response?

**9. Empower volunteers to raise money for your organization through online peer to peer fundraising tools.**

**10. Encourage monthly giving.** The lifetime value of monthly donors is much higher than single-gift donors — they give more per year and have higher retention rates. Present monthly giving as an option to new donors and create pathways to encourage single-gift donors to become monthly donors.

Already practicing all the basics listed above? Then you're ready to incorporate these more advanced strategies into your online marketing program:

1. Identify key audience segments and create “relationship pathways” consisting of tailored Web site content, e-mails and appeals that are congruent with your development objectives for that segment.
2. Integrate your online and offline fundraising efforts. Ensure your communications calendar, messaging and themes are congruent online and offline. Adopt a multi-channel communications and solicitations approach.
3. Create a presence on social networks such as Facebook and MySpace to extend your brand and reach constituents where they reside. Empower existing supporters to promote your organization on social networks, to recruit new supporters and to raise money. While you are not likely to raise much money in the short-term, social networks are here to stay and will emerge as a cost-effective way to recruit future generations of supporters.

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