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# **23 Best Email Fundraising Practices**



## **23 Tips for Creating Successful Non Profit Email Fundraising**

Email fundraising is a proven internet marketing tool that can help your charitable organization raise substantial online donations. When properly executed, an email fundraising campaign can provide your ministry with a additional source of ministry revenues, an engaged donor base, a regular branding tool, and in some cases, even improve your offline fundraising efforts.

Email campaigns can be very effective at raising funds, sometimes providing up to 35% of a ministry's total annual fund revenue. Plus, these campaigns are relatively efficient at raising funds because the costs to email can be generally lower. Of course, it's a myth to think that email is free, given that there are typically costs associated with writing copy, developing HTML email and landing pages, getting proper rendering in multiple email clients, blasting and beyond.

There are many important factors and techniques to apply for effective email fundraising campaigns. You need to do some up-front strategic thinking. What are your campaign needs? What goals do you want to accomplish? Who is your target audience? Who will be receiving this email, and what is most likely to move them to the action you want them to take?

Once you have a clear strategic outline of what you want to accomplish, here are some steps to follow to assist in the over-all effectiveness of your campaign.

### **Writing Tips to Successful Non Profit Email Fundraising:**

#### **1. Make them personal.**

Speak directly to your audience using “you” centric statements instead of the less personal “we” or, even worse, “one.” Personalize your email if possible, inserting First Name data in your Subject lines and body copy. You are more likely to engage your readers if you speak to them individually, not collectively. This, of course, also means you need to understand who your audience is, what inspires and motivates them, and

what causes them to take action.

## **2. Engage the reader's heart.**

People often give to causes and non-profits that fulfill an emotional need in their own lives. Your readers gave you their email address because they trusted you ... thought your non-profit worthy of their time and attention ... believed in your purpose in life ... saw how they could make a difference in the world through you, etc. When you ask for their support, you need to tell them through a short, heartfelt, and compelling story how your non-profit is making a difference and why you need their support.

One school of thought says that you need to tell your heartfelt story in no more than one or two short but effective paragraphs in the email, with an option for readers to get more details by clicking through to your landing pages. Another school of thought says that you can tell your whole story in the email, with the click-through process going straight to your checkout process. Both methods can be successful.

## **3. Write an action-oriented headline that you carry throughout the process.**

Your headline should lead people toward the action you want them to take but still speak directly to what's interesting to them. Plus, your email subject line needs to flow onto the email headline, which flows onto your email landing pages. The subject line and headline don't have to be exact, but make them harmonious enough so that people know they are where they belong when they open the email and click through to any landing pages. This avoids confusion, which would lead to process abandonment. It also carries your message through to the end objective: a gift.

## **4. Create urgency with your copy.**

What will happen if the reader doesn't give a donation as a result of this email? Will hurting people continue to suffer? Will dogs continue to be abused or homeless? Your reader needs to visualize the results of both helping and not helping. Appeal to your readers' senses in your copy if you can: smell, touch, taste, sound, and sight. Be urgent, but don't cry wolf just to overstate the urgency or consequences. Readers will see right through that ploy after you've done it once or twice.

## **5. Include clear calls to action.**

Your readers need to know specifically what you want them to do. Should they give \$50 now? Should they sign a petition today or take a survey in the next few moments? Use active words to describe clearly the action you want them to take. Include "click here" or "call or click" phrases in your copy, particularly in your graphics, since words like

“click here” can raise your spam score. Put these calls to action in graphic buttons, which link to the place where the reader can take the specific action, you’re requesting.

## **6. Give your readers multiple paths to the action you want them to take.**

Some experts say the typical email should have nearly 20 ways to click through to your landing pages. I'd shoot for having at least 5-10 for starters. Start by providing at least three ways where people can click to your donate page, and make these links (text or graphics) benefit and action oriented (e.g., Click Here to Help Save Lives, Read More Now , Get More Details >>, Go Here to Help).

## **7. Develop Dedicated Landing Pages.**

Sometimes I like to think of it this way: If you are trying to get the attention of a kid in a candy shop, most likely you will fail because they are distracted by all the goodies that surround them. Likewise, don't send email fundraising out that takes people back to your homepage, whereby they can get distracted easily from your primary purpose, which is to get the gift. Take them instead to a dedicated landing page that includes few, if any, links to the rest of your website—you lose people when you let them browse too much or rabbit-trail all over the place.

## **8. Improve response with well-chosen premiums.**

If there is a premium, the email should clearly describe the value of the item and how the reader can get that premium. If their gift of \$50 will get them a book, what will they learn from this book? What often motivates people is what they will learn, discover, experience, etc. No matter how altruistic and selfless they are, the reader wants to know what's in it for them. People generally give to your non-profit because they want to make a difference, and you need to specifically tell them—in words that address *them* directly—the difference they're making. You also need to succinctly assure them that you will use their funds appropriately and efficiently. Having said that, a well-chosen premium is like a bonus cherry on your offer. It doesn't hurt to sweeten the deal with something that looks appealing.

## **Design Tips for Successful Non-Profit Email Fundraising**

There is more that goes into an effective email campaign than content. You want the emails to be visually appealing and easily accessible by your viewers, whether or not they use text-only or HTML versions of email.

## **9. Include a Web Preview link.**

Some people's inboxes may default to NOT display graphics in their email client. To address this issue, always include a hyperlinked line at the top that says something like: "Can't see the graphics? Preview safely online." link this line to a published version of your email online.

#### **10. Your emails must link to well-crafted landing pages.**

It is important to have your emails connect to landing pages that are well crafted. Namely: 1) they offer more information about your cause and 2) they have a carefully engineered checkout process. By providing more in-depth information about your organization's needs on the landing pages, your readers will get answers to issues unaddressed in your email copy. By designing checkout pages that contain minimal friction and reduce anxiety and tension about doing business online, you'll reduce abandonment and increase giving. For more details about reducing friction (time it takes to complete the process) and anxiety (concerns about providing sensitive information), visit our blog on the subjects.

#### **11. Eliminate landing page navigation.**

The only navigation you want on your landing page is links to 1) your checkout page and 2) possibly, if you are offering a premium, a page that tells more about the premium. This keeps visitors focused on your offer rather than allowing them to get sidetracked while browsing your site. If the higher-ups insist, you can provide back door methods to your home page by hyper linking your header or footer graphics, for example. Make it covert rather than overt.

#### **12. Design harmonious headers and optimize your graphics.**

Design attractive email headers and footers that are harmonious to your landing pages and web optimized. These are much more professional looking than plain text emails. But if the file sizes of your graphics are too large, your emails and landing pages will load too slowly, and you'll lose people, so optimize your graphics. Create harmony between your email graphics and your landing page graphics so there's no confusion when click throughs begin to occur.

#### **13. Use fonts that are proven as easy to read.**

Headlines and body copy are extremely important. Since you have a limited amount of time to capture your reader's attention and move them to action, you don't want to waste time making things hard for them to read. Only the first letter in each headline word should be capitalized (not all caps). Copy headlines should be designed in Times New Roman or Arial font because they are universally the easiest to read. Body text

should also be at least a 12-point font and in Arial, which is the easiest to read, or Times Roman, which is next easiest.

#### **14. Create an eye path that leads you to a destination.**

Use bold text, photos and graphics to break up the page into smaller, easy to read chunks that move people to read all the way to the bottom. It's often the case that an "F" pattern is used to help envision a page layout: the best real estate is upper left running across the page (hero shots and headlines, for example) and the worst real estate position is lower right. Buttons should be action oriented (e.g., Click Here), and the text on them should be large enough for middle-age eyes (at least 12 point).

#### **15. Stay away from reverse text.**

Studies show that reverse text (white on a dark background) is much harder to read. You should avoid it if at all possible in body copy, on graphics, etc.

#### **16. Test, test, test.**

Some studies show that vertical banner graphics out pull horizontal banner graphics. But the only way to truly know is to test everything. Test headlines, test body copy, test graphics, test calls to action. Testing is the only way you can confirm or disprove your theories about what should work and what shouldn't. Once you start, you may be surprised with the results.

#### **17. Eliminate all CSS from your email code.**

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) code is great for web pages, but it doesn't work in non-profit email fundraising. Many email clients will strip it out, like gmail, yahoo and hotmail, plus numerous macmail systems. You'll read advice about using "inline" CSS in email to get around the problem, but, truthfully, that's just for people who are willing to concede that their emails won't render properly in various email accounts. Stick with coding your emails up in plain, old-fashioned HTML 101. Then test the rendering of your code across multiple email clients, fix up any issues, then test again. Once you have templates that are golden, you can reuse your proven code by simply swapping out graphics and copy blocks for the next email.

#### **18. Optimize your graphic sizes and pixel widths.**

You'll get better response to your non-profit emails if people stick around long enough to read them. You need to make sure your jpg, gif or png graphics are fully optimized for the web to improve load times. One software we use to do this is the Advance JPEG Compressor 2008. Also, shoot for pixel widths of 600-650 for emails and pixel widths of

900 on landing pages to optimize presentation widths. Design Horizontal buttons starting at 375x80.

### **19. Indent paragraphs.**

While it is not common practice to indent paragraphs on the Internet, studies show that the eye prefers to see indented paragraphs. You want to make your emails and landing pages as eye-friendly as possible, so put a little effort into indenting your paragraphs.

### **20. Call to Action Buttons, especially in emails, should be graphics rather than text.**

Since buttons include text like “Click Here,” and those words could get your email flagged as spam, it’s best to put action words into graphics. Make your call to action buttons nice, easy-to-read graphics.

### **21. Include your CAN-SPAM requirements.**

CAN-SPAM requires: 1) a company name and physical mailing address at the bottom of your email 2) a permanent unsubscription option (variations abound here, but we like to use “Update your Email Preferences” rather than “Unsubscribe.” Make sure this link takes people into a two-step process, whereby first they go to a landing page to update their email preferences. On that page they can permanently unsubscribe. If you go do a one-step process many people may click the unsubscribe option unaware that this will forever remove them from future email from you.

### **22. Lighten up the border around emails.**

Borders around emails look nice. The only problem with them is that there is often important words put in the area outside the email, where your border will be. If you use a dark background, the text won’t be legible. You might be thinking that you could just use a lighter font. Not so fast! Not all email clients include the border. If you use light text, but the email client strips the border out, then your reader still won’t be able to see the required text. In other words, if you use borders, see how they impact your CAN-SPAM copy, preview copy, and so forth, before you get too enamored with how it looks.

### **23. Use Absolute links in all your emails.**