

Grassroots Fundraising Journal

VOLUME 32 NUMBER 4 • JULY–AUGUST 2013

A PUBLICATION OF



Using **TECHNOLOGY** to Advance Your Cause

Giving Days: Making the Most of 24 Hours

Crowdfunding Sites

What Works in Community Radio Fundraising

A Grassroots Fundraiser's Guide to Choosing a Database

Top Five Email Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

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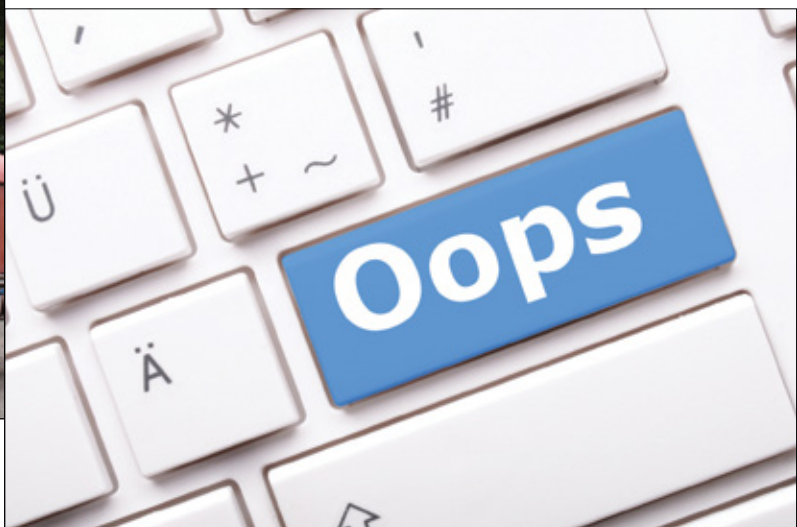
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A PUBLICATION OF



The *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* is a bimonthly publication of GIFT.

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Periodicals postage at Oakland, CA 94615
023-243.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to
1904 Franklin Street, Suite 705
Oakland, CA 94612
©2013 GIFT | ISSN No. 0740-4832



The Power & Perils of Technology

By Jennifer Emiko Boyden

AH, TECHNOLOGY...on the one hand, it can enable us to be more efficient, better connected, and produce more sophisticated work. On the other hand, when the technology we have access to fails us—whether it's being disconnected from the Internet, losing unsaved work, or having our online donation form malfunction—our productivity can come to a screeching halt.

I also wonder about the societal costs of growing up during the Information Age. Is it a good thing that my five year old's default response to me expressing uncertainty about something is, "Just look it up on our phone, Mom!?" While instant access to information is certainly a privilege, it also saddens me when nearly all the adults at the playground (myself included sometimes) are staring down at their devices instead of watching or playing with their kids.

And, while I see value in the connections that can be made through social media, I worry about the in-person interactions we're sacrificing for the sake of liking someone's status update. Virtually interacting with some while in the physical presence of others is becoming common practice and socially acceptable. Yet these personal pet peeves pale in comparison to the surveillance and monitoring concerns verified by the recent NSA findings, further endangering our most vulnerable communities.

Having said that, the tools that are available, even to the smallest of nonprofits, enable us to reach thousands of our supporters with a single click, spur online advocacy campaigns fueled by the power of social media, and grasp our readers' attention like never before through the use of videos, photos, Infographics, and more.

This issue of the *Journal* includes case studies, tips and tools to help you make informed technological choices and maximize your fundraising effectiveness. Former GIFT Executive Director Priscilla Hung kicks off the issue with an article about local, state and national giving days, and explains what you should consider before diving in. Next, Julia Wierski of Prometheus Radio profiles three community-based radio stations, documenting how they raise the money they need to continue providing services and organizing communities over the airwaves. Jon Goldberg of Palante Technology follows with a guide for grassroots groups to choose a database that includes the functionality you need while staying within budget. And because the message is equally as important as the medium, we round out the issue with a piece by Heather Buchheim of Watershed and M+R Strategic Services on the top five mistakes made in email appeals and what you can do to avoid them.

Just as Priscilla's article highlights groups coming together for mutual benefit, we want to partner with you to support the *Journal's* publication. This summer, we'll be launching our Friends of the *Journal* campaign, and we are turning to you, our most loyal and beloved backers of the *Journal*, to help us get this publication into the hands of more social justice fundraisers. We are committed to continue printing this resource because you have told us you value it, and we need your help to keep it going. You'll receive more details of ways you can help from me via email soon. Until then, please enjoy this issue.



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Giving Days

Making the Most of 24 Hours

By Priscilla Hung

SPENDING FLURRIES FOCUSED ON A SINGLE DAY are nothing new. The day after Thanksgiving, commonly known as “Black Friday,” spurs round-the-clock shopping. Telethons urge people every hour to call-in and give. It was only a matter of time before the growth of online fundraising and social media led to “giving days,” coordinated online fundraising campaigns lasting 24 hours.

Aside from online crowdfunding through vehicles like Kickstarter and Indiegogo, annual giving days are one of the few proven ways that nonprofits have used social media to successfully raise money from new donors. To help grassroots and community-based organizations better understand how to use giving days to boost their fundraising, GIFT talked with three such campaigns: Minnesota’s Give to the Max Day, Riverside, California’s Give BIG Riverside campaign, and the newly-launched national effort to increase funding to LGBTQ issues, Give OUT Day.

How It Works

A giving day is often planned and coordinated by a central entity, usually a partnership between a lead organization, a funder, and the nonprofit community. This entity sets up the online giving platform where donors can search for organizations by location or issue. It also has a leaderboard, a regularly updated chart on the website showing which organizations are raising the most. This

is critical because most giving days offer cash prizes or matching grants as incentives for nonprofits to raise the most funds or reach the most donors. The competitive aspect is often referred to as “gamification.”

The coordinating entity is also responsible for outreach efforts to nonprofits, prospective donors, and the broader community. In addition to creating all of the graphics, logos, and other promotional materials, they are responsible for sending emails, posting on social media, and using other promotional strategies, such as tabling at conferences and even erecting signs on the freeway. They also conduct training on the campaign for participating organizations, which includes how to use the online platform and leverage social media.

Interested nonprofits participate by creating a simple webpage through the campaign’s online platform. The platform also allows additional individuals to “join the cause” by signing up to raise money on behalf of an organization by creating a personal webpage. The organizations are then responsible for promoting the campaign to their networks and coming up with creative ways to encourage giving. While an existing campaign makes it easy for an organization to join, it is still up to each individual organization to raise donations for itself and to follow up with donors after the campaign.

Potential benefits to an organization can include:

- increased visibility;
- fundraising engagement from your board, staff, volunteers, or constituents;
- increased experience in online fundraising and social media;
- new donors; and,
- increased funding through new dollars or larger donations.

GIFT and Community Partners both work with many organizations that do important work but have little fundraising capacity. Creating a successful fundraising team, building a base of individual donors, and integrating fundraising with social media can be difficult for new or small organizations. The benefit of a “giving day” is that groups can plug into an existing high-visibility campaign without needing a significant up-front investment of their own resources. Used strategically, giving days can help small organizations launch their donor programs or bring added credibility to their work.

“It’s great for small groups that don’t have access to a sophisticated online fundraising program or training for how to use it,” says Jason Franklin of Bolder Giving, the anchor organization behind Give OUT Day. “We offer free training on the tools.”

Indeed, 71 percent of organizations participating in Give BIG Riverside reported they had never conducted an online fundraising campaign before. “These groups have known for years that they have to do more fundraising online and use social media, but it often falls to the bottom of the to-do list,” says Amy Sausser, a volunteer with Give BIG Riverside. “Give BIG Riverside created

a deadline that motivated them to finally do it. And the barrier to entry is really low, so why not just try it?”

But Does It Really Work?

A significant motivating factor for creating giving days is to broaden the audience for specific causes. Give OUT Day found that less than five percent of the LGBTQ community gives to LGBTQ causes. This is echoed by Give BIG Riverside, where anecdotal evidence suggests that much of Riverside’s generosity goes to causes outside of the city, such as in response to natural disasters or to alma maters. Both campaigns believe there is a large population of people who might be inclined to give to their particular cause who haven’t been effectively reached—the hope is that giving days might be the strategy to do it.

“This is not just about getting the same donors to give in a new way,” stresses Dana Nelson of GiveMN, the entity behind Give to the Max Day. “86 percent of participating nonprofits report getting new donors. We really are helping groups find new donors.” Similarly, Give BIG Riverside reports that 40 percent of participating donors were new to the group that received funds. Initial reports from Give OUT Day are also promising: over 75 percent of participating groups report that they engaged new donors, and over 80 percent report that current donors gave larger gifts.

Nelson says that part of the central entity’s job is to reach audiences that are not traditionally asked to give. If your donors complain that their email inboxes are overflowing with donation solicitations related to the giving day campaign, “it doesn’t mean that everyone’s inbox is full; it just means that we’re talking to the same people—and there are many more people out there.” 13

Giving Days by the Numbers

	Give to the Max Day (statewide)	Give BIG Riverside (citywide)	Give OUT Day (national)
Year Founded	2009	2012	2013
Amount raised in 2012/13	\$16.4 million	\$207,450	\$556,400
Number of recipient nonprofits	4,381	93	330
Number of donors	53,339	1,953	5,474
Coordinating entity	GiveMN, an online giving portal created by the Minnesota Community Foundation	The Community Foundation Serving the Counties of Riverside and San Bernardino in partnership with a 25-member taskforce of local nonprofits and community leaders	Bolder Giving and the Kevin J. Mossier Foundation
Did you know?	The average gift size was \$241 and the average amount each organization received was \$2,936.	80% of participating organizations said they would participate again next year.	Groups from all 50 states participated. More than half of the groups had budgets of \$500,000 and under.

percent of responding donors said that Give OUT Day prompted them to make their first gift to an LGBTQ group, and almost 40 percent made a gift to a group that they discovered through the giving day.

“Obviously, the main goal is to raise money. But it’s not necessarily an opportunity to walk away with a wheelbarrow full of cash,” explains Sausser. “It is, however, a chance to get the word out about your work, deepen the engagement of your supporters, and identify new donors to then steward all year.”

GIVING DAYS CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO BROADEN A DONOR BASE, BUT ADDITIONAL WORK IS NEEDED TO SUSTAIN IT.

This idea is echoed by the participants of Give to the Max Day. “A big portion of the 400-plus donations that we got were from new donors—and a large portion of those were people in our circles we had never asked before. But the giving day made it easier to ask them—and it turns out they were ready to give but just needed to be asked,” shares Josh Reimnitz, co-executive director of Students Today Leaders Forever, one of the top organizations in last year’s campaign.

Is It Right for You?

While the numbers of participating donors are substantial, you can see in the chart on the previous page that participation translates to an average of less than 20 donors per organization. The lead organizations in Give BIG Riverside ranged from 58 to 318 donors each, while those of Give to the Max Day ranged from 192 to a whopping 2,092. This means the majority of participating organizations garnered fewer than 10 donors.

It is no surprise that many organizations signed up in the beginning only to find later that they didn’t have the time to devote to the campaign or that they didn’t have a sufficiently robust online or social media presence. Says Nelson, “A giving day is just a good excuse to ask for money with a sense of urgency and excitement. If the timing isn’t good or the strategy isn’t right for your organization, then don’t participate.”

Spare Key, a nonprofit that helps families who have seriously ill or critically injured children in the hospital with housing payments, found their participation in Give to the Max Day inval-

able. “Because we only have two full-time staff, we have to be really selective with our fundraising activities,” says Erich Mische, Spare Key’s executive director. “They have to be focused, heavily depend on volunteers, and have few moving parts for staff to manage. Giving days fit the description, but groups also have to ask themselves if they have enough resources to be heard above the din. If the answer is no, then you might have to find another way to raise money.”

Adds Sausser, “This doesn’t work as just a day-of activity. Successful organizations begin planning at least a few months out and start promoting it well in advance. They need to have a strategy and to approach it like an organizing campaign that mobilizes large numbers of people.” For the first two years of their campaign, Students Today Leaders Forever did some general promotion through email and social media, and they raised around \$10,000. For the third and fourth years they decided to ramp up their strategy and invest more time, resulting in over \$40,000 raised last year.

A mistake groups sometimes make is that they focus their fundraising efforts on the campaign and neglect the other necessary parts of a healthy development program. Giving days can be an effective way to broaden a donor base, but additional work is needed to sustain it. Says Franklin, “I’m a staunch believer that these giving days cannot replace other fundraising efforts. Groups still need cultivation and relationship-building, an annual fund, and major donors. What this strategy can do is raise new money and reinvigorate existing donors. Think of it as an acquisition or upgrade strategy to engage people who aren’t responding to other fundraising efforts.”

Making the Most of It

Here are tips for how organizations can maximize their participation in giving days:

Set an appropriate goal. Not every group has to set their sights on being at the top of the leaderboard. Your goal could be to get your board members involved in fundraising, improve your online fundraising efforts, or motivate staff to ask their friends to give.

Because Give BIG Riverside’s prize money was based on who had the most unique donors, the winning organization set a clear goal of acquiring the most donors. They did this by asking everyone they knew—through social media, personal contact, email signatures, and online video—for just \$10. They saw this as a donor acquisition strategy with an easily affordable entry point that might generate larger gifts from some of these donors sometime down the road.

Get a matching grant. It doesn’t have to be a large amount. Perhaps a local community fund or family foundation would be

willing to do a match for your group or for several groups. Or it could simply be a \$1,000 matching gift that your board pools together from gifts they would have already made. Even if the matching gift itself is not new money, it will motivate prospective donors to give—and give more.

Be creative—within limits. Hundreds of organizations could be participating in a giving day, so groups need to get creative to be noticed. Several organizations participating in Give to the

right away. The excitement and momentum of being at the top helped motivate more people to give throughout the day.

Organizations participating in Give BIG Riverside reported a mixed experience with off-line events as part of that campaign, with 43 percent saying their events were not successful. Cautions Mische, “If not managed well, the push to ‘be creative’ can lead to ideas that end up costing more than you’re raising or that can undermine your organization’s credibility or brand image.”

YOU GIVE DONORS A CHANCE TO LET YOU KNOW WHAT THEY WANT AND LIKE.

Max Day created 24-hour events to accompany the 24-hour giving period, such as a theater company’s improv-a-thon. Some participants in Give BIG Riverside held informal gatherings and receptions for donors and their friends to meet and mingle with the organization—with plenty of laptops and tablets available for making additional donations.

Spare Key came up with the idea of doing a 24-hour bike ride with an interesting twist. A local company, PedalPub, donated the use of one of their signature bikes, a four-wheeled contraption that requires ten people to pedal and someone to steer. With over 120 volunteers enthusiastically recruited from local CrossFit clubs to pedal in two-hour shifts, they pedaled up and down the scenic river front for 24 hours. Mische credits their ability to spend less than \$1,000 and raise more than \$25,000 to the combination of fun, quirkiness, and so many volunteers. They were able to get local media attention in addition to tens of volunteers posting fun photos from the event on Facebook and Twitter with a link to the donation page. “I think it would have been impossible for us to raise the amount of money and awareness of our work without this type of event,” shared Mische.

Students Today Leaders Forever got creative with an online event. Because they work with a young population, they started a livestream right before the 24-hour start, featuring entertainment and a group chat box where viewers could share messages. It worked so well for their audience that by 4 a.m., they had already received \$4,000, putting them near the top of the leaderboard

Keeping Your New Donors

Give BIG Riverside offers their participants training and technical assistance on keeping donors engaged. “It’s standard donor development principles but using different channels,” advises Sausser. “You tell stories that draw people in—but you can do it through fun images and first-person video testimonials. You don’t just ask for money—you give donors a chance to let you know what they want and like, perhaps through Facebook comments or via Twitter.”

Students Today Leaders Forever has a unique strategy to acknowledge and retain their donors: they thank every donor within four minutes of receiving their donation. During off-hours, a staff person stays awake to send a personal email right away. During peak hours, they recruit volunteers and staff to call donors to thank them. “They love it!” says Reimnitz. “They love that it’s personal. They know we’re really busy on this day and appreciate that we call.” The organization then adds donors to their email list and gives them the opportunity to donate again a few months later. Those that do donate again are given more personal attention, while those who don’t are not asked directly again until the next giving day.

Conclusion

If you have an online presence—such as a website, email list, and Facebook page—and you have a large group of contacts who haven’t yet been directly asked to give, then online giving days can be a great way to convert general supporters into donors. It can also be a great way to convert general volunteers into fundraisers. But, just like all fundraising activities, it will require an investment of time and planning to make it all worthwhile. ■

Priscilla Hung is a program director at Community Partners in Los Angeles and former executive director of GIFT.

Want to start a “giving day” in your community?

Check out these resources for more information:

razoo.com/p/giving-days

kimbia.com

casefoundation.org/case-studies/give-max-dc-case-study

Crowdfunding Sites for Nonprofits

Although there are many crowdfunding websites available, we chose our top five through weighing a combination of factors, including site traffic, name recognition, fee structure, and accessibility to non-501(c)(3) fundraising. For further advice on whether using one of these sites makes sense for your group, please see “A Few Good Tools for Friend-to-Friend Fundraising,” available at idealware.org and “Crowdfunding: The New Wave of Online Grassroots Fundraising,” at grassrootsfundraising.org/archive. This chart is an updated version from the one included in that article by Ezra Nepon.

Site	Processing Fee (% of donation)	Additional PayPal/ Credit Card Fees (% of donation)	Income Stream Options	Estimated Average Daily Visits (trafficestimate.com)	Best Known For	Features Offered	Notes
firstgiving.com	5%	2.5%	credit/debit	14,770	Large group fundraising campaigns and events with individual & team pages, such as AIDS Ride for Life	Customizable campaign pages for nonprofits, fundraising teams, and individuals. Video and Image embedding. Share updates. Donor comments. Widget to share campaign. Tax-deductible donations only. Support through email, online chat, phone, or twitter.	\$500 annual fee for nonprofits. Works like online donation processing sites Network For Good or JustGive. Only available for 501(c)(3)s.
gofundme.com	4.25% for nonprofits 5% for individuals	3-5%	PayPal, credit/debit	101,720	Personal fundraising campaigns such as celebrations & events, health care costs, etc.	Customizable campaign page. Video and Image embedding. Share updates. Offer perks. Donor comments. Widget to share campaign. Tax-deductible donations only. Support via email. Wish list section where donors can choose to give to a specific item (such as airfare for a honeymoon).	Partners with Firstgiving for nonprofit donation processing
indiegogo.com	4-9%	3%	PayPal, credit/debit, check	192,677	Project categories include creative, cause, & entrepreneurial. Calls itself “World’s leading international funding platform.”	Customizable campaign page. Video and image embedding. Offer perks. Share updates. Donor comments. Widget to share campaign. Options for receiving tax-deductible donations. Partnership with arts orgs, including fiscal sponsors; all partners have curated sections of their connected projects. Customer support via email.	4% fee if goal is met goes up to 9% if goal not met. 25% off platform fees for nonprofits. Partners with Firstgiving for nonprofit donation distribution.
kickstarter.com	5%	3-5%	Amazon marketplace, credit/debit	530,333	Funding creative arts & technology projects	Customizable campaign page. Video and image embedding. Offer perks. Share updates. Donor comments. Widget to share campaign. High-visibility front page featuring campaigns. “Curated Pages” offer projects related to creative groups, including schools, museums, festivals, etc. Customer support via email.	Top site for name recognition and traffic. If you don’t meet goal, all donations are returned. All projects must apply to Kickstarter for approval.
razoo.com	4.9%	0%	Credit/debit	14,010	Hosting local, state & national giving days	Sends out tax-deductible receipts. In-house email and phone support. Embeddable donation widget. Built-in team fundraising ability. Donation tracking and downloadable reports. Social media & mobile friendly. Covers credit card charge-back fees.	

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WGXC with an eye-catching take on the death of Big Media.

PHOTO BY PHILLIP STEARNS

From Pledge Drives to Parties What Works in Community Radio Fundraising

By Julia Wierski

THIS OCTOBER 2013, A HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY for communities to own a piece of the airwaves is coming to cities all across the United States. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will open a brief application window, during which community groups, nonprofits, schools, churches, and native tribal entities can apply for a low power FM radio license (LPFM.) There are roughly 800 LPFM stations currently broadcasting in the United States in mostly rural areas or regions where there is more room on the dial for stations. Now, for the first time, urban areas will have a chance to apply for stations as well. This will mean new, community-owned stations in most of the top 100 radio markets. While the technical specifications of the LPFM medium are limited to broadcasting at 100 watts, with a radius of three to ten miles (depending on the topography of the land), the creative possibilities for community engagement are endless.

The Prometheus Radio Project, a national nonprofit that builds, supports and advocates for community radio stations, has worked with many community groups over the last 15 years to help them seize a slice of the radio dial. Many of these stations are now beacons of information and access in their communities—whether they are providing health care services over the airwaves like KUYI Hopi Radio in Northern Arizona or providing life-saving weather information to residents during Hurricane Katrina like WQRZ in Hancock County, Mississippi. Community radio has also been used as a tool for social justice. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers broadcasts in five different languages on their station, WCIW, to organize immigrant farm workers to win higher wages and better

working conditions in the fields. These stations are also cultural centers for their communities, such as KOCZ in Opelousas, LA, which aims to preserve the region's zydeco music heritage.

These stations are by and large very modest operations, despite having deep impact in their communities. Through our survey work, Prometheus estimates the start up costs of LPFMs to be about \$15,000, with ongoing yearly costs averaging \$20,000 and up depending on the number of paid staff and recurring costs like rent, utilities, and equipment upgrades.

Stations that are deeply rooted in their communities often successfully inspire their listeners to support them through fund drives and capital campaigns. What follows are some tips and tricks community radio stations have to offer the next wave of LPFMs as well as other organizations. These aren't just your run-of-the-mill tote bag public radio snooze fests.

WFMU: Flying the Freeform Flag

One of the country's most successful community radio stations is also the longest running freeform (or, "free format" which means the DJ has complete control over the airsound) radio station in the U.S. WFMU, a full power station based in Jersey City, NJ, is well known and loved for its eclectic music programming and curious DJs and personalities. It is an anomaly in many ways, not the least of which is its policy of not accepting corporate sponsorships or underwriting. Therefore, much of WFMU's funding comes directly from their listeners, which is even more impressive since their annual operating

THE STRENGTH LIES IN LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE GIVING SMALL DONATIONS.

budget is \$2.1 million, which supports six full-time and four part-time staff plus a few contractors. Echoing a strategy familiar to all grassroots fundraisers, Liz Berg, assistant general manager of WFMU, states, “The strength lies in large numbers of people giving small donations.”

But how do you get there? WFMU’s modus operandi has been to capture their audience’s attention in ever-evolving ways, which can be seen in the addition of their “Singles Going Steady” week of programming which happens every October during their “silent” month-long online fundraiser. During this week of programming, DJs play nothing but 7” singles (also known as 45 rpm records), popularized during the 1950s to hit on the obscure and often forgotten sounds that their listeners love. During their two-week annual fundraising on-air marathon, WFMU strives to make the programming reflect the best of what they are known for. They have also employed stunt tactics at times to spark interest, such as listeners donating to get a DJ to shave their head, eat “gross things,” or get tattooed. The key is to make sure on-air fundraising is fun and entertaining to listeners.

A little friendly competition sometimes goes a long way too. A newer addition to WFMU’s fundraising techniques is to allow listeners to donate to their favorite show via widgets installed on each DJ’s online playlist. Listeners want to see their favorite DJs come out on top, and DJs want bragging rights. “You can’t ignore the ego factor,” states Berg.

Another interesting strategy WFMU uses is dedicating any pledge of \$365 or more to the station’s web presence. “Our online listeners understand the costs associated with developing our online presence, [and earmarking these funds in this way] allows us to improve our web-streaming and online archive. Online listeners directly benefit from these improvements, so it helps them connect to pledging at that level.” Lest these big numbers feel out of reach of your station (or group), bear in mind that WFMU’s most popular pledge level is \$75.

There are other ways that WFMU has diversified their donation streams and tried to interact with individual donors, some more successfully than others. Berg recommends car donation programs, which involve “little footwork, and occasionally pull in some extra income.” WFMU also had a very robust mail-order catalog filled with station merchandise, but it became so successful they had to scale it back because the responsibilities and people power involved in doing mail-order were taking over.

Berg also cautions against over-ambitious event scheduling. “They’re hard to plan and require an outlay of money to make money.” That being said, the other major fundraising event that WFMU relies on is their annual Record Fair in Manhattan, whose legend has grown so much that many people travel from all over

the world to attend. If it is the right kind of event, it’s worth it. Figuring out that correct balance is a key priority.

WGXC: A Tale of Two Counties

For Lynn Sloneker, of the community radio station WGXC, a one-time big event is just what her station needed to get things kicked off in a major way. In September 2009, WGXC was awarded a Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP) grant that required the full power station to raise \$71,000 in one year—before they were even on the air. WGXC, based in Hudson, NY, relied on its local network of independent musicians to help get the ball rolling with a New Year’s Eve party that hosted 60 local performers and drew an audience of 600 people. This launched a year of intense outreach into the surrounding areas, educating residents about the need for a community radio station.

The station needed to employ different approaches to appeal to the communities it wanted to serve. The station covers a diverse population from Greene County, a rural area in the Catskills with a small town vibe, to Columbia County, which is a bit more bustling. To reach as many people as they could, they showed up at local events and set up booths, held on-the-street interviews asking people what they would want from a community radio station, and made impassioned pleas at dinners in people’s homes. At this point, they had already begun online broadcasting and had reached out to their growing listenership via the web as well. By September 2010, they had met their goal, thanks in part to a local independent family foundation that helped them bridge the gap, and they were on-air by 2011. Their initial success can be attributed to the fact that they “made the project real to people,” said Sloneker. “And when you do that, the money follows.”

WGXC’s schedule is a mix of content from other sources like Al Jazeera, Free Speech Radio, and “Democracy Now!” as well as local reporters and outlets. Musically, it runs the gamut from experimental to jazz to oldies, and also features teen programming, radio theatre, and comedy. The schedule has something for everyone, with thoughtful consideration given to coverage of local events, both big and small.

WGXC has maintained a healthy budget of \$130,000 with three paid staff (one full time, two part-time) by setting strong goals for their biannual fund drives. Held in the spring and fall, each has a goal of \$30,000. The most popular pledge level by far is \$25, which gets the donor a snazzy T-shirt designed by a local artist. As far as other giveaways are concerned, the station found that their listeners weren’t that interested in swag, and so they haven’t poured resources and time into acquiring and distributing a wide array of “thank you” gifts beyond the T-shirts.

A newer development for WGXC has been their sustainer program, where listeners commit to a monthly donation amount of their choosing. While this is off to a slow start, interest has been growing steady. Sloneker sees this kind of monthly support as a critical and stabilizing force for the station.

Being a middle-class, tight knit community in a small town has provided a strong net of support to the station in the form of underwriting as well. From the local opera house and coffee shop to solar panel manufacturers and a graphic design firm, WGXC has reached out and found a way to be a bridge between many parts of their community.

KHEN: Small, But Mighty

As far as small towns go, you can't get much smaller than Salida, CO. This "Heart of the Rockies" town relies on a robust outdoor tourism business and is home to roughly 5,236 people, mostly retirees, families, and a thriving artist community. It is also home to KHEN, a low power community radio station with a "can-do" attitude and a great sense of humor, especially about their call letters. The 'HEN' in KHEN has really been embraced by the whole town.

Like WGXC and many other stations, KHEN also holds two fund drives during the year, in the spring and the fall, though at one point they had three drives a year. Recognizing the limits of a community that was already tremendously supportive of other grassroots fundraising in the town, KHEN readjusted their fundraising plan so as to not overextend their listenership. Their goals for these drives have been modest—\$7,000 per fund drive—up from goals of just \$2,000 to \$3,000 per drive in years past.

The station's success can be traced to training a deep and dedicated volunteer base as well as the hiring of the station's development director. As the station prepared to move out of a back alley space into bigger, more visible digs on the main street, KHEN's development director knew they would need a visionary event to pull in the kind of support the station needed to make it happen.

Playing with the name of the station (KHEN), they hatched an event called "Chicken Crosses the Road" with the goal of supporting the station through the move and making sure that it had the resources to renovate the space they were moving into (formerly the town police station). The move coincided with KHEN's 10th anniversary, so a party was in order. Usually, as part of their fund raising model, the station would solicit items from the community for an auction. But this time, instead, they imagined what their new space would look like, and decided to go big.

Station Coordinator Sara Cothren compiled a list of everything the station wanted from matching broadcasting consoles to floor mats for the chairs, from countertops for work spaces to new mi-

crophones and stands. They even wanted an chicken sculpture on the outside of the building, like a gargoyle. Volunteers collected images of all these items and created picture boards and signs with descriptions for them. Then, in the completely gutted and empty space where the new studios would go, they hung up the signs where each item would be placed if purchased. Another volunteer drafted a floor plan so that when people visited the space they could imagine the building as it would be in the future, with their support.

It was a big departure from how they normally went about raising money. "Many people thought this wouldn't work, but my thought was, if we don't ask, we aren't going to get it," said Cothren. The station's board did not like the idea and felt they should instead do the auction as usual. But Jackson and Cothren worked hard to convince the board, and on the night of the party, volunteers led community members on a tour through the new space. The visualization of what equipment was needed and how much it would cost was a game changer for KHEN. By the end of the night, they had raised \$11,000—the largest amount they had ever raised from an event or fund drive.

KHEN's fundraising efforts have been successful partly because of their insistence in developing a theme and sticking with it, and maintaining cohesion between the station, the fundraising efforts, and the listeners. Their pledge levels range from Henny Penny (\$25) to Fine Feathered Friends (\$50), and for their 10 year anniversary ("The Hen is Ten!"), they produced a mug that said "Hatched 2003, Still Clucking 2013." This kind of clever branding has encouraged listeners to rally around the radio station.

Conclusion

Community radio affords a unique opportunity for neighbors to connect to each other and their region. We've seen how radio stations that tap into the ingenuity and imagination of their communities can yield successful fundraising results. What can your community do to support your station and how can you engage them? Will your listeners attend your events? Can they participate in a benefit car wash? Can they volunteer to help answer phones during a pledge drive? Your only limit is your own imagination, so talk with your community members, volunteers, staff and board to generate ideas. Good luck, and happy fundraising! ■

Julia Wierski is an 11-year veteran of community radio, having worked as a programmer, board operator, music director, volunteer coordinator, and development associate. Julia recently signed on as the Prometheus Radio Project's development and communications director after having worked with the organization on technical and policy issues for the past two years. Learn more at prometheusradio.org



A Grassroots Fundraiser's Guide to Choosing a Donor Database

By Jon Goldberg

Editor's Note: Although Jon recommends specific databases for the types of groups his consulting firm works with, GIFT does not encourage our readers to select a database based on this article alone. Please use the information in this article as a guide by checking out the referrals Jon provides and considering the issues he raises to the extent that they apply to your group.

MY FELLOW RADICAL TECHNOLOGIST JOSUÉ GUILLÉN once said to me, “Technology is a multiplier—used correctly, it makes us far more effective at accomplishing our goals. Our role is to enable our folks to use technology effectively. A database is a basic tool in that toolbox.”

Unfortunately, for a very long time, there were not good choices for a donor database besides Raiser's Edge, the granddaddy of donor databases, which costs thousands of dollars in setup and maintenance. Today, there are low-cost alternatives—many of which may be a better fit for small grassroots organizations.

About Us

Palante Technology is a worker-owned cooperative that provides tech consulting services to progressive nonprofit organizations. We all have personal involvement with grassroots organizations that precedes our involvement with Palante Tech, such as the Audre Lorde Project, Jobs with Justice/ALIGN, and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. We formed as a direct response to IT firms who either didn't understand the needs of grassroots organizations, were condescending to them, or recommended solutions that were out of their price range and/or contrary to their political beliefs.

Three years ago, we saw the rise of high-quality, low-cost donor databases. We knew that our clients could benefit from these tools, but we also knew we couldn't specialize in all of them. We set out to pick the one that best served our client base. This article details the lessons we learned and shares how to make the right decision for your organization.

The Existing Resources

Unfortunately, most of the people with the expertise to give this advice are vendors who want to sell you on their preferred solution—including Palante Tech. However, some organizations exist to be advocates for organizations choosing a donor database, and

NINETY PERCENT OF SUCCESS WITH A DATABASE TOOL ISN'T ABOUT THE TOOL—IT IS ABOUT HAVING EFFECTIVE PROCESSES AROUND IT.

they publish some excellent information. We can't cover it all here, but we encourage you to check out the following groups:

Aspiration Technology: Aspiration will help you decide on the best tool, right down to providing free assistance looking over the contract you are offered. They do not specialize in donor databases, but they probably understand the tech needs of grassroots fundraisers better than anyone who isn't one.

Idealware: Idealware publishes the 140-page "Consumer's Guide to Low-Cost Donor Management Systems." A 2013 edition should be out by the time this article goes to press. While not focused on grassroots organizations, they provide a comprehensive overview of dozens of databases, along with excellent advice and in-depth reviews of the top choices. Idealware publishes many helpful articles such as "Ten Common Mistakes in Selecting Donor Databases," by Robert Weiner.

Nonprofit Technology Network (NTEN): Unfortunately, many of NTEN's services are aimed at giant nonprofits. However, the NTEN 2011 Nonprofit Data Ecosystem Survey is the second most useful document for comparing donor databases—well worth the \$50 they charge. The survey is segmented by organization size, which makes it more useful for small organizations.

Planning for Success

Ninety percent of success with a database tool isn't about the tool—it is about having effective processes around it. The resources above cover more than choosing a database—they cover how to make the tool most effective. Databases need ongoing care and feeding, they need champions inside the organization. A good

planning process will ensure success more than the "right" tool will.

Redefining the Problem

In our research, we quickly realized that software that did donor management but nothing else was not an effective solution. Many organizations have "information silos"—collections of data that could not communicate with each other. Much of the software we reviewed embodied a 1990s-era model—excellent for tracking incoming donations and interactions with donors, but no capacity for collecting donations online or sending mass email. The software rarely included tools for event management, membership management, magazine subscriptions, or online advocacy, and if it did, it came in the form of an expensive add-on.

The business world responded to the problem of information silos with a tool called a customer relationship manager (or CRM). CRMs are designed to track all of your interactions with your people. Unfortunately, business CRMs focus on product sales and inventory control; we needed a tool where the "C" in "CRM" didn't stand for "customer" but "constituent."

So we changed our defining question from, "What is the best donor database software for grassroots groups?" to, "What is the best multi-use database that provides excellent donor database functionality?"

Whittling Down the Field

With publications like the Idealware guide available, we thought our research would be easy. Unfortunately, software changes quickly, and we found the guide to be inaccurate on many criteria. We also needed to add our own criteria that would be more appropriate for grassroots organizations.

Faced with several dozen choices, we started eliminating options based on the following:

Price-appropriate for grassroots organizations. Some "low-cost" choices run \$5,000 or more a year. Still others were cheap to start, but required you to pay extra for more simultaneous users, to raise the cap on the number of contacts you could store, or for basic functionality (beware the "add-on module"). Idealware's report lists pricing for common configurations. We eliminated Salsa, Kintera and Convio based on price.

User community. We required software that had a large user base—especially of grassroots groups facing similar problems to our clients. We were concerned about products that didn't have user-to-user forums or forced users into a paid email/phone contract in order to access online support materials.

Wariness toward Blackbaud. Blackbaud has a history of buying other companies and merging their product with an existing

higher-cost product. Because they are owned by Blackbaud, we steered clear of eTapestry, Convio, Kintera, and netCommunity.

Plays well with other software. Is it easy to get data in and out of the software? This was key to reducing the problem of information silos. Some programs provided an interface (sometimes called an “API”) that allowed other programs to automatically get data in and out of them. This is crucial if, for example, you need to automatically sync your donors with your Mailchimp mailing list. Some software didn’t provide this functionality or charged extra—we axed those options.

Multi-function. We gave extra points to software that included features like event registration or volunteer management. We were especially impressed with CiviCRM’s focus on built-in community organizing tools.

Web-based. Software that you have to install on your computer is a poor fit for fundraising in 2013, especially for small organizations. With these programs, you can’t look up donor information on your phone or from home, nor can you integrate your online donation collection without add-ons. While the strong trend is to go web-based, many vendors haven’t yet updated their software. We eliminated them, along with vendors who only went halfway, by offering remote access to a desktop that runs their traditional software. We eliminated Exceed! and Organizer’s Database based on this.

Client-owned data. Many tools operate on the “Software as a Service” (SaaS) model where you pay a monthly fee for access to the database “service.” This isn’t intrinsically bad, especially for small organizations, since it means less need for hiring IT support. However, it was unacceptable to many of our organizations that they could lose access to their data over a billing dispute. Other politically active groups were unwilling to host with providers who would turn over their data to law enforcement without a warrant or without notifying the organization.

No one-trick ponies. There are plenty of platforms that have a unique fundraising capability, which have their place if they play well with a more full-featured system. However, we did not consider tools that didn’t offer a core donor management functionality, including the ability to track interactions and to record all donations regardless of whether they came through the software.

Why Not Develop Your Own Tool?

There are plenty of organizations who, either by themselves or with a volunteer, decided that none of the tools available met their needs. Many created their own tool, often using a product like Filemaker Pro, Access or Excel.

Unfortunately, for each success story, there are several unhappy endings. Many organizations were unable to find someone to

maintain the tool when the original author left. Other tools had design flaws due to inexperience designing CRMs. Other tools met organizations’ needs at first, but didn’t keep up with the changing landscape of donor/constituent management—for instance, providing plugins to synchronize with tools like Mailchimp. Others have a tool that works, but since they are the only users of the software, they often pay high consultant fees when they need features added.

Settling on CiviCRM

After eliminating most tools, we decided that the best tool for the groups we serve is CiviCRM. In addition to scoring well on the criteria above, there were several other unique (or almost unique) points in its favor:

Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS). This means that if you are tech-savvy, CiviCRM costs nothing to download and install. It also means that you are able to modify (or hire someone to modify) the software as you see fit without permission from the original authors. Most organizations who do this choose to contribute their improvements back to the core team so everyone can benefit.

DATABASES NEED ONGOING CARE AND FEEDING, THEY NEED CHAMPIONS INSIDE THE ORGANIZATION.

Huge base of small community organizations. The Progressive Technology Project (PTP) received a large grant from the Ford Foundation to add features to CiviCRM to make it more useful for community organizations. This includes the ability to create online petitions and surveys, generate phone banking and door-knocking lists, mass text messaging, engagement ladders, and more.

Friendly and welcoming community. Top experts volunteer much of their time providing free help to other members of the community.

Community-driven expansion. Grassroots organizations may want a new feature, but have neither an in-house programmer nor money to hire one. CiviCRM has a model where several organizations can contribute to fund a new feature. Examples of successfully funded features using this model include a Kickstarter-style fundraising feature, enhanced soft credit functionality, peer-to-peer fundraising features, and Quickbooks-formatted exports.

Most customizable. The open source nature means that we have been able to add features that wouldn’t have been available at any price for customers that needed them. For example, we

customized CiviCRM for the National Lawyers Guild to support their unique membership renewal policy.

Highly rated by its existing users. An NTEN CRM satisfaction survey rated CiviCRM number one as “most likely to recommend to other organizations.”

Deep integration with website software. Global Action Project wanted to collect emails of people into their database who downloaded their web-based curricula. The National Police Accountability Project wanted to make certain material available online—but only to members whose dues were current. These were both easy to implement with CiviCRM.

Multiple vendors. Unlike software produced by a single company, there are dozens of vendors who offer CiviCRM support.

Available self-hosted or as a service. Many CiviCRM shops offer a self-hosted service for budget-conscious groups as well as a SaaS monthly service model. There are many excellent CiviCRM hosts, like Koumbit, CiviDesk, and PTP. PTP’s “Powerbase” product is especially geared toward small grassroots groups.

Used mostly by small (and very large) organizations. CiviCRM does not target mid-size organizations—its features are geared toward small organizations. It is also used by very large organizations like Wikimedia Foundation and Doctors Without Borders, who need a tool that allows extensive customization. The large groups often fund improvements that benefit everyone.

Other Top Choices

Salesforce is the most popular CRM for businesses. While it is very expensive, the Salesforce Foundation will provide a free starter pack license for up to ten users. While the software has traditionally been ill-suited to nonprofits, they have also made impressive strides toward being more responsive to nonprofit needs.

DonorPerfect and Giftworks have large user communities and affordable starter packs, are web-based, and are rated well for customer satisfaction.

Several software packages also target specific niches—customized for faith-based groups, community media groups, libraries, and more. With consolidation by database vendors serving the top of the market, new alternatives serving small groups are filling the market.

Final Notes

This article doesn’t have space for how to choose a consultant, how to evaluate the cost of migration/conversion (often much less than the cost of the software), or countless other parts of the database selection process. Nonetheless, we hope this gives a grassroots lens to the existing resources that will help shape how you make your decision.

Jon Goldberg works for Palante Tech as a database developer and systems administrator.

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Top Five Fundraising Appeals Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

By Heather Buchheim

YOU'VE HEARD THE DOOMSAYERS. Every few years some shiny new technology comes along, and they prophesize that it's the death knell of email fundraising. And every year, emails are still alive and kicking, raising tons of money online for your cause.

At least they ought to be. Email is still king, but there is no guarantee your emails are living up to their potential. Even the best-laid campaign plans can fall flat if you settle for lousy appeals. I'm talking about boring, impersonal, organization-centric writing. You do inspiring work—your writing should be inspiring too.

Fundraising is an uphill battle, especially in a rapidly changing online landscape. Don't make bad writing another hurdle in connecting with your donors and prospects.

What follows are the top five mistakes in bad email appeals and how you can avoid them.

1) Ignoring the Basics

There are many simple ways you can improve response to your appeals without analyzing your writing too deeply:

- **Don't skimp on your email subject line.** If your subject line is ho-hum, your email gets archived or ignored, and the rest of what I am about to tell you won't count. Don't come up with just one subject line. Brainstorm a few. Test one or two on a small portion of your email audience if you have time. Ensure whatever subject line you choose does not get cut off in your readers' inboxes (50 characters or less is a good rule of thumb) and is not so wordy that they will gloss over it.
- **Don't write a novel.** This isn't the place for dense, lengthy paragraphs and complex prose. Emails must be painless to scan. Use short paragraphs—one to three sentences long—though you may be able to get away with longer if your story is really strong. Make sure to bold key phrases (like your case for giving) and links, which should also be underlined.
- **Don't bury the link to donation page.** Put it early in the email, in the first few paragraphs, and in a short sidebar near the top of the email beneath a header with your logo.

Link the header and any images in the callout box to your donation form as well.

- **Don't confuse your readers with more than one ask.** Multiple asks, while tempting sometimes, will just divide your readers' attention with emails that say, "Sign this petition! Donate! Join us at our event!" And don't point to your latest blog post or an article about the issue. It will just drive your readers away from your donation form, and you may miss your chance to get their gift. Your only ask should be for money, and you should make it a few times.

Once you check these basic best practices off your list, take a look at your writing. Do these classic mistakes look familiar?

2) Neglecting Urgency

In an email, you only get a moment to catch your readers' attention. Don't squander the chance to really connect with them on a personal level and motivate them to make a gift to your cause. Urgency and timeliness are key drivers of response. Maybe it is a deadline, like the last day to meet a fundraising match from a supporter or midnight on December 31st, the last day for tax-deductible gifts to nonprofits. It could be a significant holiday that is especially relevant to your audience. It could even just be an arbitrary campaign deadline you set (the end of the month is a logical choice), and believe it or not, it really works.

Whenever your deadline is, your hook—the first sentence—should grab your readers' attention and not let go. They should feel like they will miss their chance to do their part to further your cause if they don't act this instant. Because odds are, if they close that email, they are not coming back. If you don't define the moment, your reader will be left wondering why you have wasted their time.

3) Writing like a Robot

People give because it feels good, not because they are running a logical cost/benefit analysis of their decision to give. That is why

people tend to respond to the story of one individual whose life has been affected by budget cuts versus millions of people affected. They connect with a story that has pathos and makes them feel something. Then they act. The arguments and statistics that work

KEEP IT CONVERSATIONAL, AND REMEMBER: IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.

in a press release or help secure a policy win don't necessarily work here. Giving is rooted in an unconscious impulse, so tell your readers why they should feel sad, angry, inspired, or outraged. This is personal. Use words like you and me—not us, we and them.

You also want to show—don't tell. Use vivid visual descriptions and unexpected, specific details that paint a picture for your readers. Every word has to mean something, so skip the empty phrases and generic, cookie-cutter rhetoric that will put your audience to sleep. This is it. We have to fight back, now more than ever! Stand up! Your gift will make a difference! We're so close to our goal. Deadline. DEADLINE! If I had a dollar for every time I saw these phrases, I bet I would raise almost as much as they do. Almost.

4) Not Putting Your Audience First

Try and see things from your readers' perspective in all your communications, and ask yourself these questions: Is this relevant to my constituents? Can my readers write themselves into the story and stake their claim in the movement? What does it say about who they want to be in the world?

Odds are, your audience doesn't care too much about the launch of your redesigned website, so don't get too wrapped up in what is happening within your organization internally. Put your donors directly in touch with your cause so they can feel like they are the real heroes of the story. For example: "Give \$100 by September 1st to help give teens access to college education; provide nutritious meals to seniors; or save our park from being developed."

Another mistake appeal writers often make—and I'll be first to fess up to this one—is falling in love with your own words and getting excessively lyrical in your appeals. This runs the risk of overcomplicating things and having your readers get lost in the details before they even get to a donation form. So cut to the chase. Break up your sentences with commas and em-dashes so it reads like you would say it aloud. This isn't a long-winded, erudite academic paper. Keep it conversational, and remember: it's not about you.

5) Losing Sight of the End Goal

Just as you shouldn't assume your readers know or care about your work like you do, you can't assume they are connecting the dots between their involvement in your work and the goals you have set out to accomplish. What is your theory of change? You have to make a clear, accessible case—outlining the problem, your work as the solution, and how their support is critical to that work.

This is where you tell your readers how this fight is winnable and show (not tell) how their support really does matter. Explain in detail what their money will go toward immediately. You can do that by telling them that their \$25 will pay for an exam at a free clinic. \$50 will sponsor a high schooler on a summer internship. Give a goal, and make it feel significant but achievable. Again, this is about the big picture and your readers' place in the world, so don't lose the forest for the trees.

Putting it into Practice

If you are not sure whether your appeals are making these mistakes or making the grade, here are a few easy ways you can help improve your next piece of fundraising copy:

- **Read it out loud.** Your ear will catch disconnected flow, poor rhythm, and sentences that just don't make sense.
- **Look at just the text you have bolded.** Does it stand on its own if you don't read the rest of the copy closely?
- **Find any unnecessary words and remove them.** You have precious space in an email—subject lines especially—or on a webpage, so make sure you make every word count.

Here's to fantastic writing that lives up to your truly great cause. ■

Heather Buchheim is a senior strategist at Watershed and M+R Strategic Services. Over the past six years, she has written for The Nation, Sierra Club, The Humane Society of the United States and others.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WRITING APPEALS?

Check out these and other articles on appeal writing at grassrootsfundraising.org/archive.

Can this Letter be Saved? Strengthening a Fundraising Appeal by Karen Topakian

Fundraising Appeal Makeover by Nicole Hsiang

Four Essential Tips to Motivate Individual Donors by Mara Perez

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