



HOLIDAY GIVING

Last-minute tips from consumers

Published: December 2009



INTRODUCTION

The results of our second annual Online Consumer Holiday Giving Trends and Forecast¹ are in: More than 111 million online Americans plan to donate \$4 billion in the last few weeks of the year. What are you doing to ensure that your organization gets a piece of the pie? Don't panic yet – there's still time to bring in the dollars.

With the limited number of days left in the year, the countdown is definitely on. But the good news is that consumers have provided insight into what nonprofits can do to maximize fundraising results. According to the feedback from the public you are trying to reach, you need to optimize your website, make every email count, and tap into the power of your constituents. With these three areas in mind, here are some practical and doable ideas, so you can make adjustments to your current efforts or get started right away.

OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE

A nonprofit organization's website has the most influence on a person's decision to donate (44 percent of survey respondents indicated that it is the most influential factor in their decision, regardless of whether the individual plans to give offline or online). In fact, 39 percent report that making a donation is the number one action they took during a visit to a charity's website. More than half shared their email address, registered for a newsletter, or otherwise opened the door to a relationship with the organization.

Think of your website as your organization's "front porch." Make sure people feel welcome and invite them in by using these six tips **now**:

1. Give development prime real estate on the homepage.

This time of year belongs to your development department. Give them the most visible space on your homepage so they can catch a visitor's attention the second they arrive on your website. If it's difficult for visitors to find the information they need to make a donation, then they will likely move on. A prominently placed "Donate/Give Now" button, combined with compelling copy about how their donation will help might be enough to convert a website visitor into a donor.

2. Make gifts as tangible as possible.

Try to increase fundraising results by tying a tangible gift to specific donation amounts. Rather than asking people to make a donation to a general year-end fundraising campaign, make it real and fun! For example, a \$10 donation might "buy" a seedling, a \$25 donation might "buy" a mature tree, and a \$75 donation might "buy" a forested acre. By communicating the impact of different donation amounts, you might sway donors to dig a little deeper into their wallets. After all, 'tis the season! Only 46 percent of survey respondents felt the charity gave them enough information to make their giving decision, so be sure they understand your need and the value of supporting your cause. Following this tip and the next two should help motivate the consumer to become a donor.

¹ The North American Technographics® Omnibus Online Survey, Q4 2009 (US) is a commissioned omnibus survey conducted for Convio by Forrester's Technographics®. The sample was drawn from members of MarketTools' online panel, and respondents were motivated by receiving points that could be redeemed for a reward. The sample provided by MarketTools is not a random sample. While individuals have been randomly sampled from MarketTools' panel for this particular survey, they have previously chosen to take part in the MarketTools online panel.

3. Appeal to the emotions of website visitors with photos on donation forms.

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. For your organization, a picture might be worth a thousand dollars! Use images to communicate your mission and show how your efforts are making the world a better place. A visual example of where a donation goes might inspire a first-time visitor to give more, or prompt a one-time donor to join your sustained giving program.

4. Make your fundraising goal and progress visible on your website.

Publicizing your organization's goal for its year-end fundraising campaign is a great way to share information with website visitors. Showcase your progress on your homepage so prospective donors know exactly how much more money you need to raise before the year is over. A visitor might feel compelled to give a little bit extra when they see that you are so close to your goal. Or, who knows, maybe they'll return to your website more than once to see how close you're getting to that magic number. They might even decide to donate a second time to push you past your target.

5. Consider search engine optimization and search engine marketing.

Before you can get people to make a donation via your website, you need to get them there first. Conduct a quick search engine audit to ensure that you are maximizing your placement in organic search. If your organization's website doesn't land on the first page of results, then it's time to make some changes. Work with your marketing department to tweak website content and meta tags. If you have extra budget, consider search engine marketing or paid search, such as Google Adwords, to secure a prominent spot for your year-end giving campaign on search results.

6. Offer gifts, real or virtual through eCommerce.

With funds tight, 20 percent of consumers say they will give this holiday season but have not yet determined how much. Many are torn between buying a gift for a friend or loved one and donating to a charity. Offer the savvy consumer a way to combine giving presents with giving to your organization. Online gift options, real and virtual help the consumer support your organization and show their love and affection for friends and family by combining giving and philanthropy. If you can tie traditional shopping with giving to your organization you might attract more than your fair share of online consumers.

MAKE EVERY EMAIL COUNT

These days, everyone's inbox is full of messages from a variety of sources – family, colleagues, stores, and nonprofit organizations. So, what will it take to make your message stand out? How can you ensure that your email not only gets opened, but that the recipient responds to the call to action?

Just because their inboxes are full, it doesn't mean that you should give up hope. This year's research shows that email and direct mail from a nonprofit are now in a virtual tie for the level of influence on an individual's decision to donate, with email from family and friends driving one in four people to give. Here are some tips to increase open rates and response rates **now**:

1. Segment your list.

You can make your messaging more compelling if you segment your list and customize email content based on your target audience. Recent donors? Thank them for their donation, and then tell them how your organization is rallying to meet its year-end giving goal. Last year's donors? Thank them again for

their donation in 2008, and ask if they could give again this year. Lapsed donors? Get back on their radar with a brief summary of your progress this year, and explain how you still need their support. By taking the time to segment and target, you should boost overall response rates.

2. Run multi-part appeals.

Everyone's guilty of forgetting to respond to emails that are buried at the bottom of inboxes. This year, stay top of mind with a multi-part email appeal. A series of three emails could consist of a main ask, a stewardship or season's greeting piece (e.g., an ecard), and a 'last chance to give' email.

3. Send an email on December 31.

Yes, it might seem 'last minute' to send an email on December 31, but there are plenty of people who are motivated by tax benefits. Give these generous procrastinators a nudge with a reminder that this is their last chance to give in 2009. You might be surprised by how many dollars come through before the clock strikes twelve. (For best results, incorporate this tip with a multi-part appeal – see tip #2.)

4. Share outcomes.

People are interested in knowing that their donations are put to good use. So ask yourself, "What good did our organization do this year?" and then share the answer with supporters. Not every email you send should be an appeal. Take time to share success stories and results to reconnect people to your mission.

5. Use auto-responders more effectively.

After someone makes an online donation to your organization, they likely receive an automatically generated email, or 'auto-responder', to thank them for their donation. When was the last time you looked at the content of that email? Chances are, it's been awhile. Take this unique opportunity to present copy that encourages the donor to take another action, such as join your sustained giving program or tell a friend about your organization.

TAP INTO YOUR CONSTITUENTS' NETWORKS

There isn't enough time to launch a campaign to build your email file. So, why not tap into your constituents' networks? After all, many people's decisions to support charities are influenced by what family and friends say on social media, in personal emails and through other word-of-mouth "marketing." Make the most of this fact by using these tips **now**:

1. Send eCards.

A holiday message or thank you in the form of an ecard are effective ways to connect with supporters, without making a hard ask. If possible, give supporters the option of sending ecards from your website. You can reinforce your brand and messaging in the template, but give senders the option to customize their message.

2. Encourage family giving.

Many people are torn between gifts for loved ones and gifts to charity. Why not marry the two with an appealing ecommerce offering, membership or other holiday giving idea? By getting creative, a donation to your organization could make the perfect present.

3. Use social media.

Chances are that a growing percentage of your supporters are using social media in their daily lives. Don't be shy about asking them to Tweet or to update their Facebook status about your organization. They could mention that they are making a donation to support your cause, or even ask family members to make a donation to your charity on their behalf rather than buying a present.

4. Ask constituents to forward emails or links to friends.

When an email is passed along from an individual they trust, recipients are more likely to respond or take action. With this in mind, you should ask your constituents to forward your year-end giving campaign emails and links to their family and friends.

5. Get your supporters' families and friends to email people in their networks.

Take the networking effect one step further by asking supporters to ask their friends and family to make a donation, no matter how small. Again, when such requests come from a trusted source, it can be extremely influential in a person's decision to give. Whether it's \$5 or \$100, every donation counts.

CONCLUSION

One final but important point: Online consumers engage through multiple channels. While 111 million people plan to go online to donate this holiday season, during the past year, 61 percent report mailing a check (most, after visiting the organization's website), 38 percent gave at an event, 17 percent used the Internet to sponsor a friend or family member in a run, walk or ride, whereas 16 percent responded to a phone call in addition to their personal online giving. Make sure that your direct mail and telemarketing programs are reflected on your website and even referenced in your email. Time and again, it's been proven that consistency across channels and integrated communications influence consumers' actions and behaviors, helping to build stronger relationships and encouraging them to support your cause.

There's no question – the online channel is growing as an effective and efficient means for fundraising – be it micro-donations or larger gifts. Make the most of it by using these tips that can move people and make a significant difference in your year-end giving campaign.

ABOUT CONVIO

Convio is the leading provider of on-demand constituent relationship management (CRM) software and services that give nonprofit organizations a better way to inspire and mobilize people to support their organization. Convio Online Marketing, the company's online marketing suite, offers integrated software for fundraising, advocacy, events, email marketing and web content management, and its Convio Common Ground™ CRM system helps organizations efficiently track and manage all interactions with supporters. All Convio products are delivered through the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model and are backed by a portfolio of best-in-class consulting and support services and a network of partners who provide value added services and applications focused on the unique needs of nonprofit organizations. For more information, please visit www.convio.com.

Austin | Berkeley | Washington, DC
888-528-9501 | 512-652-2600 | info@convio.com
www.convio.com



©Convio, Inc. All rights reserved. Convio, the Convio logo, Go!, TeamRaiser, Constituent360 and Common Ground are trademarks or registered trademarks of Convio, Inc. All other names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. V11.27.09