

Simple Ways to Raise More Online

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The recent outpouring of financial support for victims of the tsunami in South Asia confirms the fact that millions of Americans are not only ready and willing to make donations via the Internet, many of them even prefer to give online. For example, M+R has helped Oxfam America, an international aid and development organization, in its efforts to raise more than \$13 million online for their Asia earthquake fund in just a few weeks. Yet despite these tremendous results and the truly impressive figures raised online by the Kerry and Bush campaigns in 2004, most nonprofit groups have only just begun to tap into this potential treasure trove of support.

Obviously, not every group can expect to raise as much money online as emergency relief groups like Oxfam America. A number of factors, many of which may be outside of your control, influence your ability to raise money online, such as the strength of your organization's brand recognition, the public appeal (or lack thereof) of your issues, whether the media is covering your issues, timing, etc.

That said, there are a number of simple principles you can follow to make your online fundraising program more successful. In recent years, M+R has also helped a number of groups that do not work on emergency relief to double and even triple their returns from online fundraising. Below are some simple tips on how to create a successful online fundraising campaign.

Best Practices for Online Fundraising

Make it urgent. The more urgent the timing of your appeal, the more likely people are to give. Emergency appeals, particularly on a subject that is prominent in the news, can be very effective. Even if your work does not involve emergencies, you can still create a deadline or tie your appeal to a specific time-sensitive event to motivate people to give.

Make it relevant. We've achieved good results from tying fundraising appeals to an organization's existing advocacy or program work. The better your organization is at communicating the importance and value of your work to your supporters, the more successful you will be at getting them to give money to support this work.

Make it consistent. Create an issue- or event-specific donation page for each fundraising campaign you run so that potential donors won't get confused or turned off by clicking through to a generic donations page from an issue-specific appeal.

Make it concrete. People like to know what their money will be used for before they give it, so it's very effective to ask people to support something tangible, like a newspaper or TV ad or a lobby day visit to Capitol Hill. This tactic was pioneered with incredible success by groups like MoveOn.org, and it can work for your organization, too.

Make it specific. Ask for a specific amount in your appeal - whether it be \$15, \$50, or \$100. Asking for a specific amount takes some of the guesswork out of the process, making it more likely that a potential donor will give a contribution.

Integrate, integrate, integrate! The groups that are the most successful at fundraising are the groups that make their direct mail, online fundraising, and advocacy programs work together. Rather than viewing these as separate and competing interests, try to think of them as mutually reinforcing aspects of the greater organizational whole.

- Direct mail appeals should request people's email addresses and can also offer people the option of donating online, particularly in the case of a short timeline, as with a matching gift campaign.
- Boost response rates by using online fundraising appeals to draw attention to mail materials the potential donor is about to receive or has recently received.
- Printed materials should include your organization's web address and direct people to visit the site to learn more about the organization or to find out more about specific issues, campaigns, etc.