

‘Tis the Season for Holiday Gift-Giving Programs

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As nonprofit *supporters* become *shoppers* this holiday season, they'll be on the hunt for gifts that do good. How can your organization capture the attention of online shoppers and make the most of this year's rush?

We took a look at several of our clients' gift-giving programs and identified key strategies for success:

Know your competition.

Your supporters are holiday shopping, not making a donation. So when it comes to gift-giving programs, you're not only in competition with other nonprofits, you're also in competition with Amazon, Best Buy, Toys'R'Us, iTunes, and more. Your gift-giving program's design and functionality should be on par with these top online shopping sites.

How can you make it easy for online shoppers to buy from you? All of our tips below apply, but you can start by streamlining your purchasing process to three or four simple steps: Add to Cart ► Enter Your Information ► Personalize Gift Card ► Review & Place Order.

This experience should feel as familiar to your supporters as buying a book on Amazon (only better, because their gift matters that much more!). Check out the sample below from Oxfam America Unwrapped.



Know what motivates your donors.

We've found that gift-giving programs draw on different donor motivations than traditional end-of-year fundraising, so nonprofits shouldn't necessarily think of those programs as competing with each other.

Our experience indicates that supporters see their end-of-year gifts to nonprofits as something different from their holiday gift-giving, and they can be willing to give both. In a survey of Oxfam America Unwrapped donors, for example, we found that the money donors spend on symbolic holiday gifts comes out of their gift-giving budgets – not out of their charitable contribution budgets. Knowing this helped us get organizational buy-in to promote the gift-giving program even during early December when end-of-year giving is already ramping up.

Survey your donors and find out what motivates them when it comes to holiday gift-giving.

Time permitting, you may also wish to segment between gift-givers and donors. The overlap between gift-givers and traditional donors is typically small so there may be opportunities to segment your file such that previous gift-givers receive additional gift-giving appeals while previous donors receive extra end-of-year appeals in early December. Non-donor, non-gift givers can be tested to determine which type of appeal performs best for this segment.

Look at the overlap between your donor and gift-giver file to determine if this strategy makes sense for your organization.

Get specific.

Gifts should be interesting and special enough to feel personal – to feel like the perfect gift!

Your catalog should include a pithy description for each gift using specific and compelling terms. A repackaged donation request simply won't do. Shoppers want to give their friends and families tangible things, even if they're symbolic. After all, which would you rather buy: a symbolic gift "to support families in rural communities" or this adorable chicken from Mercy Corps:



Gift-wrap!

When giving gifts, the packaging matters. Use images. Put together a great video – but be sure to test it. Do whatever you can to bring home the impact of your gifts, so more of your supporters will bring your gifts home to their friends and family. And if there's a hot issue your organization is currently facing, make sure to emphasize the issue in both the email and landing page copy to increase both urgency and perception of the gift's importance.

You can also take your program further by promoting special gifts that correspond to specific holidays. For example, U.S. Fund for UNICEF ran a Mother's Day promotion for a Mother-Baby Pack that delivers a simple kit to expectant mothers who are HIV positive to help keep HIV from being passed to the baby. The kit was a huge hit among UNICEF supporters, and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF plans to follow up on its success with a Winter Child Survival Kit in late November that will include nutritional supplies and vaccinations.

Let supporters have it their way.

This one's easy: Offer donors multiple fulfillment modes, whether paper cards with printed custom messages sent to the recipient by your organization, e-cards for immediate (or scheduled) delivery, or printable cards the buyer can put in an envelope and bring to a holiday party.

Many of your supporters will want to make sure paper cards are mailed to their gift recipients in time for the holidays – so be sure to give them a clear deadline in your emails, and send emails close to that deadline! Last minute shoppers can be your top audience, so don't hesitate to send out more than one email in the final few days before the shipping deadline. Put the deadline date in the subject line for extra urgency. You

may want to consider express shipping options to enable supporters to purchase gifts even later.

Promote, promote, promote.

You've got a great gift-giving program in place. What now?

Well-timed, personalized emails to your existing list can be an effective way to promote your gift-giving program. But you're probably already doing that. What else can you do?

- Don't forget to promote your gift-giving program prominently on your homepage.
- Invest in renting outside lists for standalone email promotions – from nonprofit-related lists to media lists and promotional lists whose demographics line up with your donors'.
- Instead of spreading yourself thin, saturate a few key media markets to start building your brand – hit them with targeted email list buys, online and offline ads, and earned media.
- Blogs and news sites like CNN frequently release holiday gift guides – make sure your organization is on those lists!

Also, while not all organizations have access to them, celebrities can help. Famous faces can lend a hand by plugging a gift-giving program through videos from the field, signing emails or mentioning your program on talk shows. For example, endorsements for Oxfam America Unwrapped from celebrity spokespeople including Scarlett Johansson and Kristin Davis have raised awareness and expanded its reach.

Remember, holidays happen all the time.

Are your donors interested in giving inspired gifts for birthdays or other holidays?

We've found that it's worth testing gift-giving outside of the winter holidays – you can always drop less fruitful appeals if your results show donors aren't interested. Your list might respond well to Valentine's Day appeals but not as well on a Father's Day promotion. Test a few to find out what works, then focus on the holidays that matter most to your supporters! We've found that Valentine's Day and Mother's Day are the top holidays outside of the end of the year.

Also, consider tracking donors who buy gifts outside of the big holidays and sending them an annual reminder on the one-year anniversary of their gift, in case they purchased it as a birthday present.

Keep them coming back for more.

If someone buys a gift, be sure to send them follow up emails – both immediately after their purchase and at future holidays. Supporters view the gift-giving experience as a form of gift shopping, rather than as straight-up charitable giving, so it's common for donors to purchase multiple products in a short period of time. While the average gift for a gift-giving program tends to be lower than unrestricted giving, those multiple gifts can help make up for it!

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?

If you have questions or would like to discuss your organization's online fundraising strategy, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

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