

8 Holiday Email Marketing Ideas for Nonprofits

'Tis the Season to Connect with Your Members and Tap Their Spirit of Giving and Giving Back

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Fall is not too early for nonprofits to start planning their holiday email marketing campaigns.

With Thanksgiving and the December holidays around the corner -- and time ticking for charitable givers to make tax-deductible donations before the New Year -- now is the time to plan how to thank your supporters, highlight your year's accomplishments, suggest other ways they can support your organization and tap into their holiday spirit of giving.

Here are eight ways to use email marketing to stay top of mind with your subscribers this holiday season:

- 1. Say Thank You.** Email a holiday card thanking subscribers for their support. List a few accomplishments that their support has made possible. Consider segmenting your list and sending a more personalized note to each of your target groups: donors, volunteers, board members, etc. If you request a donation, make it subtle and secondary. Thank you is the primary message.
- 2. Share Your Accomplishments in an Email Newsletter.** This takes the thank you note one step further by creating a more extensive piece showcasing your organization's good work over the year. Tell stories, using faces and pictures to illustrate your successes. Bring your work alive in ways that show donors how far their dollars and other types of donations go. Include a "make-a-donation" link at the end.
- 3. Invite Members to Holiday Events.** Some nonprofits host local holiday parties, open houses, fundraisers, and member appreciation events. Email provides a fast and easy way for you to send out an invitation with a link to a simple email RSVP or an event registration page. Don't forget to follow-up with an invite reminder closer to your event.
- 4. Call for Volunteers and Other Types of Donations.** Cross-promote among your constituents to expand their relationships with your organization. Tell volunteers about how they can donate dollars or goods. Promote volunteering opportunities to your donors. Tell people who have donated goods (clothing, books, food, etc.) how they can make a cash donation or give the gift of their time and energy. Doing so will help further cement the relationship you have with your supporters and donors.
- 5. Ask for Donations to Support Your Cause.** If your organization has a capital campaign underway, the holidays are a good time to ask for a donation that supports this campaign or a specific cause or program. Give as much detail as you can about this program in need of funds and what the member's donation will help make possible. One way to soft-sell your request might be, "During this gift-giving season, consider supporting our organization's vital work..." Remind donors that their charitable contribution is tax-deductible.

Timing Tip: Ask Early, Remind Often

If your holiday email has a call to action such as asking for capital campaign donations, send it earlier in the season, closer to Thanksgiving, with follow-up reminders as the season draws to a close. If you're promoting your merchandise, time your emails to catch members at different points in the buying cycle (suggest "gifts for that hard-to-buy-for person" or "gifts for a cause" when holiday shopping first ramps up and "last-minute gifts" later in December). Create your holiday emails in advance so you can send them out on a schedule.

6. Leverage Your Partnerships to Reach More Like-Minded People. Ask board members, supporters and volunteers if their businesses and organizations would be willing to include a note about your charity in their holiday marketing campaigns. A mention of your work could appear in their email or print marketing pieces, or on their company or organization website. Would they be willing to let their customers and employees know about your organization?...to provide matching funds? Forge partnerships with other complementary organizations to promote your organization to their supporters and promote their organization to yours.

7. Offer Gift Ideas. If your organization sells merchandise or has a webstore, now is the time to remind subscribers about it! Wouldn't a mug (or hat, or tote bag, or T-shirt) with your brand make a great gift for that hard-to-buy-for person on your member's list? If a portion of merchandise proceeds goes to support your organization, remind them of that too. *Tip: For better conversion results, your email should link back to a landing page on your website showcasing those gift items (rather than linking to your homepage).*

8. Ring in the New Year with a "What's Coming Up" Email: This is similar to the end-of-year-accomplishments newsletter, only now you're showcasing the projects and initiatives for the coming year. Again, tell stories, show a need for your important work and how your organization -- and your members' donations -- support those important causes. Again, ask them to consider supporting your efforts. Add a link to "click here to volunteer or give."

Formatting Tip: A Picture Still Says a Thousand Words

Whether your email marketing communication is a simple "Thanks and Happy Holidays," a request for donations or volunteers, or a newsletter showcasing your accomplishments - don't forget to include photos. A picture that illustrates how your members' donations are put to work is more compelling than statistics and words alone. Show them how their giving makes an impact in the lives of others.

During challenging economic times, consumers whose budgets are stretched thin will benefit from regular email reminders of why they supported your organization in the first place. Email marketing gives nonprofits a cost-effective way to tell donors, members, volunteers, and subscribers how much their generosity is appreciated all year 'round. Year-end holiday communications are a great way to stay top of mind and in front of your supporters - and make sure they stay engaged in your mission and energized for the New Year.