

# Sage Nonprofit Solutions

## Five Simple Steps to Stellar Year-End Fundraising



For nonprofits, the dynamic duo of holiday generosity and an approaching tax season provides for more than 40% of annual donations. And like any good campaign, your year-end campaign will take preparation and planning to maximize this opportunity.

This white paper highlights five simple steps that can provide successful results for your nonprofit. Following the steps, you can win (and keep) the hearts and minds of your donors, the lifeblood of your organization.

## Prepare and Plan

It's not too early to start gathering assets for your year-end campaign. Do you have images available that tell your story? The old adage is true—a picture is worth a thousand words—and it is important to have a library of compelling images that convey your organization at work and your successes at a glance.

Is your public service announcement (PSA) current? Do you need to create a PSA? From storyboarding to final edit, it can take up to six weeks to produce a good PSA. Be sure to start early if you need to update your message.

While it may sound obvious, not all organizations take the time to really understand their donor demographics. Screen your donor database for particularly generous past donors and gather background information so you can make their “ask” more personal and their “thank you” more meaningful. Sometimes wealth screening tools can give you a more complete picture of their giving potential.

Email does count. Seventy-eight percent of U.S. adults now use the Internet, and nearly all of those (91%) send and receive email.<sup>1</sup> Now is the time to think about your automatic email replies, as well as more personal emails. How are you going to thank donors who are particularly generous? Create an asset library of year-end thank-you emails that you can personalize based on size and type of donation.

Also you'll want to develop a good “thank-you” phone script and determine the donation level at which you want to call versus email. Work with your staff and your Board of Directors to determine from whom the thank-you comes and who calls the donor.

It's always great to work backwards so that you have a good timeline for your year-end campaign. No one likes to manage a crisis that could have been prevented with a little upfront planning!

## Offer a challenge while sharing accomplishments

A great way to increase giving for your year-end campaign is to challenge donors and stakeholders to give more.

Now is the time to ask your Board of Directors to:

- Honor their pledges to the organization. Remind them how important it is for you to show 100% solidarity, not only for grant writing, but when you pursue major gifts or recruit the best Board members.
- Ask their friends and family to donate as a win for everyone. Empower your Board with all the tools that enable them to share their involvement and ask for support, including ways to give through social media.
- Encourage donations as gifts rather than traditional holiday presents. After all, a gift to a nonprofit organization can be the most meaningful gift of all.

Challenge your donors by telling them upfront why you need them now, as the year ends. Show your donors how their funds today will help the organization reach its mission in the coming year. Share goals that are achievable and personal. Remember “solving world hunger” may sound grand, but “providing 50,000 children with free lunches” is something that your donors can wrap their arms around.

<sup>1</sup>Pew Internet & American Life Project, “Generational difference in online activities,” January 28, 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Infographics/Generational-differences-in-online-activities.aspx>

Achievable, bite-sized goals are an excellent way to get current donors, lapsed donors, and potential donors excited. By making “asks” personal (for instance, \$150 provides lunch for one child for one school year) donors are able to become part of the solution, giving them a compelling reason to open their wallets.

Don't forget to share your accomplishments to date and paint a picture of the goals you can successfully achieve with a banner year-end campaign. People want to support a winning cause!

### Provide an emotional hook by creating your story

When establishing your value, appeal to your donors' emotions, as well as their minds. At this year-end season of giving, it's more important for you to give your story a face—a personal view of whom they are helping. It is a known fact that people want to help people, not just causes.

A 2007 research paper written by scholars Deborah Small, George Loewenstein, and Paul Slovic<sup>2</sup> shows how logical thought can reduce charitable giving. The study found that potential donors gave more money if they were asked to give to support a 7-year-old girl named Rokia facing starvation in Mali, Africa, than if they were asked to support the three million children facing starvation in the country.

Providing an emotional hook gives your potential donors a way to relate to your cause.

Every time a potential donor hears your story it should move them—long after they forget the facts, the stories must linger.

### Integrate Social Media with your website to create a donation magnet

Social media must become more and more integral to your cause. Online giving is bringing in more donations than ever before as nonprofits have seen a 46% increase in revenue from online giving between 2008 and 2009.

Your online presence should:

- **Be simple and specific**

Just like your offline story, your online story should provide links and ways to contribute to specific projects, rather than general fundraising appeals. Tell your donors what they are funding—is it building a roof on a school in Malawi, giving shoes to schoolgirls in Zimbabwe, or funding a library for an inner city school in New York? Again, fundraising specifics make the donor be a part of the solution.

- **Include online forms that are easy**

While the urge is great, resist the temptation to try to know everything there is to know about your donors. Make your online forms simple to use and ask the minimum number of questions you need to complete the transaction. If different programs require different questions, have unique giving forms for each, rather than one catch-all form, so the donation process is as streamlined as possible.

Remember to provide your mailing address, phone number, and email on the form. Also, it is best practice to provide a selection of amounts to give, and also provide a place for your donors to contribute a custom amount.

It's also important to provide donors with multiple options for giving—whether it be credit cards, ACH, or even a form the donor can print and mail in. Providing multiple options will allow the donor to give while the hook is strong, and with the financial information they have handy.

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<sup>2</sup>Sympathy and Callousness: The Impact of Deliberative Thought on Donations to Identifiable and Statistical Victims," Deborah A. Small, George Loewenstein, Paul Slovic; *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, March 2007.

As always, it is up to you to provide your donors with adequate tax receipting. When your donors make their donations online at the “eleventh hour” on December 31, be sure you supply an exceptional donation experience by immediately providing the right information donors need for that all-important tax write-off.

- **Integrate social media**

Let your donors share their generosity through Facebook and Twitter. Partnering with Twibbon allows them to put a ribbon around their avatar to promote awareness for your cause. Providing an “easy share” button or link on your online form integrates social media into your website and exposes your nonprofit to potentially thousands more donors.

Consider a year-end Facebook or Twitter campaign challenging your friends and followers to support your cause as a holiday gift.

Integrating social media into your traditional offline campaigns provides a greater reach for your organization and brings added value to your work. It’s an effective method to spread your messages, attract new people, and increase awareness of your nonprofit not only in your community but globally.

## Thank donors

You know that it’s important to thank your donors. It’s especially important for year-end campaigns to include those components that allow your donors to easily declare their donations as tax-deductible. And while this is a no-brainer, it’s always surprising when great organizations don’t follow-through properly.

At the very minimum, you must provide a personalized thank-you response email when you receive an online donation. This personalized email should include not only the name of the donor, the amount they’ve contributed, and a signature line from your Executive Director, but also your tax id number and the date that the donation was given. However, this is generally looked at as a type of receipting, and your donors know it is automated.

To really go the extra mile, follow up with thank-you letters that are not just authentic, but offer images and languages reminding them why they gave in the first place. They should provide a recognition of the difference that your donors make, and should never include another “ask.” This genuine communication will cause donors to remain loyal to your organization for a lifetime.

## Begin with preparation; end with thanks

Stellar year-end campaigns take planning. Keep it simple and remember these five tips to ensure your year-end campaign is a success:

1. Identify actionable items and plan to make only the changes you can effect immediately, for this year’s campaign.
2. Build on your successes from throughout the year. Share your accomplishments and challenge donors and stakeholders to step up.
3. Put a personal face on your organization—from who you are, to who you are helping. People want to help. Your job is to give them the reason and motivation to help you.
4. Leverage your website and the viral nature of sharing with social media to make the most of “eleventh hour” giving opportunities.
5. Personalize “thank-you” messages for an exceptional experience that will keep donors loyal to your organization for a lifetime.

By keeping your organization real and your thanks genuine, you’ll not just make your year-end campaign successful, but all your campaigns stellar!



**Sage Nonprofit Solutions**

12301 Research Blvd.  
Building IV, Suite 350  
Austin, TX 78759

866-831-0615  
[www.sagenonprofit.com](http://www.sagenonprofit.com)

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