Beginners' Guide to Online Fundraising Campaigns

By

Nonprofit Website & SEO Provider

SEONonprofit.com

About this guide:

This guide has been written for small nonprofits that need help navigating the world of online fundraising and getting the most out of it. It is a beginner's guide, so additional research is recommended.

It explains how to use many online resources to conduct an integrated online fundraising campaign. No technical knowledge is needed, and most of the tools highlighted are free.

You will learn how to:

❖ Define your campaign and it's goal
❖ Choose from a list of online tools to run your campaign

What is a Campaign?

Collins Essential English Dictionary defines a campaign as "*a series of coordinated activities designed to achieve a goal*". *In nonprofit terms, a campaign would include a series of steps and actions undertaken to raise funds for a project, create awareness about a topic, increase newsletter/volunteer signups, etc. There must be a certain defined goal for every campaign. Also, campaigns are most effective with a set timeframe (start and end dates).*

Why Do You Need Campaigns?

Since your nonprofit originally exists for an overall goal with a mission statement, why do you need to have campaigns? It's because they help you set and accomplish targets, and focus on key causes within your overall structure. They signal to your prospects that the campaign topic is very pertinent and must receive immediate attention. Think of them as mini-missions that all add up to accomplish your main mission. Since our focus is **online fundraising campaigns**, instead of your campaign's goal simply being *to raise money online*, it could be to *raise $2000 online, between June 1st and July 31st, towards a back-to-school giveaway*.

Online Fundraising Tools

There are a vast number of online tools that nonprofits can use to raise funds, and with the advent of social media, this number has grown even more. Here, we attempt to highlight the most popular ones.

In order to conduct a well integrated online fundraising campaign, your organization must first focus on a few fundamental but essential tools such as a website and a persuasive e-mail strategy.

- **WEBSITE**

  – *Your website is where your donors and volunteers get to "meet" you.* Even though you may have pages on other sites, your website allows you to fully reveal who you are, what you do and how visitors can be a part of it. Its design, colors and tone must appeal to your

target audience. It must have a prominently displayed **donation button**, and provide an easy option (e.g. print option) for offline donations. *Decide if you want to accept these donations on your site or use third-party credit card processors.* Your site must also have a **newsletter feature** so visitors can easily subscribe to your news. For more information about nonprofit websites and online donations, contact us at www.seononprofit.com.

Another important feature for your site is a **Blog**. This is a section where you post news, updates, and discuss topics of interest. *Blogs are great because you can quickly add short/long content with a not-so-businesslike tone (also called a blog voice). As a small nonprofit, you can use your blog to further put a personal touch/human face to your site.* You can have a few members of your team post as often as possible; include photos, videos, etc. Blogs also help you gather comments from visitors, which can give great feedback. Finally, the "**subscribe to our blog**" feature is a must-have. It allows subscribers to automatically get notified via RSS or email every time you post to your blog! This is great because it helps put you in front of your donors/prospects more often (in between newsletters).

- **E-MAIL STRATEGY**
  - **Features**

    You want to sign up with an email system that can send blasts and track statistics such as open rate (how many people opened your mail), bounces (undelivered email), and click-throughs (how many people clicked links in the email). These allow you to measure the effectiveness of your mails. *Before you begin sending emails to your subscribers, you must have a balanced email strategy.* Not every email should be used to solicit donations. You should decide how often you send emails, when to expressly solicit, and when to include updates regarding the difference their gifts are making.

- **Growing Your List**:

    There are several ways to grow your email list. First, make sure you have a prominently displayed form on every page of your website, inviting visitors to sign up. This is different from your "subscribe to our blog" button and it allows visitors to only sign up for official newsletters. If your budget allows, you can collect emails through offline methods such as direct mail, organized events or telemarketing. You may also consider pay-per-click text ads on search engines inviting visitors to join your list, make a donation, or both. There may be an upfront cost to acquiring donor emails, but the long-term donor relationship is promising.

- **FUNDRAISING "OUTLETS"**

    – Apart from your website, there are several other websites (sometimes called nonprofit directories) where you can have a presence and their visitors can learn about you. Some major ones include –

    Guidestar.org – They get lists of registered nonprofits directly from the IRS Business Master File. In cases where your organization is not required to register with the IRS, you can add it to GuideStar's directory using the information found here: http://www2.guidestar.org/rxg/help/faqs/for-nonprofit-organizations/index.aspx#faq1991

    Once your nonprofit is listed on GuideStar.org, it is very important for you to keep your nonprofit report up to date. This is because -

    1. Other sites like **Change.org**, **NetworkForGood.org**, **GreatNonprofits.org**, and **Facebook Causes** pull information from your GuideStar profile. **Facebook Causes** recently launched the *Causes Exchange* (http://exchange.causes.com) which offers nonprofit organizations of every budget size, staff capacity, and issue

area access to Facebook and MySpace. Visit all these sites to learn how you can actively promote your nonprofit on them.

2. Donors, volunteers and other nonprofits often search these sites for organizations to work with and may be wary of those not listed. Learn more here - http://www2.guidestar.org/rxg/update-nonprofit-report/how-to-update-your-nonprofit-report.aspx

There are several other websites that allow nonprofits to create a profile page to raise money for a cause. So in addition to your website, these outlets are a great way to publicize on-going campaigns. You simply enter required information, set your fundraising target, start/end dates (if applicable) and create your page. Some sites provide widgets (small chunks of code) that you can place on other websites or blogs to direct donors to your page. *One major difference between these sites and third-party credit card processors (mentioned above) is that they have communities of donors that regularly browse them for causes to support and promote*. Some of these sites are listed below. Visit them and read their terms to be sure you understand how they work. Also, check out other nonprofit profiles on there, so you get ideas on how to build yours effectively. They include -

firstgiving.com
Change.org
fundable.com
Justgive.org

There are yet other sites that have a different approach, allowing your donors to gain some benefit while supporting your cause. They include –

Cmarket.com – an auction catalog website where you can run auctions and donors place bids. They also provide great information about how to get items to auction off.

NonprofitShoppingMall.com – First you need to request that your nonprofit be added as a partner. You and your donors can shop popular retail stores through their network and they in turn donate a portion of the proceeds to your cause.

OneCause.com, VisitOurMall.com, iGive.com, GoodShop.com, HeartOf.com - all allow people to shop while donating to charity.

GoodSearch.com, iGive.com – allow people to give to charity while they search the internet.

- **ADVERTISING**

  – Depending on your budget, pay-per-click ads on sites such as **google.com**, **bing.com** and **yahoo.com** can help send donors to your site. You could also try applying to the **Google Grants** program, which provides **free** Google Adwords advertising to nonprofits who qualify - **google.com/grants**.

- **SOCIAL MEDIA**

  – The world of social media is rapidly evolving and it may be tough to choose which tools to use. Facebook.com, Twitter.com and MySpace.com are three popular social networking sites that you can use to stay connected to your supporters. *Just remember that "staying connected" involves adding friends, posting relevant information, engaging others in the community, and creating buzz any way you can. Include information about your website, profiles on other sites, and let visitors know quickly, how they can help. Successful networking involves creating content that people immediately want to share with others (viral).*

You can also write interesting articles about a topic related to your campaign, give your campaign a mention, and include a link to your website. Then post those articles on sites like **digg.com**.

Tying it all together

So how do you run a campaign with all this information?
Remember that campaigns are mini-missions that you can use to focus attention on certain causes within your organization. Setting start and end dates allows you to plan, execute and measure your campaign's success once it's over. Most of all, it helps you create a sense of urgency for donors, so they act immediately.

Basic tools include your website & email strategy. I encourage you to set those up first. Getting listed on GuideStar.org is a huge bonus which you should get naturally by registering with the IRS.

Choose your campaign goal and title carefully – make them as specific as possible. It may be all prospects read before you lose their attention. Choose your campaign dates, allowing enough time for the planning phase. If your campaign is seasonal in nature, then make sure to start planning early. Decide which tools will best suit your campaign, and make sure to run them simultaneously. If you set up profiles on other sites, you can choose to include links to them all, on your site. So visitors have a variety of options to choose from, at the moment you have their attention.

About the Author:

Bukie Opanuga is President & CEO of Modavate, Inc., a company that provides website and search engine optimization (SEO) services to nonprofits. For more information, visit our website at www.seononprofit.com