



HOW TO **RAISE**
MORE MONEY
Online



HOW TO RAISE MORE MONEY ONLINE

by Joe Garecht

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About the Author

Joe Garecht is an internationally known nonprofit fundraising consultant, author and speaker and is the President of Garecht Fundraising Associates. Joe has been a professional fundraiser for two decades, and during that time has served as the Director of Development of a major nonprofit, Executive Director of another major charitable organization, and as a consultant to hundreds of nonprofits worldwide. Joe has also served as the fundraising director of several political campaigns and previously founded The Fundraising Authority.

Joe is the author of *How to Raise More Money for Any Non-Profit*, *The Non-Profit Fundraising Formula*, and *Raising Money Without Going Crazy*.

For more great information on how to raise more money for your nonprofit, visit Joe online at Garecht.com.



Introduction

Online fundraising should be a key component of your nonprofit's development strategy. As more and more people become comfortable making purchases and donating to charity online, the percentage of revenue you raise online will only increase. In this guide, I'm going to show you how to make the most of your online fundraising program.

First, though, I want to caution you that online fundraising should not (and cannot) replace your offline fundraising activities.

Your major and mid-level donor programs will continue to rely on personal contact ... meaning visits, calls, events, and video conferences. Your online activities can be a strong complement to your offline strategies, but they won't replace them.

Ok—with that out of the way, let's talk about how to raise more money online for your nonprofit.



Your Most Important Online Fundraising Asset

As you build your online fundraising program, your nonprofit will have a number of assets at its disposal. For most organizations, those assets include a website, an e-mail list, and your social-media presence. By far the most important of these is your e-mail list.

Every nonprofit, no matter how small, should be focused on building an e-mail list for the organization. This is because your e-mail list is the only active marketing medium you control online. Your website is important, but you have no way to reach out to visitors to your site unless you collect their e-mail addresses.



Likewise, social media is important, but the social networks have significantly decreased the reach of your posts and tweets. For example, if you post something on your Facebook page, Facebook will likely show it to less than 5% of your followers unless you pay for advertising.

When it comes to online fundraising, therefore, your e-mail list is the organization's most important asset.

How to Grow Your Nonprofit's E-Mail List

When working with a new nonprofit, one of the questions I always ask is, "How many people do you have on your e-mail list?" The answer invariably includes the phrase "not enough." Whether they have 1,000 or 10,000 people on their e-mail list, most nonprofits feel as though it's not enough ... and they feel they should be doing more to grow the size of their list. In this article, we're going to take a look at how any nonprofit can significantly grow their e-mail list.



Growing Your Nonprofit's E-Mail List Will Take Time

There's no magic bullet for growing your e-mail list. Nearly every e-mail list (for both businesses and nonprofits) starts off growing slow. As your e-mail list grows and you continue to communicate with those on your list, things usually pick up and the list starts to grow more rapidly. So don't be discouraged.

Growing your list takes time and commitment. One year after launching your list, you may only have 200 people on it. After the second year, you may have 2,000 people on the list, and after the third year, you may have 8,000. It all depends on your commitment to slowly and steadily seek out new subscribers.

What Do I Mean by "E-Mail List?"

First, let's talk about what we mean when we say, "e-mail list." Really, what we mean is your e-mail *newsletter* list. Your e-mail list is the list of people who have signed up to receive updates from your nonprofit via e-mail. You can also call this group your "e-mail subscribers." This list is comprised of donors, prospects, volunteers, and anyone else who gave you permission to add them to your list.

It's important to remember that you shouldn't just add e-mail addresses to your e-mail list. Far too many nonprofits start an e-mail newsletter and just add everyone they can, including friends and family of the staff, community leaders, local businesspeople, and people who they think *might* be interested in their work. Don't do this. People hate being added to e-mail lists without their permission. If you do this, they will consider your newsletter spam, and it is highly unlikely they will become a donor or supporter of your organization.

Why Your E-Mail List Matters

Every single nonprofit should be building an e-mail list. One of the biggest mistakes that nonprofits make online is to launch a website without building an e-mail list. These nonprofits usually realize after a year or two that they should have been building an e-mail list all along and then go back and add an e-mail sign-up form on their website. This means they lost valuable time along the way. Don't make this mistake!



Your e-mail list is more important than your social media presence, and it's even more important than your website. If you want to know more about why e-mail is the killer app for online fundraising, read our recent article [The Most Important Thing to Understand About Online Fundraising.](#)

Simply put, your e-mail list is the single biggest asset you have when trying to raise money, find volunteers, or spread the word about your organization online.

How Do You Grow Your Nonprofit's E-Mail List?

Ok, so now that you know why building an e-mail list is the most important thing you can be doing online, how do you actually go about growing your list? Here's a simple three-step plan for building your list—whether you are starting from scratch or trying to grow the list you have already built:

#1: Make Your E-Mail Newsletter the Centerpiece of Your Website

The first step to growing your list is to make your e-mail newsletter the centerpiece of your website. Everything you do on your nonprofit's website (apart from those portions that are focused on client services) should be focused on getting people to sign up for your e-mail newsletter.

You should have an e-mail sign-up form on every page of your site. You should also offer people an incentive to sign up for your newsletter—something like a free e-book or a special report, access to a free webinar or video, or some other compelling reason for them to sign-up. Tell them that when they sign up, they will not only receive the special item via e-mail, but they will also be subscribed to your monthly newsletter and will receive updates on your work.



#2: Turn Your Subscribers into Evangelists

The second step to growing your e-mail list is to turn your subscribers into evangelists for your nonprofit and for your newsletter. Primarily, this means two things:

First, while not everything you send out in your newsletter needs to be knock-your-socks-off amazing content, every once in a while, you should be sending out something that makes people stand up and take notice. This means sending out something that people want to share on social media and that they would be inclined to forward to their friends, family, and coworkers. So be sure you are occasionally sending out shareworthy articles, statistics, videos, or infographics.

Second, you should be asking your subscribers directly to forward your e-mail newsletter to their friends and colleagues. For example, let's say you are an educational nonprofit and you publish a list of tips in your e-mail newsletter to

My general rule of thumb is this: When your board members visit your website, they should be slightly concerned about just how much you are pushing the newsletter. Yes, you should certainly be looking for donations and talking about your programs on your website, but if at least one board member does not comment that it seems like you're pushing the e-mail newsletter too hard, then you probably aren't pushing it hard enough.

help parents better prepare their middle schoolers for high school. Why not include a big bold ask at the end of the newsletter that says,

“Do you know parents who have a child getting ready to start high school? Forward this e-mail to them!”

Also, make sure that every newsletter you send out has an easy-to-find button or link that allows people to subscribe to your e-mail newsletter. That way, if someone forwards your newsletter to a friend, the friend can sign-up easily.



#3: Ask for E-Mail Addresses Everywhere You Can

The third step to growing your e-mail list is to make sure that you are asking for addresses everywhere you can. Of course, this includes asking for e-mail addresses on your donor-reply cards and noting that people will be subscribed to your newsletter when they give you their e-mail address. But it also means having newsletter sign-up sheets at your fundraising and volunteer events, at the front desk of your office, and at all of your non-ask events. Don't be shy about asking people to subscribe to your list!

How to Use Your E-Mail List the Right Way

As you focus on growing your e-mail list, it's important to remember that if you don't use those e-mail addresses people are giving you, you will eventually lose them. If people sign up for your nonprofit's e-mail newsletter and then don't hear from you for months, they will forget that they signed up and will see your newsletters as spam.

The same rule applies if you are only sending out a newsletter every three or four months. You won't build the connection with your supporters that you had hoped, and people will simply delete your e-mails and unsubscribe from your list as they focus on organizations that are working harder to build relationships with them.

If you want to build a strong e-mail list, you should be sending out an e-mail newsletter at least monthly, though most nonprofits should not be sending more than one newsletter per week.



Your e-mail newsletters need not be long; they can be simple updates on your work or could contain numerous articles about your programs. Either way, make sure people hear from you often!

Just as with every other type of fundraising strategy, your e-mail list should be used for both cultivation and stewardship as well as for making solicitations. This means sending out real, honest-to-goodness e-mail fundraising appeals to your e-mail subscribers. E-mail solicitations are the primary way for your nonprofit to raise money through online fundraising.

We've found that the best e-mail fundraising appeals are sent in "flights," meaning that you send an e-mail appeal and then follow it up with 1 to 2 additional, complementary e-mails that reiterate the ask. This helps break through the clutter in most people's inboxes. These follow-up appeals should each be sent a couple days apart.

If you want to build a successful online fundraising program, my suggestion is that you send out e-mail fundraising appeal flights at least 2 to 3 times per year—one of them during the year-end giving season.

Setting Up Your Website for Fundraising Success

When it comes to online fundraising, your nonprofit's website should do a number of things in addition to collecting e-mail addresses. It should also be an appealing place for supporters who wish to make donations. There are 4 main things you need to do if you want to set your website up for fundraising success:

#1: Make It Easy to Find Your "Donate Now" Button

Nothing frustrates donors more than searching in vain for a way to make a gift on your website. Make sure you feature your "Donate Now" button prominently on your site. Make the button big, bold, and above the fold. If your grandmother can't find the donate button within the first 15 seconds of looking at your website, you need to make it bigger and bolder.

#2: Explain the Need and Make an Ask

One way that online fundraising is just like offline fundraising is this: if you want people to give, you need to explain the need and make an ask. This means that the donation pages on your site should include a condensed 2- or 3-paragraph version of your case for support. Your donor message needs to tell people why your nonprofit matters and why they should care. Then, you need to make an ask. Don't just tell people, "Get involved today!" Ask them, "Would you be willing to make a donation today to help end hunger and homelessness?"

#3: Include Contact Information for Donors

People feel much more comfortable donating online if they have an offline way to reach your nonprofit should the need arise. Smart nonprofits include contact information for a member of their development staff right on their online fundraising pages. While most people won't use it, doing so helps your donors feel safe and secure donating online.

#4: Provide Proof and Transparency

Another way to make donors feel comfortable giving via your website is to provide as much "social proof" and transparency as possible. Make sure your organization's mailing address appears on your online fundraising pages. Post a link to your annual report so donors can see how you are using their money. Consider posting testimonials from current donors, board members, community leaders, and those you have helped so that people know your organization is trustworthy and is having a real impact.



Driving Traffic to Your Website

Of course, no matter how great your website is, you won't raise any money on your site if no one is visiting it. Most nonprofits have no plan in place to drive traffic to their sites, even though this should be a key part of their online fundraising strategy.

The most important and most basic thing you can do to drive traffic to your site is to make sure that your current supporters (donors, volunteers, and friends of the organization) are visiting the site often. You can do this by making sure that you are linking back to information on your site in your e-mail newsletters and via social media.

You should also be thinking about making sure that Google and other search engines are sending visitors your way. Your online fundraising will grow as the traffic you receive from search engines grows. The process of proactively seeking more search traffic is called “search engine optimization” or SEO.

While there are hundreds of different methods, there are two primary places to start if you want to boost your search traffic:

First, try to get other websites in your mission field to link to your website. Not only will this help visitors to those other sites find your site, but it will also signal to the search engines that your website is a valued resource. This will boost your web traffic, which will in turn boost your online fundraising.

In order to get other websites in your field to link to your site, you need to post articles on your site that are compelling, and then ask those other websites to link to you. For example, if you are a homeless shelter, why not write an article on “5 Ways to Be Kind to the Homeless in Your City” and then e-mail other homeless shelters and homelessness advocates to ask them to link to that article?



A second easy way to boost your search traffic is to write articles for your website focused on search terms that make sense for your organization. Basically, this means you need to think through what people are searching for on Google and other search engines—and which of those searches should show your organization on the results page.

If you're a homeless shelter in Philadelphia, you'd want to make sure that your nonprofit showed up on the results page when people search for things like:

- Homelessness in Philadelphia
- Ending homelessness in Philly
- Homeless shelter Philadelphia
- Homeless donations

In order to show up when people search for these terms, you need to write an article focused on each of these terms and post it on your website. This may seem complicated, but it's not. Research it! There is quite a bit of information on this online.

You can also consider using paid social-media advertising to drive traffic to your website, particularly to your e-mail newsletter's sign-up pages. Again, there is quite a bit of information on this online



How to Turn Social Media Followers into Donors

Most nonprofits are investing increased amounts of time, energy, and money into social-media networking, but to what end? While raising awareness of your mission is a good thing, unless your nonprofit is focused on issue education and awareness, it doesn't necessarily help you fulfill your ultimate goals.

Development directors, board members, and other nonprofit leaders often wonder how to turn social-media support into fundraising revenue for their organizations. Many nonprofits have tried, with varying degrees of success, to raise money through social networks. For the vast majority of them, social media lags way behind other fundraising methods in terms of dollars raised per hour spent on development.

While social media can provide a boost to your fundraising efforts by supporting and complementing your other activities, raising money through direct asks on social media is not something that most nonprofits can rely on for significant revenue. There is, however, a proven strategy for turning a portion of your social-media followers into offline donors, if you are willing to think outside of the box.

The First Step: **Providing Real Value on Social Media**

Of course, the first thing you will need to do if you want to be able to raise money from your social-media followers is to provide real value on social media. This means being active on each site where you have a presence and showing your followers how compelling and important your work is.

Be sure to make your presence on social media a two-way conversation. Ask people for their opinions, take polls and surveys, hold contests, and give “inside information” that makes people feel like a part of your team. Your activity on social media should build trust because in the next step, you will be asking people to trust you with their e-mail address.



The Second Step: **Converting Social Media into E-Mail**

This is where the outside-the-box thinking comes in. If you want to turn your social-media followers into donors, you need to move the conversation off the social networks. Social media can be a great cultivation tool, but for the time being, it is not a great solicitation tool.

Thus, you'll want to convert your social-media relationships into e-mail relationships. You will need to ask your followers on social media to sign up for your nonprofit's e-mail newsletter.

You can do this by regularly posting links on your social networks asking people to sign up for the newsletter and giving them compelling reasons to do so. Such reasons can be as varied as exclusive articles and pictures of your work, invitations to events, the chance to build a deeper relationship with your organization or to better support your initiatives.

Some nonprofits find value in running paid advertising to make sure that their e-mail sign-up link is front and center for their followers on social networks, but most nonprofits simply post updates on a regular basis asking people to sign up for the e-mail newsletter and giving them a link to do so.



The Third Step: Providing Real Value through E-Mail

Once your social-media followers sign up for your e-mail newsletter, you'll need to continue building the relationship by providing real value through e-mail on a regular basis. Your goal is to make sure that your e-mail subscribers look forward to receiving your newsletters. You can do this by including interesting stories of your work and profiles of your clients, donors, board members and staff, as well as features on your events and thought leadership about your mission field.

The Fourth Step: E-Mail Fundraising Solicitations

Now we come to the pay-off. While social media isn't a great way to make asks, e-mail is—at least when it comes to quick, cheap, mass-communicated asks. As noted above, when it comes to online fundraising, no ask medium is as effective as e-mail.

That's why you spent so much time in the preceding three steps getting people to move from social media to e-mail and building a relationship with them through your e-mail newsletter.

Your nonprofit should be sending out several e-mail fundraising solicitations to its list each year. These e-mail asks should be similar to offline direct-mail appeals and be focused solely on fundraising. These aren't cultivation e-mails; they are ask e-mails.

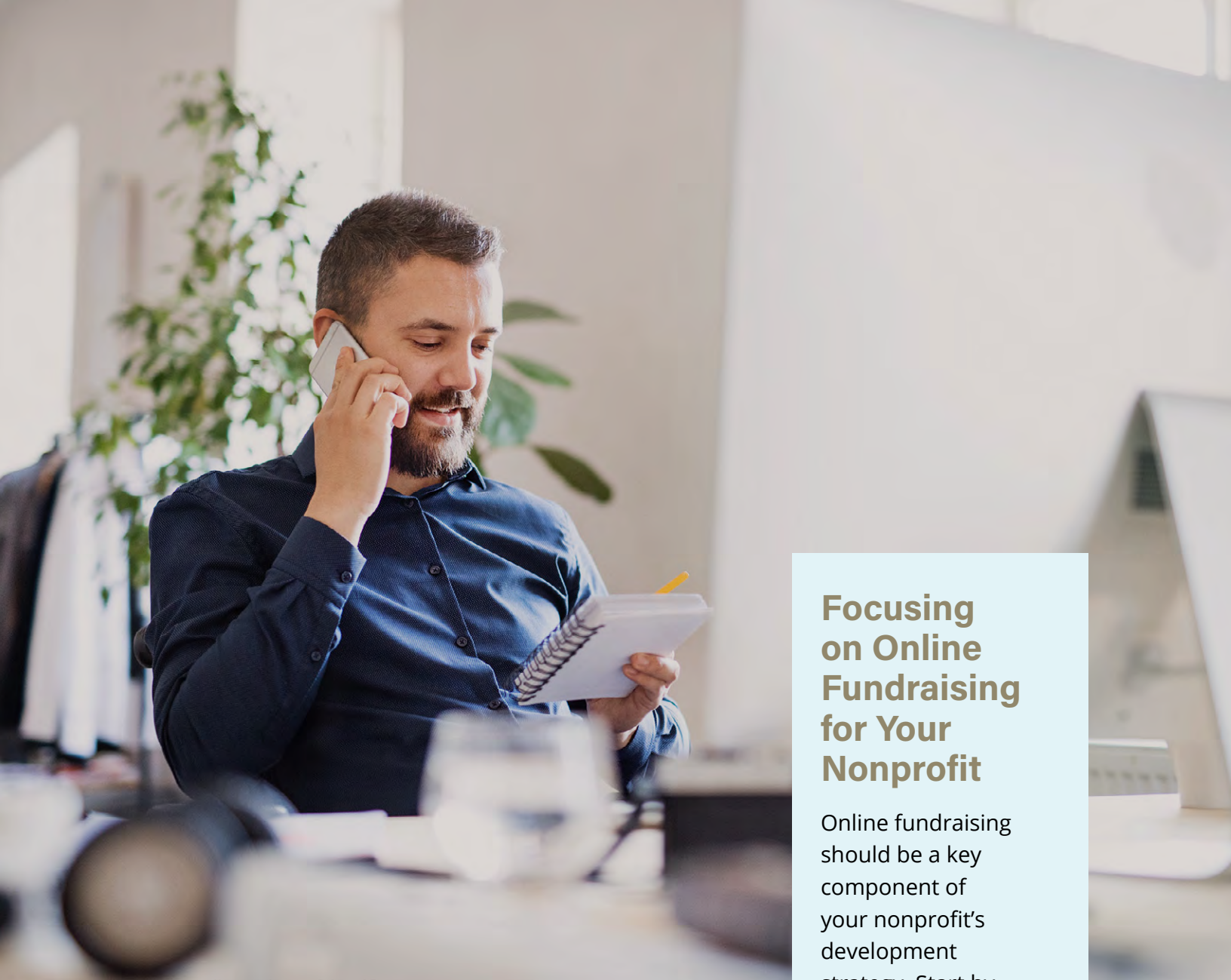
The only real difference between direct-mail appeals and e-mail solicitations is the length: e-mail appeals should be much shorter than offline appeal letters—in most cases, no longer than 300 to 400 words. Be sure that your e-mail solicitations include a true ask (“Would you be able to make a gift of \$25, \$50, or \$100 today to support our work?”) and that they include links and buttons that people can click to make an immediate donation to your organization.

As mentioned earlier in this guide, we have found that e-mail solicitations work better when they are sent in “flights” of 2 to 3 e-mails. This means that each e-mail solicitation you send will be comprised of several e-mails to your entire list. The first of these will be the full appeal (300-400 words maximum). The second (and the third, if you do three) will be shorter: 100- to 50-word reminder e-mails that say something like, “I’m checking in to make sure you received my e-mail earlier this week.” Use these e-mails to summarize the first appeal and to make the ask again. (Once again, include links and buttons to donate). In our experience, sending these follow-up e-mails can boost your solicitation revenue by 10 to 25%.

Where Online Fundraising Fits into Your Overall Strategy

The final piece of the puzzle is figuring out where online fundraising fits into your overall strategy. All of the data for nonprofits points to the fact that you'll raise more money if you go “multi-channel” with your fundraising. This means that your most successful appeals will be those that mix both online and offline fundraising strategies.





Focusing on Online Fundraising for Your Nonprofit

Online fundraising should be a key component of your nonprofit's development strategy. Start by focusing on building your e-mail list. Then set up your website for maximum fundraising success. After that, focus on driving more traffic to your website and using your e-mail list to send out e-mail solicitation letters and run multi-channel fundraising campaigns for your organization.

For example, when you run your annual appeal, you'll raise more if you send out snail-mail letters, make calls, hold meetings, send out e-mails, post a page on your website, and talk about your annual appeal on social media. Combining online fundraising and offline fundraising strategies has a powerful multiplier effect for your efforts.

Of course, you can also run online-only fundraising appeals for your organization. When using this strategy, you can combine a flight of e-mail appeals with a heavy social media presence to raise money for your nonprofit. Remember that e-mail appeal letters are the "killer app" for online fundraising. You can also include crowdfunding campaigns as part of your online fundraising strategy.



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Major Gifts LLC
1288 Valley Forge Road
Unit 82
Valley Forge, PA 19460

800-490-7090
succeed@majorgifts.com