



Digital Fundraising

Embracing Your Strategic Potential

By Todd Whitley

It's a crowded and noisy marketplace online, full of distraction, in a rapidly changing environment. But don't despair. You work for a great cause.

You have impassioned supporters, volunteers, and staff. And regardless of your size or available budget, you can increase your online revenue by thoughtfully examining your messaging, taking a tactical approach to campaigning, and taking advantage of often underused resources. It begins with a digital fundraising strategy.

About this workbook

This workbook will walk you through crafting a strategy and then detail the steps that will tactically support your strategy through a campaign, including specific deployment examples.

Who this workbook serves

The framework for creating a digital fundraising strategy can serve nonprofit organizations big and small. On the operational level, collaboration is important because digital fundraising doesn't occur in the vacuum of a specific department. To be truly effective, development, marketing and communications, and IT staff need to work together as a team. With this workbook you can be the team lead, guiding your organization to raise more money online, no matter what department you currently represent.

Whether your organization is big or small, this NTEN workbook will walk you through crafting and implementing a digital fundraising strategy. You'll learn how to create an outline based on a single fundraising goal, identify key objectives and tactics you will use, recognize your legal parameters, employ best practices that put the donor first, and outline an informed, integrated digital fundraising strategy.





About the author

Todd Whitley is #wiredtothecause, a digital consultant for nonprofit organizations who want to improve their effectiveness online, and an instructor in the Strategic Communications program at Columbia University. He pulls from years of experience overseeing the development and expansion of online programs at two of the nation's largest voluntary health organizations and many

other organizations both multi-national and small. He's founded a number of special events for charities close to his heart including the Hudson Valley Dance Festival and the Catskill Turkey Trot.



About NTEN

NTEN: The Nonprofit Technology Network aspires to a world where all

nonprofit organizations use technology skillfully and confidently to meet community needs and fulfill their missions. We are the membership organization of nonprofit technology professionals. Our members share the common goal of helping nonprofits use all aspects of technology more effectively. We believe that technology allows nonprofits to work with greater social impact. We enable our members to strategically use technology to make the world a better, just, and equitable place.



This workbook was made possible by the support of DonorPerfect.

**“Oh, the
places
you’ll go!”**
—Dr Seuss

PART 1: Embracing Strategy

A fundraising strategy is based on the bedrock of a goal. On that goal rests the objectives, which make up the things you want the campaign to achieve. And on top of that sit your tactics. You would never start a fundraising campaign with a Facebook ad, when you haven't yet worked out what you want to achieve. We are leading you through this building process bottom up, to make sure your layers are rock-solid before you attempt the next level.



Guiding principles

- *Keep the focus on the donor experience*
In many ways, digital fundraising is an extension of usability testing for the web. The difference being that you need to examine the donor's experience through all channels (online and off). Doing so will help you address questions of ownership among stakeholders.
- *Collaboration is key*
Working cross-functionally is vital to digital fundraising success. Without it, the variables you can't control can jeopardize your success.
- *Educate to build awareness and trust*
Big plans require support from leadership and benefit from awareness among all staff—in large organizations this is even more true. Making sure the entire organization is engaged in this plan will reduce challenges during execution.
- *Successful fundraising is a year-round effort*
Even if your campaigns are not running all year, you should be building towards success.
- *When you disagree with stakeholders on tactics, agree to test*
Testing is a great and underused way to settle disputes over functionality and design.
- *Allow the data from your results to inform where you go next*
Making data-informed decisions is a continual process, and often a cultural challenge for many organizations, but it is critical to making your online program effective.

“A vision without a strategy remains an illusion.”

—Lee Bolman

Defining your goal

A strategy not only provides you with the framework of a plan to serve you throughout the year, it also allows you to say no to initiatives or suggestions that do not directly support the goal. It's important that you keep to one goal, and take care to cut out the clutter during a fundraising campaign.

Nonprofit professionals are often asked to support more than one goal simultaneously, which dilutes the response rate for each call-to-action.



Case in point: The Make-a-Wish Foundation launched their World Wish Day campaign with three distinct calls to action on their front page. To be sure, all the calls to action are operationally important but only one will help reach its fundraising goal.



For the purposes of this workbook, we have invented a campaign using the fictional organization Health NPO, where you were recently hired as Vice President of Digital Fundraising. (Congratulations!) We're going to reference Health NPO in green text throughout this workbook as a test example.

Our goal for digital fundraising is fairly straightforward, but take a moment to write it out here. You'll be surprised how many times you may have to remind your colleagues of the goal.

Digital fundraising goal

For example, the digital fundraising goal for Health NPO is to raise over \$1 million online in 2018. Please write your own fundraising goal here:

This workbook will help you develop a digital fundraising strategy with a single goal, multiple objectives, and numerous tactics. This strategy may interface with others and your organization may have other business goals but you need to keep the focus here on your single fundraising goal. Next, we'll build objectives to advance that goal.

Clarifying objectives

Working with your team of stakeholder collaborators, identify digital fundraising objectives that actively support your goal.

“Increase direct donations from first-time donors” is an example of a solid objective that serves your goal to increase online revenue. Another is “increase matching gift donations.” Fill out the following chart taking care to only identify those organizational business objectives that serve the online fundraising goal. You can name as many as you are prepared to support throughout the year.

While the way you measure your objectives may change, the importance of measuring them will not.

For example, in our example Health NPO campaign, we will measure our first-time donations by issuing a weekly report of donations and comparing it with our previous donor database.



**Did you know?
the 2017**

M + R Benchmarks study showed a 10% increase in email volume among nonprofits, with the average subscriber receiving 24 fundraising messages, 20 advocacy messages, and 11 e-newsletters per year.

Digital fundraising objectives

Objective 1

How will you measure it?

1. Increase direct donations from first-time donors

Legacy database report issued weekly, forms and offline donations. Compare weekly donations with previous donor list.

Objective 2

How will you measure it?

Objective 3

How will you measure it?

Related questions:

Take a look at your list of objectives. How does each serve to support your goal? If any don't, remove them from your objectives list. Rather than ask how the objectives cover the fundraising program, you may want your internal stakeholder group to consider which are missing. Answering the "how" question isn't as important as making sure objectives are succinct in purpose and comprehensive in scope.

How do your objectives cover the breadth of your online fundraising program?

For the first objective, increasing direct donations from first-time donors, we can identify new donors by comparing donations made during a given campaign against the donor file. Nurturing them using information about the programs they love (so they can see the impact of their gift) will allow us to deepen their relationship with the organization and set the stage for additional support. With this we are supporting our goal of increasing online donations by embracing a lifecycle approach to donor cultivation.

Note, too, that objectives aren't tactics. Just as objectives serve your goal, tactics serve objectives.

Audience targets

Now it's time to choose your audience targets. These are the subsets of people who are most likely to be moved to action by your campaign. Use the following chart to examine the audiences associated with your digital fundraising objectives. Who are they and how are they being engaged? If there are staff identified that you have not contacted, ask them to verify the information.

Audience	Objective #	Channels outreach	Relevant URLs	Communication schedule	Staff
First-time donors	1	Social posts Display ads SEO, SEM, Mobile	<main donation form>	• Quarterly social posts • Year-end ads • Ongoing SEO, SEM	Head of Individual Donor Program

With a draft of your audience spreadsheet, convene a meeting with your internal stakeholder group (development, IT and marketing staff) to talk through the data collection, donor workflow, and tracking for each audience target. Your success as an online fundraiser is inextricably tied to how well you understand your organization's process for managing data across platforms. Convening this conversation as a team may help you uncover process gaps and roadblocks you'll need to address when it comes to actively campaigning.

Related questions

With each target identified, is there anyone left out? Were staff included? Do you understand the related workflow for each channel? How are you pulling together new contacts from across your network into your digital communications program? Conversely, how is your digital program serving your offline communication and marketing efforts? Talk these questions through with your team.

Caution: Consider your existing donors first

Lumberyard Contemporary Performing Arts recently launched a capital campaign for a new building, and in doing so, one of their first tactics was to post a fundraising ad on Facebook. They did this before launching an email appeal to their donor base.

When considering your campaign timeline, how you sequence previous donors is important to consider thoughtfully. Remember the donor principle we listed on page 3? Don't start with an ad. Doing so speaks to a weak strategy and channels owned by departments that aren't working together effectively.



“As a general rule, retaining and motivating existing donors costs less than acquiring new donors.”

— Association of Fundraising Professionals
2016 Fundraising Effectiveness Survey Report

Cross-check your audience table to make sure all channels used to engage your constituents are represented. Now consider the communication schedule for each. If you realize that a specific audience segment is not being engaged regularly, take note. You will want to be sensitive to that when campaigning, just as you'll want to improve outreach moving ahead.

Targets by channel

Now let's consider your targets by channel. Keeping the donor experience top of mind, answer the following questions:

Will your campaign be served best by a single landing page on your website and a feature on your homepage—or is there an opportunity to amend the copy for multiple landing pages (for example, membership chapters or different communities)?

For your email efforts, you'll want to include every contact possible and segment them to personalize your appeal. Is there a list of email contacts who should be suppressed from the appeal (for example, current donors to a capital campaign)?

If you're working at a larger organization, your campaign driver may be a direct mail program or television spots. Consider how you may complement all of the above noted efforts in your online campaign here:

Your search engine marketing (SEM), in the best case scenario, will help elevate the organic ranking of your campaign through search engine optimization (SEO) and paid search ads. Are there grants available to you or additional funds you can use for search marketing?

“We have technology, finally, that for the first time in human history allows people to really maintain rich connections with much larger numbers of people.”

—Pierre Omidyar

Is there a role for your influencers? Do you have bandwidth for a social content strategy? Will your campaign have a specific visual identity? What's the constituent experience via social? What's your social marketing budget?

And what of your strategic partners—your staff and volunteers, your nonprofit allies, and your corporate friends? List partners who might participate in signal-boosting your campaign.

Your campaign reach may be dynamically extended by providing advance notice, tools, and direction to your partners and friends. Why should they help your campaign? What resources can you develop to make it easy for them to share?

At this stage, it's important to begin thinking about how you will track the efforts associated with each channel. Will the same online donation form be used for appeals placed in each channel or are you setting up separate forms for specific activities? How will you track how donors found your website? Because tracking can take time to set up, start by prioritizing what you need to track. Note that the tactic that costs the most to support is generally the most tracked.

What about roadblocks?

As you've led a conversation across your organization in a quest to define primary fundraising objectives, it's likely that a number of other related issues have cropped up. This may include anything from "we need a new website" to "but the organization is currently under a major reorganization." To identify these issues and their potential effect on your digital fundraising strategy, it's often helpful to list them in a landscape analysis.



Did you know?
More than half of emails

read worldwide are read on a mobile device. Studies in 2010 and 2017 by Return Path noted that 55% of all emails are read via mobile.

Use this grid to note whether they represent an opportunity, or a challenge (or perhaps, both) and the impact each potentially has on your fundraising program. As your strategy evolves, address these issues within the framework of the objectives you've set.

Issue: landscape analysis	Opportunity	Challenge	Impact on fundraising
Health NPO's website is in need of a redesign to improve branding, user experience, and opt-in data flow.		✓	While online donations currently sync into the legacy database, opt-in contact information isn't optimized on the site. Addressing this issue will allow us to expand our house file (email marketing list) and increase donations through prospects.

Now identify at least one tactic for each of the audience targets you listed earlier and ideally include all of the tactics you would like to employ throughout the year.

Audience target	Communication tactic(s)
Major Donors	Quarterly email from the Chief Marketing Officer, quarterly direct mail appeals, end-of-year cultivation party, approached to participate in three events a year.

With this you have the foundation for your strategy. All you need to do is to add these tactics to a calendar and share with your leadership and key stakeholders for their collective support.

PART 2: Getting Tactical

Campaigning

It's important to look at your digital communication program holistically to make sure you are cultivating your contacts effectively. Asking people for money is but one piece of a larger, matrixed communication program online.

As your organization's digital leader, the more thoughtful your digital communication program, the greater your ability to nurture a large, engaged online community and the better you'll be at fundraising. Campaigning is a great tool to evaluate your digital communications program.

Guiding principles for online campaigning

You can think of these guiding principles as a methodology toolkit.

- *Cultivate your contacts*
Your content has to have a unique value to attract subscribers and followers. Even in email, you're waging a dialogue where personalization and relevant messaging directly effect list engagement.
- *Keep permission marketing in mind*
Seth Godin defines permission marketing as "the privilege ... of delivering anticipated, personal, and relevant" messaging. Why is it effective? Because in a largely unregulated sector, permission marketing shows you care about your constituent. Being able to call on a community to support your mission is a privilege, and that approach should be at the heart of every communication you have.
- *Check your workflow*
How is data from your acquisition program imported to your database, and how is it then used? From acquisition to list creation to database management, workflow is the key. Personalization is only as effective as the data that powers it.
- *Integrate by offering value*
No campaign exists in a vacuum. What else is being communicated to your audience targets? What offline communications are they receiving from your organization (for example, membership renewals)? Is your digital campaign recognized in other channels? If not, why not?
- *Test to improve deliverability*
Testing never lets you down. It allows you to respond, informed by data. Test one thing at a time, and make sure you take the time to review.



Did you know?
In the first full year since Canada's Anti-Spam Law compliance required stricter email opt-in processes, the 2016 Blackbaud Luminate Online Benchmark Report found Canadian organizations were rising to the challenge. Canadians saw 15% organic email growth and were among the highest performers for the sector.

Covering your ask: Legal requirements you should know about

It's not just a best practice, it's the law. While many of our tools have controls that help prevent us from spamming, you need to look beyond the tools to the workflow process to ensure your organization is compliant. Here are some regulations that may be relevant to your organization's fundraising:

CAN-SPAM Act (Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing Act): Law that sets the rules for commercial email and establishes requirements for commercial messages.

COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act): Rule designed to protect children's privacy.

Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act: Law designed to protect financial services consumers.

HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act): Law addressing patient privacy protections.

Charitable Solicitation Registration: Requirement by many states for nonprofits to be registered to raise funds in that state, important to note if you're sending emails across state lines.

Note: Canada, the European Union, Australia, and India have developed their own laws around privacy. If you're planning to solicit there, make sure you're compliant.

Six key components of a campaign

No matter what the size of your organization, your campaign plan will need to consider:

1. **Content**: what you are communicating, the message and visuals
2. **Channels**: what you can use to distribute your appeal, for example website, intranet, email, search, social, mobile, and paid advertising
3. **Audience**: who you will be targeting and how
4. **Analytics**: how you are tracking specific campaign tactics (vital when reporting and testing)
5. **Workflow**: the process for managing contact data and donations throughout the campaign
6. **Timeline**: the time you need to get it all done



No budget for online ads? Google has a nonprofit program that offers up to \$10,000 a month in ads for qualifying nonprofits.

Building on the framework

Now it's time to flesh out the strategy frame you've built. First, remember your goal and objectives from pages 4 and 5. Copy them here as a reference.

As you work through the following exercises, emphasize the value offered to your prospective donors with each response. You have an opportunity to expand on your initial messaging in thoughtful, more sophisticated ways.

Reiterate the importance of focusing on a single goal and supporting related objectives

Goal: The Digital Fundraising goal for the Health NPO is to raise over \$1 million dollars online in 2018.

Your objectives

1. Increase direct donations from first-time donors

2.

Tactics

**1. Launch year-end fundraising
2. Participate in #GivingTuesday on social media
3. Increase first-time donors
4. Prompt past donors to give**

1.

2.

3.

4.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Content

Explain how you plan to modify the messaging to feature a unique value for each channel. Note whether you intend to offer a sequence of messages through a particular channel.

Website: **Separate landing pages for new donors, previous donors, young people, bequests.**

Intranet: **Develop campaign landing page offering toolkit materials for supporting organizations.**

Email: **Segments for previous donors, former members, volunteers, young people.**

Social media: **Organic social media marketing and paid social media marketing by channel.**

Search: **Ads targeting people interested in health to learn more about our programs.**

Mobile: **Text campaign to former donors asking for urgent action.**

List the three most important Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for your campaign and how they will be measured. Think through what that will mean from an operational perspective and how will you track the KPI?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Channels

Note here what you feel is the optimal channel mix for your campaign, whether one is weighted as more important than the others, and why:

Email is our primary channel for previous donors but is useless to reach new donors. We will use advertising to bring prospective new donors to program information pages to the Health NPO website.

Audience

Is there an audience missing from your case study? Explain how you will test whether an audience may be missing:

At Health NPO, we might consider trying to reach more potential bequesters by advertising in niche media. We could use the audience insights on our ad and social networks to find out if we're reaching those prospective donors in the right age and demographic categories.

Analytics – your guide to success

In order to effectively measure specific online campaigning tactics, you'll need to be able to track the performance of each one. Analytics will help you understand how your campaign is performing and often uncover insights that can help you improve your performance in real time, for example: which search marketing ads are generating the most donations.

Analytics concepts can get confusing, with so many terms: event tracking, conversion goals, success events, multi-channel funnels, and so on. For our purposes, we'll focus on the most important: a completed online donation.



Did you know? Online fundraising increased 14% in 2016 among all nonprofits according to the M+R Benchmark studys. Email accounted for 26% of that revenue. Have you measured how much it's changed at your organization?

With analytics in place, it's relatively easy to set up a conversion goal for online donation tracking, provided you have access to the back end of your donation form's confirmation page, where you'll need to place some code. A word of caution here: don't wait to set this up until the last minute. Depending on what you're using for donation processing (your own custom-built e-commerce form or a third-party solution,) you'll need to place a bit of code on the confirmation page to track a true donation conversion. If you're working through a third party that can take some time. Of course, using this approach you can also track subscription, contact form, and all manner of other KPIs as well.

Workflow: Making or breaking your campaign

Workflow is an underappreciated variable and one that can define your success. Consider the following workflows and add your own there are others that are significant for your test campaign:

Your campaign is generating new donors/contacts for the organization. How are those contacts being folded into your email communication program? If they didn't donate during this campaign, what is your communications plan to cultivate them in the future?

How will these new constituents be recognized in your legacy database?

What have you done in this campaign to integrate your new constituents into your social media program?

Timeline: Counting backwards from your goal

Consider the timeline for each milestone in your campaign in relation to the channels you are using and any sequenced messaging you would like to apply. Often, it helps to work backwards from your goal. Fill in the framework with the main actions you will take at each milestone.

The following is a timeline working backwards from a big finish. In the middle line, we've added activities that we recommend at different stages of the campaign. Add your own campaign milestones and activities to the right column.

**Goal
reached!
Celebrate!**

- Thank donors
- Report to leadership
- Report to staff
- Identify lessons learned;
modify what may need
to be changed
- Pull tracking, forms
- Update records

**¾ goal
reached**

- Examine analytics,
donor response to
identify what needs to
be changed
- Communicate progress
internally
- Recognize/suppress
participating donors

**½ goal
reached**

- Examine analytics,
donor response to
identify what needs to
be changed
- Communicate progress
internally
- Recognize/suppress
participating donors

**¼ goal
reached**

- Examine analytics,
donor response to
identify what needs to
be changed
- Communicate progress
internally (externally, if
appropriate);
- Recognize/suppress
participating donors

**Campaign
launch**

- Coordinate
announcement among
all targets through all
selected channels

4 weeks ahead

- Confirm email list pulls; create templates
- Develop donation form pages, as needed
- Set up analytics
- Create event in social media, if appropriate

8 weeks ahead

- Post internal memo outlining campaign, roles
- Post campaign web page (hidden from navigation)
- Confirm approval of budget, messaging, visuals

12 weeks ahead

- Define the campaign scope, strategy, and budget; construct a to-do list assigned to staff
- Reach out to internal stakeholders for their input and support
- Share campaign strategy with vendors for their input

Review: What have you learned?

Congratulations, you’ve waged a successful campaign, and high fives have been shared with your team—now make sure the learnings don’t get lost. Distill the program, including how key measures were addressed.

Leadership: What are some summary takeaways that leadership can use to understand and appreciate the impact of your efforts? What was the program you created to make this happen?

Constituents: How will you communicate the importance of their participation and impact to campaign donors? How can they learn more or engage further for free?

Staff: How will you help your campaign stakeholder team, department, and staff colleagues understand how this campaign and their support made a difference to key organizational objectives?

Yourself: How will you apply learnings from this campaign to subsequent campaigns? What tactics, timeline, or targeting would you do differently?

Conclusion

Truly successful digital fundraising occurs when:

- There's organizational consensus on your strategy,
- You take the time to think through the prospective donor's experience, and
- You do what it takes to support that by adopting technology and workflow processes that enhance their journey.

Being strategic allows you to better manage a responsive and fast-changing environment. Keep your goal in mind and it will allow you to be agile and adapt to changes. Feel free and empowered to use your digital strategy to process requests, validating why some projects and activities deserve your focus over others. Central to all of this, of course, is the experience you are providing donors and the relationships that you'll be able to nurture for years to come.

This workbook has taken you through the process of developing your fundraising goal through building objectives, identifying key audiences, and matching tactics with the audiences who are likely to be moved by them.

No matter what your organization's capacity, you have the potential as a digital leader to transform your organization online in meaningful ways by using this workbook as a guide. Lead with distinction and integrity—it won't be lost on your constituents.

**“You miss
100 percent
of the shots
you don't
take.”**

—Wayne Gretzky