Cut Through the Clutter

With Your Year-End Fundraising

2019 Edition
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**In Part 1 of this book, you’ll discover:**

5 key insights to help you cut through all of the year-end fundraising clutter.

**In Part 2, you’ll find:**

10 proven strategies based on real-life fundraising experiments to help you improve results.

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A Note From the Authors

The end of the calendar year is a potential fundraising gold mine. In fact, our data shows that the average nonprofit brings in 35% of their online revenue during the year-end season.

But each year, it’s increasingly apparent that we need new online strategies to cut through all of the year-end noise.

During the 2018 year-end season (Nov. 15, 2018 – Dec. 31, 2018), we analyzed the emails we received from 243 nonprofit organizations spanning various sizes and verticals.

Our primary goal was to find unique insights that you can use to craft strategies that will cut through the noise of the year-end inbox and ensure that your message stands out.

To get an even clearer picture, we compared our observations to real online revenue figures from 25 organizations with active online fundraising programs.

By comparing these two data sets, we’ve found 5 insights that you can test this year-end season to make sure your message has the best chance of reaching your donors.

But this report doesn’t stop there...

We’ve also outlined 10 strategies proven through real-world experimentation that can help you get more opens, clicks, donations, and revenue this year-end season.

It’s our sincerest hope that these 5 insights and 10 proven strategies will lead to your best year-end fundraising campaign ever.

Enjoy the study, and best of luck in all of your fundraising efforts.

– Nathan, Brady, Tim, and all the folks rooting for you this season at NextAfter
Insights from Analyzing 7000+ Emails from Year-End 2018
You Can’t Expect People to Give to You if you never ask them to donate.
58% of organizations sent emails on Giving Tuesday 2018.

52% of organizations sent emails on December 31st, 2018.

December 31st and Giving Tuesday are two of the largest giving days of the year. According to our data, these two days represent 39.8% of total year-end revenue. Organizations that decline to send emails on these critical days are missing out on significant potential revenue.

Be sure to email your donors on both Giving Tuesday and December 31st.
Most Year-End Emails are Sent at the Same Times.

But sending on the weekends is an option.
Email Send Times Heat-Map

|       | 12 AM | 1 AM | 2 AM | 3 AM | 4 AM | 5 AM | 6 AM | 7 AM | 8 AM | 9 AM | 10 AM | 11 AM | 12 PM | 1 PM | 2 PM | 3 PM | 4 PM | 5 PM | 6 PM | 7 PM | 8 PM | 9 PM | 10 PM | 11 PM |
|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Sun   | 1     | 5    | 2    | 9    | 26   | 36   | 29   | 45   | 81   | 99   | 39    | 54    | 32    | 31   | 25   | 30   | 26   | 33   | 16   | 27   | 20   | 18   | 0     | 5     |
| Mon   | 9     | 4    | 2    | 28   | 38   | 45   | 71   | 146  | 116  | 146  | 101  | 125   | 95    | 51   | 58   | 81   | 89   | 67   | 65   | 86   | 60   | 46   | 14   | 12    |
| Tue   | 9     | 6    | 3    | 28   | 44   | 43   | 66   | 115  | 103  | 117  | 105  | 97    | 82    | 77   | 91   | 67   | 70   | 97   | 88   | 67   | 46   | 47   | 17   | 11    |
| Wed   | 3     | 7    | 9    | 25   | 26   | 45   | 38   | 110  | 66   | 97   | 88   | 110   | 71    | 56   | 27   | 48   | 52   | 67   | 45   | 39   | 20   | 20   | 6     | 5     |
| Thu   | 2     | 4    | 0    | 25   | 45   | 34   | 44   | 86   | 131  | 161  | 145  | 121   | 71    | 64   | 32   | 54   | 30   | 50   | 39   | 48   | 24   | 32   | 2     | 2     |
| Fri   | 4     | 0    | 2    | 26   | 35   | 43   | 34   | 94   | 89   | 103  | 110  | 122   | 96    | 37   | 51   | 49   | 42   | 43   | 43   | 18   | 13   | 14   | 4     | 6     |
| Sat   | 0     | 0    | 1    | 22   | 27   | 28   | 20   | 49   | 53   | 94   | 92   | 95    | 34    | 16   | 11   | 17   | 22   | 3    | 28   | 23   | 6    | 28   | 1     | 1     |

The inbox is **Less Crowded** in the early morning, late afternoon, and evenings.

The inbox is **Most Crowded** on Mon, Tues, Thurs, and Friday from 7am to Noon.

The inbox is the **Least Crowded** in the afternoons on Saturday and Sunday.
Most Emails aren’t Being Sent by Real Humans.

Yet donors prioritize emails from people.
Research from Litmus* has shown that 42% of people look first at **the name of the sender** when deciding whether or not to open an email.

Additional experimentation from NextAfter has proven that sending from a real human being (not the name of an organization) can significantly **increase email opens**.

Yet, only **13% of organizations used a person as the sender** name in their year-end emails.

By **sending from a real person**, this organization saw a 28% increase in email opens.

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*Litmus research based on a survey of 1,361 American adults on July 5, 2016.
Everyone is Saying the Same Things.

Especially on December 31st.
Cut Through the Clutter

63% of Dec. 31st emails directly referenced the **year-end deadline** in the subject line.

40% of Dec. 31st emails offered some type of **donation match** in the subject line.

Adding urgency in a subject line is a proven way to **increase email opens**. And matching gifts are often effective at incentivizing a donation.

But if your **subject line says the same thing as everyone else’s**, it’s possible that your message is getting diluted.

Be sure to **communicate why someone should give to you**, and use deadlines and matches as incentives to give **now instead of later**.
The last week of the year is being overlooked.

While Giving Tuesday might be getting too much attention.
9.9% of emails were sent on 
**Giving Tuesday.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Emails Received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-Nov</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-Nov</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-Nov</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-Nov</td>
<td>400</td>
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<tr>
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<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>19-Nov</td>
<td>600</td>
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<td>20-Nov</td>
<td>700</td>
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<td>21-Nov</td>
<td>800</td>
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<td>22-Nov</td>
<td>900</td>
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<td>25-Nov</td>
<td>1200</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-Nov</td>
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<td>27-Nov</td>
<td>1400</td>
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<tr>
<td>28-Nov</td>
<td>1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>29-Nov</td>
<td>1600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-Nov</td>
<td>1700</td>
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8.5% of emails were sent on 
**December 31st.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
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<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-Dec</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-Dec</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>6-Dec</td>
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<td>7-Dec</td>
<td>350</td>
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<td>400</td>
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<td>9-Dec</td>
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<td>10-Dec</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-Dec</td>
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<td>12-Dec</td>
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<td>13-Dec</td>
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<td>15-Dec</td>
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<td>30-Dec</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-Dec</td>
<td>1550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonprofits invested more in communicating to donors on Giving Tuesday, despite significantly greater revenue opportunity on the last day of the year.

Don’t give up on Giving Tuesday, but be sure to spend more effort communicating on December 31st and during the last week of the year.

Canadians sent 346% more email on Giving Tuesday than Dec. 31st.

30% of organizations sent nothing after December 25th.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-Dec</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

53% of Online Year-End Revenue came in during these 6 days.
Strategies to Test
Based on More Than 2000 Online Fundraising Experiments
Make Your Case for Support Before You Even Send an Email.
In this experiment, a series of 6 different articles was created that focused on the impact of a donation to this organization.

The thought was that if they could help potential donors understand the impact of a donation before making an appeal, they could increase the likelihood that someone would donate.

**Control**
The control group was made up of email subscribers that had not seen the articles related to donation impact.

**Treatment**
The treatment group was made up of subscribers that had seen and read the articles about the impact of a donation.

**Key Takeaway**
By reinforcing the impact of a donation before making the appeal, they saw a 196% increase in donations. Test ways that you can use content prior to your email appeals to help potential donors understand why a gift to you is important.
Communicate Like A Real Human Being.
In this experiment, the original email appeal used a very typical email template including a colored background, visible preheader text, a logo, a hero image, and a call-to-action button.

For the treatment, they wondered if an email that appeared to be sent by a real person would increase response.

The treatment dropped the background and the hero image, although it still contained a logo and a button.

**Key Takeaway**

A more personal email increased click-through rate by 80%. And we consistently see that the more personal the email, the better the performance.

Test dropping your designed email template, and send an email that looks like one you might send to a friend or coworker.
Use a Match to Incentivize Donors to Give Now.
In this experiment, this organization wondered just how much of an impact a matching gift challenge would make on donor conversion.

The original email was a standard case for support style email with a direct donation ask, emphasizing the December 31st deadline.

The treatment email added in language around the financial need, and leveraged a matching challenge as an incentive to donate.

**Key Takeaway**

The treatment version of the email saw a 50% increase in donations by spending more time focusing on the financial need and leveraging the match challenge as an opportunity to help meet that need.

If you have the opportunity, **test using a matching gift challenge** to further incentivize donors to give during the last week of the year.

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**Control**

The end of the year is upon us and Museum of the Bible is working hard to meet a $1 million goal by midnight tomorrow night (December 31).

In our first year, Museum of the Bible welcomed one million guests to engage with the history, narrative and impact of the Bible. While we are pleased so many have visited, we know there is still so much to do.

In the next year, we are poised and ready to seize exciting opportunities to engage even more people with the Bible. In order to do this, we need your continued support. The museum does not receive government funding, so we rely on donors like you to continue and further our mission.

[Can we count on you to help us engage all people with the Bible in 2019?](#)

Please join us in our mission to share the history, narrative and impact of the Bible with all people. [Make your tax-deductible donation to Museum of the Bible today.](#)

On behalf of the more than 50,000 donors, 20,000 members and our staff and families, thank you for everything you do to further the mission of Museum of the Bible. We wish you a prosperous and joyous New Year.

Best regards,

Kee McKenzie

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**Treatment**

The end of the year is upon us and Museum of the Bible is working hard to meet a $1 million goal by midnight tomorrow night (December 31).

In our first year, Museum of the Bible welcomed one million guests to engage with the history, narrative and impact of the Bible. While we are pleased so many have visited, we know there is still so much to do.

We see significant opportunities and a few challenges on the horizon for the year ahead. We will seize opportunities to ensure we fulfill the mission of the museum. We invite all people to engage with the Bible. We also see challenges that we need to address the financial requirements of our mission. In order to engage even more people in 2019, we need your continued support. The museum does not receive government funding so we rely on donors like you.

[Can we count on you to help us engage all people with the Bible in 2019?](#)

Thanks to a generous donor, all gifts will be doubled via a matching grant, so your donation will have twice the impact.

You have a wonderful opportunity to play an integral part in sharing the history, the narrative, and the impact of the Bible so please [make your tax-deductible donation to Museum of the Bible today](#).

On behalf of the more than 50,000 donors, 20,000 members and our staff and families, thank you for everything you do to further the mission of Museum of the Bible. We wish you a prosperous and joyous New Year.

Best regards,

Kee McKenzie
Give Your Donors Something Before You Ask Them to Give.
On Giving Tuesday, this organization offered their donors a free eBook. And they had 2 methods of delivering the book.

In Version A, the donor was given the eBook automatically when they clicked through from an email, and then presented with a donation opportunity right away.

In Version B, they sent donors an email that went to a landing page to download the eBook. After filling out the download form, they were presented with a donation opportunity.

Key Takeaway
Version B saw a **70% increase in donations** when donors had to fill out a form in order to get the eBook.

From this experiment – and many others like it – we can see that offering something of value for free can lead to reciprocal generosity. In this case, that meant a major increase in Giving Tuesday donations.
Show Donors The Progress of Your Campaign.
In this experiment, the original donation page included a progress bar showing how close the organization was to reaching its campaign goal. They wanted to know if the progress bar was actually making a difference or not. Progress bars are often a best practice, but not all “best practices” are the best performing.

Control

Stand with Heritage by December 31 and advance conservative policy victories

Goal: $1,000,000
$667,311

For nearly a decade, our movement has faced opposition at every turn. Eight years of an Obama administration resulted in expansive government, one unlawful executive order after another, and Obamacare, one of the greatest failed policies in recent memory.

A divided, often ineffective Congress has stifled our ability to advance principled legislation to reduce regulation and taxes, restore Constitutional limited government, and help the American economy grow.

And an activist Supreme Court has ignored the Constitution in many high-profile cases, telling conservatives that we are on the wrong side of history and threatening decades of cultural progress from behind the bench.

But on one Tuesday in November, the American people spoke and the entire balance of power shifted. And now, with a Republican President-elect, majorities in the Senate and the House, and conservatives appointed to select Supreme Court Justices, conservatives are in a near-unprecedented position to lead our country back to a place of liberty, opportunity, and prosperity.

And one policy organization has been selected to provide the ideas, intellectual firepower, and leadership needed to make this transition: The Heritage Foundation.

The President-elect’s transition team includes several Heritage staff including Founder Ed Feulner, who are implementing Heritage’s three-part Mandate for Leadership plan to provide hundreds of specific steps to roll back the Obama’s oppressive liberal agenda.

Heritage provides the President-elect and Congress with the intellectual firepower to accomplish key priorities.

Treatment

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Heritage provides the President-elect and Congress with the intellectual firepower to accomplish key priorities.

Key Takeaway

When they removed the progress bar, they saw a 6.5% decrease in conversion rate. The progress bar was indeed helping donors to see the urgency, as well as create the bandwagon effect.

If you’re not using a progress bar already, be sure to test one on your year-end campaign donation page.

6.5% Decrease in Donation Conversion
Use a Countdown Clock to Create a Sense of Urgency.
In these experiments, countdown clocks were added to attempt to increase urgency. In the experiment on top, the countdown clock was added to a donation page. In the experiment on the bottom, it was added to an email.

**Key Takeaway**
Countdown clocks can help create a sense of urgency and help your donor to see that their gift is needed now.

Test using a countdown clock on your donation page and in an email appeal to increase urgency.

**Quick Tip**
We’ve found that countdown clocks only make a meaningful impact when used during the final week of a campaign.
Be Careful of Combining Countdown Clocks and Progress Bars.
In this experiment, the original donation page used a countdown clock placed near the headline on the page. It showed how close they were getting to the campaign deadline.

In the treatment, they wondered if combining a countdown clock with a progress bar could multiply the sense of urgency, and lead to greater donations.

Key Takeaway
Although both the countdown clock and the progress bar have individually been shown to increase donations, the combination of the two elements led to a 29% decrease in donations.

It’s possible that these elements together decreased clarity around the goal. It’s also possible that the progress bar early in the campaign made donors feel like the goal was insurmountable within the time that was left.
Transcribe Your Fancy Video, and Use the Text Instead.
In this experiment, this organization wondered if copy could do a better job than a video of helping the donor understand the value of donating. The original page had a video. The treatment page took a transcription of the video it and put it as text on the page instead.

**Key Takeaway**
Communicating the value proposition through text increased donation conversion by 560%. That means that **text was much more effective than the video at showing why someone should give.**

If you have a fancy year-end video, test using the transcript to create more value proposition copy on your page. You can save your video for nurturing content like blog posts, articles, and social media.
Visually Emphasize Your Desired Gift Amount.
In this experiment, the original donation page used a standard gift array offering 3 recommended gift amounts, as well as an open “other” field.

For the treatment, they added a “Most Popular” indicator on the defaulted gift amount to see if this would lead to an increase in average gift size.

**Key Takeaway**
Adding this “Most Popular” indicator to the gift array reduced friction in the decision making process and *increased revenue per visitor by 23.8%*. Additionally, it increased mobile revenue by 44%.

Add a “Most Popular” indicator to *clarify expectations for donors and reduce friction*. 

### Control

If you have questions or need more information call 1-888-330-6264 Monday thru Thursday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Central Time.

**Your Donation**

- $25
- $50
- $100

**Billing Information**

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Country

### Treatment

If you have questions or need more information call 1-888-330-6264 Monday thru Thursday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Central Time.

**Your Donation**

- $25
- $50
- $100

**Billing Information**

First Name

Email Address

Country

**23.8%**

Increase in Revenue per Visitor
Make Sure Your Donors Know Their Gift is Secure.

Simply Having a Secure Page Doesn’t Cut it.
In this experiment, the original page was already a secure page. But they wondered if making it overtly clear that the page was secure would help decrease anxiety and increase donations.

In particular, they wanted to **reinforce the security of the page** at the moment the donor would be most anxious: entering their credit card number.

**Key Takeaway**

By setting the credit card fields apart from background of the page and **adding a simple padlock icon**, they saw a 14.4% increase in donation conversion. No additional security was added – they simply visually showed the donor that it was secure.

**Test adding these security indicators around your credit card field to reduce anxiety.** If you can’t, consider adding copy to re-affirm that the gift is secure.

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**Control**

- [ ] * City
- [ ] * State
- [ ] * Zip Code

- [ ] * Email Address
- [ ] Preferred Phone

- [ ] Yes! Keep me posted on CaringBridge news, involvement opportunities and how my gift makes a difference.

- [ ] * Credit Card Number
- [ ] * Expiration Month
- [ ] * Expiration Year
- [ ] * Verification Code

- [ ] * Email Address
- [ ] Preferred Phone

- [ ] Yes! Keep me posted on CaringBridge news, involvement opportunities and how my gift makes a difference.

---

**Treatment**

- [ ] * City
- [ ] * State
- [ ] * Zip Code

- [ ] * Email Address
- [ ] Preferred Phone

- [ ] Yes! Keep me posted on CaringBridge news, involvement opportunities and how my gift makes a difference.

- [ ] * Credit Card Number
- [ ] * Expiration Month
- [ ] * Expiration Year

- [ ] * Email Address
- [ ] Preferred Phone

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14.4%

Increase in Donation Conversion
About NextAfter

NextAfter is Three Things...

A Fundraising Research Lab
Conducting marketplace research, A/B testing, and digital experimentation to discover what works to attract, acquire, and retain more donors and raise more money online.

A Digital Fundraising Consultancy
Working side-by-side with nonprofit organizations to help them develop and execute research-backed digital fundraising strategies designed to generate sustainable online revenue growth.

An Institute for Online Fundraising
Equipping nonprofit fundraisers and digital marketers with data-driven and evidence-based research, resources, and training.

These three things are unified in our mission to decode what works in fundraising and make it as accessible to as many nonprofits as possible. It is our belief that if we can truly deliver on our mission we can, together, unleash the most generous generation in the history of the world.

Learn more about the research lab at nextafter.com/research, our consulting at nextafter.com, and the institute at nextafter.com/institute.
Online Courses

NextAfter’s online courses will equip you with the tools and knowledge you need to grow your online fundraising in essential areas including:

- Year-End Fundraising
- Donation & Landing Page Optimization
- Email Fundraising Optimization
- Copywriting for Online Fundraising
- and more

Grow your online fundraising skills through online certification courses at courses.nextafter.com.

Research Studies

The best way to optimize your fundraising is to see it how the donor sees it. Each one of our free research studies takes a look at a different aspect of online fundraising from the donor’s perspective to help you generate new ideas to test and grow your online revenue.

Download and read any of our free online fundraising research studies at nextafter.com/resources.