

Help Center

**MARKET YOUR
INITIATIVE**

5





Communication With Maximum Impact

Once you commit to hosting an initiative and decide what exactly you want to highlight with this event, all of your communication should be designed to further that cause. Your communication strategy will need to become focused and directed.

The content of these messages, as well as tone, timing, and platform, should be tailored and optimized in order to reach as much of your audience as possible through your chosen channels. While you want to keep your message focused and centered on a singular narrative, you can't simply copy and paste text from one medium into another.

Beyond the logistics of format and length restrictions that vary between email, social media, post, and phone, these different platforms allow—and require you—to interact with your donors and followers in different ways. Here are a few ways to ensure that your message is clearly received and not lost in the shuffle of correspondence.



Say What You Need To Say

Regardless of the restrictions that different platforms bring, there are a few crucial pieces that have to be included in your messaging: the initiative and the Call to Action. In a longer format, like an email, you have some space to explore these, but even short tweets should include an ask and preliminary information about your initiative.

Where you have room to speak at greater length, provide a brief explanation of your initiative in the first communication, particularly if you have not launched before and your followers might be unfamiliar with the details. Lay out the specifics of this undertaking and what makes it different from your other fundraising campaigns. Be sure to emphasize the limited donation period if there is one to create a sense of urgency. Include your hashtag, graphic or icon, and a link to your website anywhere and everywhere you can. If you're working in a truncated medium like Twitter, your hashtag and links back to your fundraising page and website become especially important.

You may have several Calls to Action that shift focus a bit from your earliest communication to the later pieces. Even if you opt for a soft launch, that won't come until a week or two before your event. When you send announcements months ahead of time that you are launching, ask people to mark their calendars, share information, or follow you on social media. As you get closer to your launch date, ask for help with peer-to-peer fundraising and for their individual participation.

There are many ways you can ask people to get involved, and starting early keeps them engaged from the start. However, don't put out a laundry list of asks all at once. Dropping a lot on your donors and followers at one time can feel like homework or a to-do list, which may make them less likely to want to engage.

Effective communication for your fundraising deals in asks, not tasks.

Decide on a series of asks when you first begin to plan this initiative. Dole them out over the 1-3 month lead time in order to maintain a more constant stream of engagement that makes people want to reach out to their own networks, thus growing yours.

Even in correspondence that isn't specifically driven by your initiative, try to at least include a reference to this big, upcoming appeal to keep the event on people's radar. If you send regular newsletters, include reminders and information about your launch in every one. This can be as substantial as writing several paragraphs to talk about the project or as subtle as featuring the icon your team designed for the initiative in a header, footer, or sidebar.

Be Personal, Be Specific

Your correspondence should focus heavily on this particular initiative, but you should also extend that focus to your donors and followers whenever possible. This initiative cannot be successful without them; they are inherently part of it. Make them feel vital and included in the process by personalizing your communication with them. In emails, letters, or anything sent to an individual, use their name. An ask that feels tailored to request a specific person's help can be more impactful than one that casts an indiscernibly wide net.

If possible, note their connection to your organization. Are they primarily a volunteer? A new or recurring donor? Is this one of their first interactions? A line or two that shows you know a bit about their interests, who they are, and what they mean to you takes the communication from transactional to friendly and can help endear them to your organization.

If you don't already use segmented lists for your email or postal correspondence, the practice can make personalization even easier and can help you deliver more effective Calls to Action and avoid leaving money on the table. You should never send the same ask to a person who regularly donates \$10 and one who donates \$100. Similarly, you should use different appeals for volunteers, one-time, and repeat donors. By maintaining well-curated segmented lists, you can draft a small handful of slightly different emails and see major results. It takes less time than writing dozens or hundreds of notes separately but still feels more personal than blanket mailings.

The criteria you use to segment your lists will vary based on the needs of your organization and the information you collect from your donors, volunteers, and other members of your network. Potential sorting methods might include action (volunteer, one-time donor, repeat donor), affiliation (faculty, alumni, student, friend, family), age, or average gift size. You may elect to use a combination of these or other criteria, but make sure that you only list each person once, even if they might fit in several categories.

No matter who you're talking to or what you're saying, remember that there's a real person on the other side. Be friendly! Keep your tone optimistic and amiable. There's a problem to be solved, but your donors can fix it. Even the famously sad ASPCA commercials stress hope in their dialogue and textual moments. There are many ways to balance being overly peppy (diminishing your problem) and being a downer (making things look hopeless). If you haven't already found a sweet-spot, you're probably closer than you think. The level of engagement you see on your posts will reflect positively with any changes toward a personalized, humanized note.





Catching Them At The Right Time

According to the 2017 [Global Mobile Consumer Survey](#), the average person checks their phone 47 times per day. That number jumps to 86 times per day for the 18-24 year old demographic. Despite all those eyes on screens at seemingly all hours of the day, there are actual peaks and lulls in online interaction, thus creating notably great and terrible times to share content. An email will linger in the inbox if it needs to, but posts on Facebook and Twitter, with their approximate half-lives of 90 and 24 minutes respectively, can get lost in the feed. Because impact, engagement, and longevity of posts vary from platform to platform, it's important to know how to best utilize different platforms.

[Schedule posts in advance](#) for specific times on different platforms. It's a simple way to ensure that content is approved in advance, appropriately frequent, and live at optimal times. While it's important to be active across platforms, scheduling in advance will also help ensure that your efforts are appropriately divided between different mediums. Just don't forget to interact with your followers, too!

You should be able to see metrics for your specific base of followers on different platforms, but generally speaking, here are [the best times for nonprofits to share content](#) through different channels for maximum interaction:

Platform	Good Times	Great Times	Best Times	Notes for Your Giving Day
Facebook	Weekdays 9:00 am-4:00 pm	Monday 9:00 am Tuesday 6:00 pm Thursday 10:00 am, 12:00 pm Friday 9:00 am, 11:00 am	Wednesday 2:00 pm Friday 2:00 pm	Share 1-2 posts per day in the weeks before your Giving Day and 4-5 times the day of
Twitter	Weekdays 10:00 am-4:00 pm	Tuesday 10:00 am-2:00 pm Thursday 10:00 am-2:00 pm Friday 10:00 am-2:00 pm	Thursday 12:00 pm Friday 11:00 am-12:00 pm	Share 3+ tweets per day in the weeks before your Giving Day and roughly every two hours the day of
Instagram	Weekdays 12:00 pm-5:00 pm	Tuesday 3:00 pm, 9:00 pm Wednesday 3:00 pm-4:00 pm Thursday 2:00 pm-3:00 pm Friday 10:00 am	Friday 2:00 pm	Share 1-2 posts per day in the weeks before your Giving Day and 4-5 times the day of

Because emails don't get lost or overwhelmed in the same way that social media can, the rules about the best time to send them are a bit less specific.



On your launch day, you'll want to send one in the morning around 9:00 am, when people are likely to be first checking for the day, one closer to noon, and one in the evening as a last call/countdown or reminder of the length of the initiative. Additional emails may be sent to update people upon reaching significant benchmarks, like 50%, 75%, and 90%, and to announce stretch goals.

Note that these update emails differ from messages that solicit donations. For your core morning, noon, and night emails, which should contain a more obvious ask, remove people who have already donated to this initiative from the later emails. This is different from your segmented mailing lists and that divide will be very much appreciated by your donors.

Optimizing Your Messaging For An Omnichannel Approach

It can be tempting to favor one or two channels over all others. Some forms are inherently easier to set up and execute. Phone calls and physical mailings, for example, take way more energy and time than social media or even longer emails. Despite this, a diverse range of channels can be crucial to your initiative. An omnichannel approach keeps your initiative visible in multiple ways and increases the chance that one of those channels will get through to your donors.

Moreover, different demographics respond better to different channels. Specifically, different age brackets are more likely to engage with different components of your omnichannel approach. The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y/Millennials all have different priorities and preferences. The ways they give to and interact with organizations vary accordingly. By recognizing and working with some of those differences, you can maximize your success with multiple demographics.

Gen Y (b. after 1981) are tech savvy. They are the generation least likely to donate by phone or mail, but most likely to engage online. They hold organizations accountable and want to see the impact of their contributions. On average, Gen Y donors gave \$481 in 2013.

Gen X (b. 1964-1981) also prefer online donations. In fact, they are more likely to donate through social media than Gen Y. (Though social media can still be used to generate a strong buzz for any demographic on it!) They are more likely than Gen Y to donate through the mail. In 2013, Gen X gave an average of \$732 between their causes of choice, and more than half of them gave material goods.

Baby Boomers (b. 1946-1963) are also very active online, but are substantially more likely to give by mail or phone than either Gen X or Gen Y. Boomers alone accounted for 43% of giving in 2013, averaging \$1,200 per year in addition to goods.

The Silent Generation (b. 1929-1945) are, unsurprisingly, the least likely group to donate online or through social networking, but are the most likely to donate by email or phone. Mail, however, is their preferred method; they donate by mail more than any other generation and prefer it over any other channel. Although the Silent Generation is the lowest in number, they have the highest average contribution of \$1,370.



Of course, these averages don't mean you should ask everyone for vast sums. There will be large and small donors in every age bracket. What these statistics tell us is that none of these channels are completely obsolete. You may not want to divide your efforts perfectly evenly across all platforms, but it's worth including everything to a certain extent. You never know what might be the best way to draw in an individual donor, or which medium might be the final, necessary piece of persuasion after someone has been exposed to various sources.

In communicating across platforms, keep the key essentials of your initiative in mind—the basic rundown, the Call to Action, the ask—but adjust the copy and content for the medium. Include hashtags and links in everything—even paper mailings. Just because it can't be a hyperlink doesn't mean people won't want to find you online.

Medium	Content	Length	Imagery	Notes & Extras
Facebook	Switch it up for frequent posts. Asks, thanks, stories, and updates make for a varied and engaging feed. Thank donors and volunteers by name when possible.	Longer than Instagram or Twitter, shorter than email or mail. You have some freedom here, but you don't want your message doesn't get cut off on people's timelines. Keep it concise, but include details where you can.	Videos and images are reliable attention-getters, boosting interaction and donations. Aim for a 30-90 second video, or series of videos. Include media as much as possible	To effectively use, you need a following before your initiative. Post regularly, share updates. Interact with followers. Maintain an event page. Use Facebook Live to share in-person events.
Twitter	Share a blend of asks, articles, shoutouts, thanks, and stories with snappy attention-getting messages. Links and hashtags for days. Thank people specifically.	No room to waste words! This platform keeps your message quick by default, so make it count. Short tweets (around 100 characters) see the most engagement.	Have fun with videos and pictures. They'll help you stand out in people's feeds and can share information that won't fit in the text.	Build your following before your initiative. Post regularly, share updates. Interact with followers. Twitter demands the most frequent updates.
Instagram	A picture's worth a thousand words. Your caption should share your website and some details about your initiative, but make sure your picture doesn't rely on it completely.	Keep captions on most of your posts close to the length of a tweet. The sweet spot of hashtags falls around 5-10, with 9 seeing the maximum engagement per post. Other than your personalized hashtag and #GivingTuesday, mix them up to avoid shadow banning putting your visibility at risk.	Since this is the basis of Instagram, you'll obviously have pictures or videos in all of your posts. Keep them engaging and varied. Your whole feed shouldn't look the same.	Build your following before your initiative. Post regularly, share updates. Interact with followers.



Medium	Content	Length	Imagery	Notes & Extras
Email	Establish camaraderie, especially if your segmented list gives you enough info to personalize a few lines in different versions. Greet the recipient with familiarity, share the story and link to a source with more detail, explain the goal and impact of this time-driven campaign, and round it out with the Call to Action and links for additional information.	You should only need a few short paragraphs to get your point across. There's plenty of space to include additional resources, like your website, video, and social media, so use some of this space to ground the email within all of the other work happening for this initiative.	Include a video in a handful of your emails and your logo or graphic and a picture or two in all of them. Just be sure to test it so that any visual-heavy formatting isn't lost or changed in coding.	Segment lists in advance. Send regularly (newsletter, etc.), share updates.
Mail	For donors who may rely more on mail than the internet, provide more thorough detail in postal communication. Explain your initiative clearly with a straightforward ask. Personalize anything bigger than a postcard with the recipient's name. Include a Save the Date.	Aim for a postcard to a broader audience and a 1-page letter to a more targeted audience. Keep records of who your mail-in donors are and appeal more heavily to them.	Include your campaign logo or graphic always, and possibly one or several powerful photos. Handwriting, even just a signature, is a nice touch if it's manageable with the size of your mailing.	Send with intention, when you need to. Send updates intermittently (2-4/year) to avoid communication blackouts and provide digital contact info. Handwritten thank-you notes and stewardship practices are always necessary!

There's a lot to consider when meshing together so many avenues of communication with all their distinct best practices, but this is also one area where it's fairly easy to work ahead. The more posts and messages you can draft and schedule in advance, the more freedom you have to interact with your network. Remember to have fun with it, make friends with your network of donors and followers, and check out our sample templates for social media platforms and email.