Digital Fundraising 101 | Principles

Principles of Raising $ Online
- Maximize on and invest in big moments
- Create engaging and timely calls-to-action
- Focus on “high-intent” and likely to convert targets/audiences/keywords
- Segment, Test & Measure: Base decisions off of metrics above all and monitor how results change overtime
- Put authenticity over everything

Writing a Fundraising Appeal
So you want to raise money online...

Including a theory of change is key. Present the reader with a “Crisitunity” -- a real world problem that creates a compelling opportunity to do something to make a difference.

A cause-and-effect sequence that identifies a problem, clearly dictates something the reader can tangibly do, and ends with the resolution of the problem.

This is when readers are also most likely also organically paying attention to your issue.

Here are some things to ask yourself before you write:
- What action am I asking supporters to take?
- Is my message or ask timely?
- What is the goal or key data point?
- What supporter info do you wanna gather?
- How is the landing page experience?
Digital Fundraising 101 | Email

The most effective venue for online fundraising is email fundraising although ads, social media, SMS, and peer-to-peer fundraising campaigns may all be utilized as well.

While ads cost money to run, emails are free to send outside of your monthly CRM cost. You should regularly contact supporters and increase the frequency of fundraising emails within reason, while keeping an eye on engagement and unsubscribes, to maximize what you’re able to raise through email. Send engagement, organizing and petition emails as well as fundraising to keep your supporters engaged.

To make sure you aren’t hitting your supporter list too hard (or risking deliverability problems), you should divide your email list into “tiers” according to activity. Tier 1, the most active, will receive every email, and if they respond exceptionally well, you can send to your Tier 2 and 3 names who haven’t opened an email recently.

‘That way, you’re raising money and providing inactive names with tried and true content that is likely to re-engage them.

The Anatomy of an Email

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Above the Fold
What’s happening right now?
Why does it matter?
What should we do about it?
• The fold of an email is the first ask.
• Above the fold is generally shorter, quicker to the point, and relates to a given moment
• Above the fold is where writers should include their: problem/crisis, theory of change, and first ask

Below the Fold
The bigger picture of a campaign, organizational goals, etc. that builds out from the “Moment story”
• Everything after the first ask of an email
• Key to deepening relationship with readers and your organization.
• After writing an email draft, consider this: What can I move from above the fold to below? Anything? Probably.

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P.S.

One of the most read items in email, a P.S. can be effective at reinforcing the ask or including a different ask.

- Reinforcing the ask
- One last effort at getting people to act
- Adding a twist to the ask
- Instead of just “sign the petition,” “sign the petition and forward this to 5 friends”
- Continue “Movement story”
- Follow up on other priorities of the overall campaign.
- P.S. Did you see CANDIDATES email last week about our rally in YOUR CITY? Sign up now

A Good Email is…

Timely
Timely emails tied to real world things / moments perform better than fabricated moments.

This Fair Fight email was sent after the 5th 2020 Dem Debate in Georgia. It highlighted that at the same time a debate was being held in Georgia, hundreds of thousands of Georgia voters were at risk of being purged from the voter roles and denied their right to vote.
Scannable
When drafting email, consider the letter ‘F’: Readers will read in the shape of this, generally, reading less and less of each line, paragraph, as they continue down the body of the email.

Personalized
The more personalized an email, the more likely a subscriber is to engage. Personalize donation ask amounts to make sure you’re raising as much as possible without asking subscribers for inappropriate amounts. If we have a donor who gave $500 last year, it doesn’t make sense to ask them for $3 in the next email.

Likewise, you’ll want to keep ask amounts low for non-donor and low-dollar audiences so as not to intimidate people away from giving.

Big Picture Tips

Switch Up Email Senders/Signers
- People form relationships with specific senders.
- Different (and relevant) voices will improve results
- Asking supporters to volunteer? Send from the field director
- Asking supporters to share a great news story? Comms director
- Asking supporters to give money? Finance director
- At times, consider sending from the organization itself, not a specific sender

Subject Lines
- Keep them short
- Use personalization in them
- Make them actionable
- Don’t use misleading or scary language

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Use personalization to break down walls and deepen connection

- “Can we count on you?” Vs “Can we count on you, Alex?”
- First name, city, or state, are all great pieces to include when it makes sense
- Data on previous actions is also be very effective
- I know you’ve stepped up (donated) and pitched in before, Alex. Can we count on you to up your commitment and make monthly recurring donation?
- “Having you as one of our top volunteers ..”

Effective Formatting

- Bolding important text -- often the theory of change or the line right before the ask
- Including a button underneath asks
- Including italicized sentences directly after the ask to further drive home why it’s important
- Bulleted list of accomplishments
Digital Fundraising 101 | Key Tools

ActBlue
ActBlue is a tool that any Democratic campaign can take advantage of for free. It allows campaigns and organizations to create fundraising pages and bring in donors with easy to use templates.

CRMs - Customer relationship management
Your CRM will host your supporter data and let you send emails to supporters. The most common in the digital space is NGP, which many campaigns also use for field programs. There are tons of other great alternatives, like Action Network, which is non-profit owned.

A Good CRM…
- Hosts supporter contact & donation data
- Hosts email marketing
- Creates basic landing pages

A Great CRM…
- Tracks long-term value of supporters

Websites… Do you need one?
Websites can be expensive and hard to keep up to date. If you have the budget and someone who is able to regularly update the site, it’s a great investment. Wix, Squarespace and Wordpress all offer lower-cost alternatives to building a website. If not, there are a few steps you can take to cover all the bases a website would:
- Create donate pages in ActBlue or your CRM
- Create a signup page in your CRM that redirects to your ActBlue page once completed
- Maintain and update your social media pages
- Keep a link to a signup or donate page on your social media pages
- SEO optimize so both pages come up when people search basic related phrases

Social Media
Overall, social media is not going to be the bulk of your digital and online fundraising. You should focus it on authentic and engaging content. You should make sure that it is easy for folks to find a place to donate to you if they are explicitly looking for it. Again, SEO optimization and links in social bios will help here.

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Digital Fundraising 101 | Online Ads

Through a series of targeted signup and direct-to-donate campaigns, paid advertising can build a small-dollar donor list that serves as the foundation for a strong digital fundraising operation and far surpass a positive long-term ROAS.

Direct response ads have a primary goal of getting a user to take an action - or directly respond - to your ad in that moment. Direct response KPIs are usually easy to measure and straightforward. The success of DR campaigns is primarily determined by the immediate results/returns (ROI, cost per conversion).

Unlike ads designed to persuade voters, direct response ads are targeted at likely supporters who will take action with you, and are designed to drive actions from those supporters rather than change people’s minds.

Some common direct response objectives include:
- Sign up (email or text)
- Donate
- Look up polling place
- Download a PDF report
- Contact a legislator

Platforms
Google and Facebook have long been the 800lb gorillas of direct response digital ad tools, and for good reason — the targeting and user base of these platforms is unparalleled. That said, as the digital media landscape changes, so do the core platforms audiences engage with. Younger, heavy digital media consumers are engaging with new platforms like TikTok, YouTube and Reddit.

Direct response ad programs of the future will leverage Google and Facebook, but know they are not everything. An investment in new and non-traditional networks can help us reach and impact audiences that aren’t as active and reachable via Google, Facebook and display ad inventory.

Each platform lets you target audiences in a different way:
Paid Social: Facebook, Reddit, Twitter (non-electoral issues)
People who are likely to engage (because they look like existing supporters or interested in X).

Google Search
People who have searched X and/or people who have searched X and are also likely to engage.

YouTube (owned by Google) & Display
People who are subscribed to or watch videos X’s channel, people have searched X on YouTube with ability to layer on likely to engage with news content. People have read about X recently or gone to X website.

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CPA Buys
Campaigns can purchase names from vendors like Democrats.com and DailyKos usually for $2 or less with little initial return. Names from trusted vendors will break even in roughly 2 months and give ten-fold over time.

Types of Ads & Thresholds for Success
Building these lists generally relies on two types of ads, acquisition and direct-to-donate, each with a different objective and measure for success.

Acquisition
For acquisition campaigns, the goal is to bring in new names to the email list at a low cost. Ads will drive to a signup landing page that redirects to an ActBlue fundraising page after completion. We generally consider an acquisition campaign successful when the cost per new name/signup is under $5 and/or the immediate ROAS (Return on Ad Spend) is over 20%.

Direct Donate
For donate ads the primary goal is to raise money from both people already on the email list and new donors. Ads will lead directly to an ActBlue page when clicked. Supporters whose first action with an organization or campaign is a donation are exceptionally high-intent donors and will give back faster than names acquired via sign-up ads who don’t donate right off the bat. Supporters already on the list get an opportunity to donate through the targeted ads. For
these reasons, we consider a donate campaign successful when the total campaign ROAS is 75%-80% - with existing supporters at 110%+ immediate ROAS and new supporters at 50%+ immediate ROAS.

When running DR campaigns it’s important to be regularly checking results. These metrics are gonna tell us if, when, where and how to spend. When campaigns are performing above thresholds, we will likely increase investment. When campaigns are below thresholds we may turn segments or entire campaigns off.

Once on the email list, names from acquisition campaigns typically reach 100% ROAS, giving back what was spent to reach them, within 3-5 months. List rental names will cost under $2 with little initial return, but break even in roughly 2 months and give ten-fold over time.

Optimizing Ads
Rather than set arbitrary spending caps, real-time results will guide the decision making process on spending. Ads will be optimized daily based on performance and allocate budget to best performing concepts in real-time. This is the smart way to do it, but it requires good, consistent reporting. Reports will include a campaign description, total spent, number of signups, cost per signup, total raised and immediate return on ad spend (ROAS). Play a Game to Test Your Skills!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMMEDIATE RETURN ON INVESTMENT AS A %</th>
<th>COST PER EMAIL SIGNUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$.01 to $.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
<td>Keep Going + Monitor</td>
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<td>25-39%</td>
<td>Much as Possible</td>
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<td>40 to 59%</td>
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<td>60 to 79%</td>
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<td>100% to 110%</td>
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<td>110% or more</td>
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Background
As the political landscape shifts, it’s become more important than ever that campaigns and organizations build a small-dollar digital fundraising list.

By acquiring supporters and engaging them with opportunities to donate and take action, campaigns and organizations can build an engaged list of online supporters to sustain action-taker and small-dollar fundraising goals over the years.

Investing in building a small-dollar list can free up call-time and allow candidates and orgs to rely less on PAC $ and large-dollar donors.

The most effective venue for online fundraising is , although social media, SMS, and peer-to-peer fundraising campaigns may all be utilized as well.

This series of trainings will cover:

- Principles & Writing a Fundraising Appeal
- Key Tools
- Email Fundraising
- Online Advertising

Resources
NGP VAN GUIDE: The Basics of Fundraising for a Political Campaign
NerdyEmail - Google Group on email fundraising practices & ethics
Facebook Ad Archive - An archive of all political run ads on Facebook
ACRONYM - An organization working to track digital spend and best practices in the political space
  The Senate FYI Weekly Newsletter
  FWIW (For What It’s Worth) Weekly Newsletter

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