

# DIGITAL IS NOT MYSTICAL

*FUNDRAISING  
BASICS RULE  
BOTH ONLINE  
AND OFF-LINE*



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By Steve Maggio and Dina Fanelli

The growth of online fundraising continues to outpace direct mail, with \$3.2 billion in online donations in 2020, a 21% increase in online giving over 2019, as compared to a 2% increase in overall giving, according to Blackbaud's 2021 *Charitable Giving Report*. Despite this growth, there are still many fundraisers who have yet to tap into the full potential of this exciting addition to the fundraiser's toolkit.

Some of these reluctant fundraisers might be hampered by restrictive budgets. Many of them might simply be enjoying good results with direct mail and are hesitant about embracing new technology. For some, it might be the fear of the unknown.

The good news is that most of the tenets of classic fundraising apply to "new media." The technology and tactics are a bit different, but the underlying strategic and creative theories are the same. You can apply your fundraising knowledge and the data you've gained in direct mail testing over the years to your new digital program.

The most important drivers of success in digital fundraising are the same as direct mail: list, offer and creative. It's still about "reaching the

right person with the right message at the right time."

## Email Campaigns

Email is the most basic and easy to execute foundation of your digital program. There are several ways to build prospect email lists, such as opt-ins on your website and in your direct mail program, rented

lists, and the use of online surveys, petitions and offers of free content to get prospects to sign up for email messaging. E-appends are another effective way to add email addresses to your donor file.

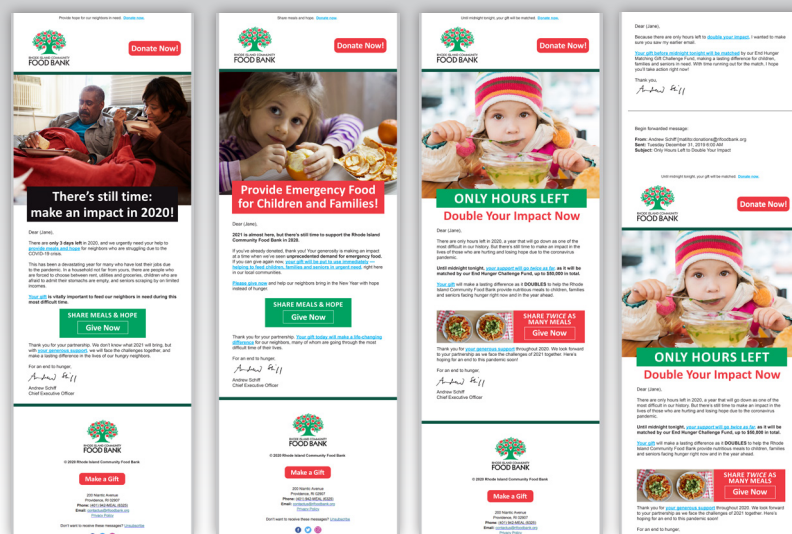
Prospects can then be cultivated with a series of email communications that build a bond, using stories that illustrate

your mission, content that adds value to the donor relationship and culminates in a hard ask using one of your strongest offers. The idea is to build community first and then monetize.

The offers that have always worked through the mail also work in digital communications. Have you noticed



Year-End email appeals are among the most productive digital campaigns for nonprofits, increasing in urgency with each execution.



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how many emails you receive with a Challenge Match offer? This offer has staying power in the digital space, as it has had for decades in direct mail.

Other proven direct mail offers such as Annual Fund, Holiday Appeal, and Member or Supporter Drive can be employed as well, along with straight, “mission/story-based” appeals.

The timing of appeals follows the direct mail paradigm as well, with Q4 and December being the strongest time for digital fundraising.

As always, fundraising is a balance of art and science, a matter of testing multiple variables such as offer, gift ask, copy, design, format, timing and more in a process of continual improvement.

**“Repetition works, which is why you might get five, 10 or more executions of the same campaign at year end.”**

Repetition works, which is why you might get five, 10 or more executions of the same campaign at year end. Fundraisers have been using reminders or follow-up mailings with deadlines in direct mail for years, and this technique also works online. Letting donors know that the “Challenge Match ends December 31” is effective.

Sometimes the same email can be sent with a different subject line, such as “In case you missed it,” with good effect. Another repetition technique is to “forward” an earlier email with a brief, urgent message, “because your support is so important right now.”

Email copy must be more brief and punchy than what you’d write in a direct mail letter, but you still need a clear, concise offer and a

End Campaign” with several emails in the last week of the year ~ and multiple emails on December 31.

Shoot for 25 to 50 emails in your first year. Test and refine your messaging as you go. The nice thing about testing in the digital space is that you can read and react quickly. If you’re testing two subject lines or hero images to part of your file on Tuesday, you can roll out with the winner on Thursday.



strong ask to be successful. And, of course, good storytelling with emotion and urgency.

If you’re just now getting into digital, start with email campaigns that mirror your most successful direct mail executions. Use repetition in the best time slots, especially October, November and December. In addition to your existing campaigns, be sure to include several emails leading up to and including #GivingTuesday, which this year is November 30.

Also load up on an “Urgent Year-

## Lightboxes

Using lightboxes is one of the best ways to grab the attention of visitors to your website, build email lists and share a targeted ad message. Lightboxes are essentially digital ads on your website. They can deliver a targeted message at just the right time for maximum engagement and are proven to work for email lead capture as well as increasing donations.

To capture the target audience’s attention and appear at the right time with a vivid and eye-catching

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message, fundraisers can use different triggers and rules that include but are not limited to time-based interval, scroll trigger, and even an “exit-intent trigger” which catches visitors when they are about to leave your website.

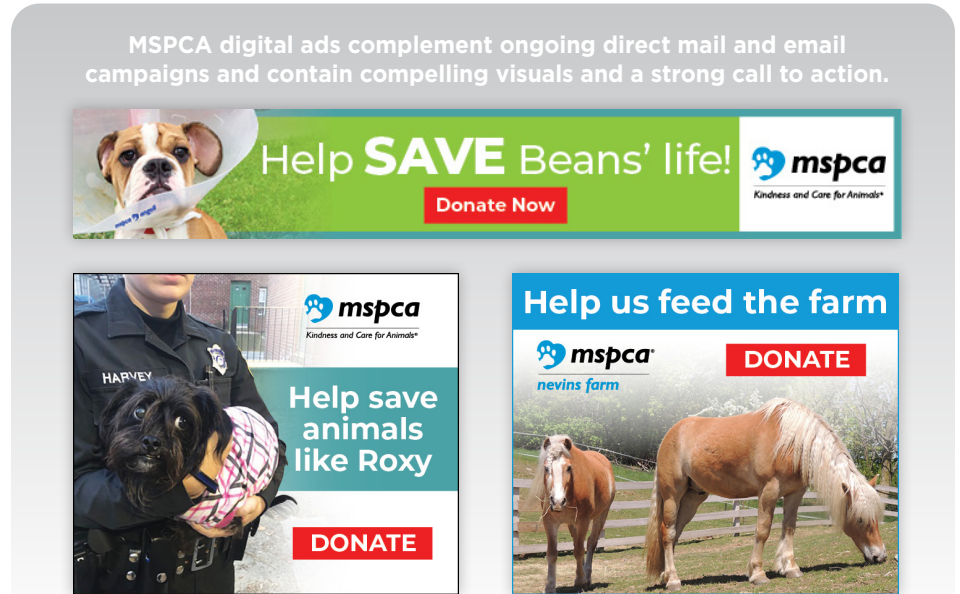


## Google Nonprofit Program

Google’s nonprofit program is a powerful set of tools for your organization’s digital marketing program. Spread the word about your nonprofit’s mission, engage new supporters, fundraise in more ways online. Do all this and more when you leverage Google for Nonprofits.

The Google nonprofit program encompasses office collaboration tools, video fundraising and resources, impact mapping, search engine visibility, mobile fundraising and more.

Fundraisers can also apply for a “Google Ad Grant” and receive \$10,000 of in-kind advertising from Google each month. You’d use it to create text-based ads and get access to tools to help you build effective campaigns that can display on Google Search when people look for information related to your nonprofit. Google Ad Grants help you reach more supporters and lower the barrier to donating.



## Digital Ads

Spending on digital ads by nonprofits increased by 33% in 2020 and was concentrated toward the end of the year, with almost one-third of all spending occurring in December, according to the M+R Benchmarks Report.

Digital ads can be branded or non-branded search engine ads using keywords, social media advertising, such as Facebook ads – and may include display ads or video ads.

There are two main ways to advertise on Facebook. One way is to create a Facebook marketing campaign using image/video content. The second type is to pay to boost your post. Image/video ads can appear on a variety of the different placements including news feeds, the right-hand column and Instagram stories or feeds.

Most fundraising ads ask for a direct donation, although digital ads can also be used for branding, awareness, education and lead

generation. “Coordinated display ads” are banner ads that show up as you are surfing the web. These ads are served through display ad networks.

While there are plenty of different campaign types that can be executed via display networks, the coordinated display campaigns are not like any others as they are based solely on the mail files with postal information. Targeting the mail/offline files becomes possible by using data onboarding providers who have extensive databases of the digital parameters including cookies, IP addresses, device ID’s, etc.

Digital variables are matched to the postal information of the recipient from the mail file. For example, the prospects in your next acquisition mailing can be targeted so that a digital ad is served at the same time the snail mail is arriving in home, thereby increasing potential response.

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## Remarketing

Remarketing (also called retargeting) works by keeping track of people who visit your site or interact with your brand and displaying your retargeting ads to them as they visit other sites online. After placing a JavaScript tag in the footer of your website, this code creates a list of people who visit your site by placing anonymous retargeting “cookies” in their browsers. The list allows different remarketing vendors to display retargeting ads to potential donors as they visit other sites.

Facebook remarketing works similarly to Google remarketing, except that audience lists can be made from people’s Facebook User IDs and phone numbers (as well as their emails). This is a powerful feature for reaching potential donors.

It’s important to note that that half of all nonprofit website visitors used mobile devices, so your message must translate well from the prospect’s desktop computer to their smartphone.

## What can you do on your own?

Organic social media refers to the free content (posts, photos, video, memes, Stories, etc.) that all users, including businesses and brands, share with each other on their feeds. As a brand, when you post organically to your account, you can expect that the people who will see it are:

- A percentage of your followers (a.k.a. your “organic reach”)
- Your followers’ followers (if people choose to share your post)
- People following any hashtags you use

It sounds pretty simple, but the reason that organic social media is the foundation of every digital marketing strategy today is because it’s the best way to nurture a connection with your customers at scale.

For example, brands use organic social to:

- Establish their personality and voice;

- Build relationships by sharing informative, entertaining, and/or inspiring content;
- Engage customers at every stage of their buying journey; and,
- Support their customers with customer service.

## Boosted Posts

A boosted post is a post to your page’s timeline that you can apply money to in order to boost it to an audience of your choosing. When you boost a post, it’ll show up in your audience’s Facebook News Feed as an ad. You can also select Instagram as an ad placement for your boosted post.

**These are just a few of the ways reluctant fundraisers can get their digital fundraising programs up and running. As with all our fundraising endeavors, the digital journey starts with a single step.**



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