

# The Procrastinator's Guide to Year-End Giving - Part 2

By Donna Ann Harris, CMSM, Heritage Consulting Inc. | From *Main Street Story of the Week* | December 11, 2013 |



Last week [we laid out the basics](#) for your last week of the year fundraising campaign. This week we will focus on the timing of your campaign, some tested email subject lines, and how to thank donors and recognize the gifts given to your Main Street organization.

## When to Send Your Emails/E-Newsletters

The five emails you will be sending during this campaign should be sent early in the day (between 9AM and 11AM). Convio, a fundraising and marketing software company for nonprofits, says that email open rates decline significantly after lunch. Network for Good, a digital giving platform, says that thirty percent (30%) of all donations happen in December, and ten percent (10%) of all giving happens the last three days of the year with the peak being on December 31 between 12 noon to 7 PM. Be ready! Your Main Street office should be open, you should be at the computer, answering the phone, and opening the mail. Not everyone will donate via email so make sure your mailing address is on every email/e-newsletter. You may get some checks, but make sure you deposit them on or before December 31.

## Email Subject Lines

As you are preparing your messages, consider the impact of the email subject line as a way to increase open rates, and to attract attention on Facebook and Twitter. We collected actual subject lines from last year's crush of end of year appeals from various preservation, museum, and downtown organizations that we received, and we learned a lot about what makes an effective pitch. Here are three tips:

1. Make your subject line about the donor (not your organization) and their gift's impact on your organization.
2. Use your organization's name or the words "our downtown" in at least one of the five emails, especially if your email reply includes an acronym or shorthand.
3. Create urgency for your donor's gift, and remind them of the looming end of year tax deadline, especially for the December 30 and 31 emails.

Here are some samples of effective email subject lines for each day of your campaign:

#### **December 24**

- Happy holidays! Our Board will match your gift (if you have challenge gifts)
- Please remember name of your organization in your year-end giving
- 5 4 3 2 1 Tax deductible giving
- Share your hopes for downtown, make a gift today

#### **December 26**

- Seasonal Sprit Downtown! Double your gift (for a challenge gift)
- You can help us reach our downtown goal! Match our Board's Gifts (for a challenge gift)
- Your opportunity to make a year-end gift to name of your organization
- Only a few days left to support the name of your organization's year-end campaign

#### **December 27**

- Your gift can be doubled today! (if you have a challenge gift )
- Double the power of your year-end gift today (if you have a challenge gift)
- There is still time to give!
- Give a gift to your downtown!

#### **December 30**

- Your gift will be matched, but our offer expires in 24 hours (for challenge gifts)
- Your matching gift opportunity is almost over (for challenge gifts)
- Almost to our goal, help name of your organization today
- Last hours for tax deductible gifts for downtown

#### **December 31**

- Last Chance to Match Your Gift (for challenge gifts)
- Urgent! Only a few hours to double your giving power (for challenge gifts)
- Last day for matching gifts (for challenge gifts)
- And it's over at midnight, help us reach our goal for downtown
- Last minutes to help your downtown

We also identified a variety of subject lines that *don't* create urgency to give. Here are some examples:

- Happy Holidays from name of your organization
- Happy New Year from name of your organization
- The end of the year
- To a new year

Track what subject lines generate the most gifts each day. Experiment with your subject lines if you have the ability to track their performance and keep notes about what works best, so you can use that information for next year.

## **Review Your Donation Levels**

You may want to review your donation levels as part of this campaign. If you know you have a large clutch of \$100 members, you might want to offer a new giving level at \$125, or offer a modest level such as \$20 if you don't have one already in your pyramid of gifts. Finally, you might want to offer an "other donation amount" option. This permits donors to give you an amount of their own choosing. For your end of year campaign, any contribution is welcome.

## **Get Ready to Say Thanks!**

Write your thoughtful thank you letter now. Everyone who makes an online donation should get a paper thank you letter within a week. They also should get an immediate thank you email after making their online gift, so work with your online donation software provider and make sure to add that capability. If you use a third party system to take donations such as PayPal, Network for Good, or other online payment processor, change your confirmation email to be a heartfelt thank you for this campaign. Think about creating links to your Facebook page or Twitter feed on the thank you email, and suggest to donors that they share the good news about their donation to your organization with their friends and followers.

Once someone makes a donation, if at all possible, please take their email address off your solicitation lists for this campaign. Because five emails will be going out during seven days, this is an especially important part of donor relations.

Email gifts will come in at the very last minute, so automating thank you letters helps. The IRS permits mailed gifts to be postmarked by December 31 to be considered in that tax year (see IRS Publication 526). Tell your accountant about your campaign and date your thank you letters correctly.

## **Show the Progress of Your Campaign**

Your website's home page is the best place to keep a daily record of your campaign's progress. You can use a traditional thermometer or other graphic device to show the campaign's progress. Telling potential donors how well you are doing will be especially helpful in your December 30 and 31 messages. These messages can be changed to show progress or to ask people to help you to meet your goal.

## **Tell Everyone about Your Success in the New Year**

Tell everyone about the results of your campaign the week after New Year's Day. Send an e-newsletter with your successes to your entire list. This may pry lose some additional donations in the new year.

Make sure you publish your list of all year-end donations in mid-January. You can post your list of contributors on your web site, or in the next issue of your e-newsletter. Organize your list based on the giving levels, not alphabetically.

Take a few days to recover, and start the New Year knowing that you've started 2014 with a nice start from your year-end fundraising efforts.

We hope these two posts were helpful. Please let us know how you did!

**[Click here to learn more about year-end gift campaigns.](#)**

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