



The Intimate Face of Fundraising

Fundraising has many facets – from mass market campaigns that raise hundreds of millions of dollars, to solicitations of mere handfuls of donors that raise as much. Which approach, or mix of approaches, is best depends upon the donor base – and how the fundraising campaign is linked to other organization goals. In many campaigns, a variation of the “Pareto principle” applies: that 80% of the donations are made by 20% of the donors. Some campaigns are even more skewed, with perhaps 90% to 95% of the contributions given by only 5% to 10% of the contributors. In such campaigns, it becomes important to maximize the contributions of the relative few. Fundraising becomes more intimate, and the interactions between the person who solicits a gift (the gift “solicitor”) and the prospective donor become paramount.

Solicitor-based fundraising is a very delicate and sensitive art. It’s best done in person and face-to-face. Next best is over the telephone. The more impersonal the ask, the less likely it is to be effective, and the less likely to yield optimal gifts. Getting to know the donor and developing a relationship typically generates the big gifts. Matching a donor’s passion with the need of the institution is crucial, but the personal relationship is key. The art of “the ask” is about listening carefully to a donor’s words and demeanor and responding thoughtfully and with nuance to the donor’s particular history, situation, and desires.

Donating is about supporting a community – and the people within it – with which the donor identifies. This is why it is essential for fundraisers to build connections with the donor, and between the donor and the community for which “the ask” is made. One of these connections is the solicitation itself. There is no substitute for being part of a real-world in-flesh community. However, online communities can keep connections alive when people are distant, or introduce people to a group that they embrace in real life. This is especially true for younger generations, where maintaining an active and vibrant virtual community using social media can be essential to fundraising – even when the ask is not made online.

Fundraising can lose polish and effectiveness when applied on a mass scale with social media. An impersonal ask is the easiest to ignore. People may “unfollow” an online community that is used only to ask for gifts. (The same holds true of all communications – whether snail-mail or email – if viewed by the recipient as solely “marketing” or “soliciting”.) For many organizations, utilizing social media primarily as a community builder is likely to attract more followers/friends. These can be approached for raising funds on a more individual and personal basis.

Develop a database of prospective donors and their contact information. This is essential for all fundraising – whether or not solicitor-based. *Social media and online communities may be a key component of the database gathering effort.*

Stay connected to alumni who will give during the course of their lives. Establish a meaningful lifetime relationship driven by customer service, *tailored* programs built on market data, and career services.

- **The Napa Group**, www.napagroup.com, Trends and Best Practices in Alumni Associations
 - Use market information and data to segment programs and create value-centric relationships with alumni; shift toward lifetime relationships through a “lifecycle model of programs and services”
 - alumni seek meaningful relationships with their universities; alumni relations become ‘portals’ for programming and communications and an ‘enabler’ of services
- **Engagealumni.com**, <http://engagealumni.com/tag/alumni-relations-best-practices/> - Building Alumni Affinity Through Great Customer Service - **user friendly websites, easy access to live support, seamless logistics at events, knowing what alumni expect**
- **Team Works Media**, <http://www.teamworksmedia.com/blog/university-engagement-5-new-ways-to-think-alumni/> – No one size fits all – “The emotional engagement button is different between (and often within) generations and if you don’t parse your message accordingly you’ll miss the mark on triggering a response.”
- **Jewish Philanthropy**, <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/keep-alumni-engaged-by-offering-career-services/> - “At the core of every successful alumni program...is an ability to capture and reflect back what their members want. One of the best ways to engage alumni is by offering them resources and support in making decisions about their career.”
- **CASE**, www.case.org, Multiple articles in areas of Outreach and Engagement, Constituencies, Alumni Generations, and Marketing & Market Research –
 - One size doesn’t fit all and the many faces of alumni
 - Pursuing relationships that span different stages of lives
 - Five segmentations – the new, the experienced, the stay-at-home, the entrepreneurial, and the hiring
 - Programming for baby boomers headed to retirement and for Millennials with high expectations for electronic communication, personal control, and service