

Evan C. Parker
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Prof. Adam Segal
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Internet Fundraising Strategy: Doctor's Without Borders

The immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001 saw a huge outpouring of donations by everyday people across the nation. By one measure, \$2.8 billion was donated from the private sector.¹ One of the less told stories, however, is how donor support of non-September 11th charities dried up as a result. According to one poll by Independent Sector, 26% of American's who donated to a September 11th charity say they "will not give as much as they usually do or they won't give any more at all" to the charities they usually support.² Unfortunately, Doctor's Without Borders' non-tsunami operations may face much the same problem. To date, approximately \$2 billion in private funds have been pledged or collected for Tsunami relief.³ While it is still too early to determine how much of this will come at the expense of other charities, it is vital that Doctor's Without Borders put themselves in the strongest fundraising stance possible to ensure no interruption in their achievement of their goals.

The first step in the process is to optimize your campaign's landing pages. According to MarketingSherpa, campaign specific landing pages are important for three reasons: (1) you can use the pages to reinforce messaging begun by the email; (2) you can push users to the exact information you want them to see; (3) you will have more meaningful metrics to judge the success of the campaign because you will have a specific page in your web statistics that only campaign users visited.⁴ It is critical to not overlook the mechanics of the process when launching an online fundraising drive. According to the same MarketingSherpa report, not only will 30% of people stop donating to a non-profit offline "after they have a bad online experience," but 65% of people will not donate on a form or a site they deem to be "poorly designed."⁵ With this in mind, it is imperative that the landing pages be streamlined and simple. Users should have the reason they are visiting the site reinforced, but the form should not include a top heavy appeal since the donors have already decided to act through the email they received or the banner they clicked. Underneath the lead-in, the form should be as compact as

possible while still collecting necessary information. If there is a strong need for extensive data to be collected, it should be broken up in a multipart form so that the user is able to digest the parts better.⁶

The other major step is the fundraising appeal. For your purposes, this should not be artificially limited to just a single email sent to your fundraising list, but should include multiple email asks, offline appeals and website advertising. According to Melissa Wyers, a DC-based fundraising consultant, the most successful disaster relief fundraising appeals include two items. The first item emphasizes efficacy. “You can really make a difference in the life of another person -- you may not be able to end hunger, end poverty...but you can get one family in great need in one village a boat that will set off a chain reaction of good events...,” Wyers says. “Some day this one family won't be hungry and poor -- but rather productive middle class people like ‘me’ the donor.” The second item emphasizes the reasons the donor feels they need to help out. Wyers says that for people donating in a time like this, “it is living ‘your core values’ of helping those less fortunate and making the world a better place for all” that drives the action.⁷ These two touchstones should be used to relate with the user on both the landing page and the fundraising appeals.

Also, it is important to realize that when people donate online they are actually shopping, albeit for something in tangible. According to Alan Andreasen and Philip Kotler, these appeals need to remain customer-centered, as “its principle focus [is] meeting the needs and the wants of [the] target audiences.”⁸ When possible, your email appeals should be personalized and focus on issues of importance to the donor. For example, those interested in agriculture will be engaged as to what farming supplies and equipment their donation will bring to a needy family. Offline appeals will have to be more generic, orientating the donor on the wide spectrum of what specifically their money will “buy.” Finally, banner advertising and keyword will take the most compelling vignettes from both the offline and email marketing efforts, and push them to the optimal audiences through targeted buys.

By remembering that the user is a *customer* and not simply a fundraising target, you will be best prepared to convert their attention into dollars for Doctors Without Borders' causes.

¹ Loren Renz and Leslie Marino, *Giving in the Aftermath of September 11: Final Update* (New York: The Foundation Center, 2004), 86. <http://fdncenter.org/research/trends_analysis/pdf/9_11updt04.pdf>

² "Independent Sector Survey Finds Mixed Outlook on Charitable Giving," *Independent Sector*, October 23, 2001, <<http://www.independentsector.org/media/sept11survey2.htm>>

³ David Loyn, "Will debt relief work?," *BBC News*, January 13, 2005. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4170203.stm>>

⁴ *Email Marketing Metrics Guide 2004* (Warren, RI: Marketing Sherpa, 2004), 112.

⁵ *Ibid*, 113.

⁶ "Proposal to Provide Consulting Services," Carol Trevelyan Strategy Group, May 10, 2004.

⁷ Melissa Wyers, email to author, 28 January 2005.

⁸ Alan Andreasen and Philip Kotler, *Strategic Marketing for Non-profit Organizations* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Educational, 2003), 83.