How Charities Are Raising More Online: 3 Case Studies

Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties

Growth in online fundraising: 22 percent for the fiscal year ending in June, over fiscal year 2011

Growth forecast for the fourth quarter of 2012: 4 percent

Winning strategies: Listen to donors’ needs; harness the competitive spirit of local businesses

An International Group Finds Donors Respond to Frequent Appeals

Room to Read has found that its donors don’t mind getting a lot of e-mails from the San Francisco charity. In fact, all the appeals are prompting them to give more and donate more frequently. Steve Cox, online strategy manager at the nonprofit, which builds libraries for children in the developing world, says it conducted extensive tests to figure out how donors responded to multiple appeals and got encouraging results. “It kind of quelled some fears of being too heavy in contact with our donors,” he says.

Last year, donors on average got solicited for online gifts about seven times. This year, they’re receiving 10 to 12 e-mail solicitations. The charity says very few people are asking it to stop sending the e-mails from the San Francisco charity. In fact, all the appeals and some are giving more often.

“We’ve been seeing some positive numbers all year,” says Mr. Cox. “We’re really happy to see that growth,” Mr. Cox says. “We’re investing in our online audience by getting comfortable in asking them for money more often.

“We’re fortunate the response rate continues to be steady and strong,” Mr. Cox says. “The drop-off rate or unsubscribe rate doesn’t seem to be affected.”

Room to Read is also optimistic about its prospects for the final quarter of the year, a period of time in which about three-quarters of its online fundraising occurs.

So far, the charity has a solid start. The day after it sent its first message seeking year-end gifts, Room to Read attracted donations worth 186 percent more than it last raised from its entire online holiday drive. It also seems to be appealing to more donors, with 72 percent more donation transactions than in last year’s holiday campaign.

“We’ve been seeing some positive numbers all year,” says Mr. Cox. “We hope the trend continues.”

—Raymund Flandez

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