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Copywriting Examples and Portfolio

Please note: formatting is maintained from archived articles as associated websites no longer exist.

For additional copywriting and web design examples, please see the following sites, written and designed by me:
- https://evergroove.com/
- https://insightconsultation.com/
- https://ethankotel.dev/
- https://www.ethankotel.photos/
- https://www.ellmangallery.com/
- https://www.ethankotel.com/

Earning Your Nonprofit Wings

Congratulations!

You've successfully incorporated your new nonprofit and are eager to get started changing the world! Seriously, congratulations; and, more importantly, **thank you** for your ambition, for your desire to make real change in the world. There aren't enough people like you out there, and we're so glad to have you here with us.

So, **what's next?** Now that your nonprofit is registered and ready to begin changing lives, it's time to get to the real work: **acquiring donors, eliciting donations,** and **engaging your new supporters.**

So, how does all of this get done? I won't lie to you, there's a lot of work involved. By following these best practices, however, you will, in no time at all, be attracting new donors, volunteers, and supporters, and expanding your cause around the globe.

There's a **lot** to cover here (buckle up). Here's a table of contents to help you find your way!

- **Building Your Lists**
    - Segmentation
    - Automation
    - A/B Testing

1) Start Building Your Lists

Anyone who has ever worked in marketing or for a for-profit corporation will tell you that a large, engaged, and authentic email list is key to increasing profits. Obviously, you won't be focused on profits; nevertheless, a great email list is also key to increasing donations, the new lifeblood of your organization.

Your email sends will very quickly make up a large part of your overall fundraising efforts, so it's important to start building your list immediately. By producing engaging content and sending it out to your supporters, you will be able to send donations asks, event invitations, and more to your loyal and eager base.

There are a couple of good first steps when thinking about building your email list, and furthermore, putting it to good use.

First off, you'll need a way to actually capture people's email addresses, to add them to your list. You may be familiar with buying large lists from shady companies. **Don't even bother**. You will spend a bunch of money for the email addresses of people who don't

care about your cause, and won't engage with your emails. You'll waste time communicating with them, waste money acquiring their addresses, and potentially face abuse reports that will earn your domain name an automatic blacklist in email clients, even for the people who **do** want to hear from you.

Therefore, focus on acquiring emails from people who care about you: more specifically, people who are visiting your site.

Every page on your website should include an online form to sign up for your email list. These can be large, small, placed on the sidebar or smack in the center of the page. The most important thing is that they are omnipresent, so that anyone who visits your site never misses a chance to sign up, and doesn't have to go hunting around to learn how to engage with your cause.

Additionally, at each and every event you host for your nonprofit, you should aim to **have at least one staff member or volunteer armed with a clipboard,** ready to collect emails, mobile phone numbers, and full names from any attendees that care to give them to you.

Think about it like "teaching a man to fish." Sure, an event attendee giving you a $20 donation is nice. However, acquiring their contact information provides you with the vector to send later donation asks, event invites, and more, so that you can elicit that same $20 donation multiple times a year. Turning your one-time donors into recurring donors is important, but we'll get to that later.

Ok, so you've **started to grow your list**, but **how do you manage the data and coordinate sends?**

This is where a phenomenal email client comes in. Email clients, like Mailchimp, HubSpot, Unbounce, and more, will help you keep your data nice and tidy, **segment** and **target** your email sends, and serve as a powerful conduit between you and your supporters.

My personal favorite email client is Mailchimp, so I'll focus on them for now.

Mailchimp provides powerful email capabilities, such as targeted sends, automation according to basically any parameters you can think of, daily subscribe/unsubscribe reports, detailed statistics and analysis, and more to help you learn about what messages are salient to your support base.

No idea what I'm talking about? That's ok! Let's break down some of the ways that an email client can make your life easier.

Segmentation and Targeting:

Have you ever been living in, for example, San Francisco, and received an event invite to an event in New York City? I'm willing to bet that you didn't think twice about deleting that email, since it clearly doesn't apply to you. In fact, I'm willing to bet you might have felt almost a little insulted, like the organization sending it to you clearly doesn't know about you, or care to learn.

This is a problem very much solved by an email client and good data practices. By capturing additional data from your supporters, such as their geographic location (in the form of zip code, state, or specific physical address), you can use your email client to segment and target your communications to only those supporters for whom it is relevant, avoiding that uncomfortable feeling of being invited to something that doesn't apply to you. This also enables you to let portions of your list rest, while engaging others, making your communications feel personal, not spammy.

Automation

You'll see me write about "continued engagement" fairly often, and there's a reason for that: it works. By engaging your list not just once, for say, a donation ask, but often and in ways aside from soliciting money, you'll be able to make people feel appreciated, part of something bigger than themselves. After all, isn't that the whole point? Your goal is to change the world, it seems obvious that ordinary people would want to help you and take an active role in doing so.

Automation can be used in a ton of different ways, so I'll just focus on one of my favorites to get your mind turning.

How do you feel about an organization who only ever talks to you when they want money? Maybe you have a friend who only gives you a call when they're down on their luck, or needs to borrow your mower. You acquiesce, they seem appreciative, and then *poof!* You don't hear from them again until the next time they need something from you.

This type of communication is more than insulting for a donor, it can feel degrading, as though they're being used. Automation can help with this problem, by providing very genuine communications, on an evenly spaced basis, that **don't** only ask them for money.

By creating an **engagement workflow**, a series of emails with good stories about your cause, you can help donors learn more about what it is that you do, without trying to reach into their wallets in a hurry. Mailchimp is one of the best for automation, though some other email clients provide it as well.

For my engagement workflows, I like to **create 5-7 story-based emails**, simply explaining who the beneficiaries of the nonprofit are, and what their lives are like. Be sure to include information about how your nonprofit seeks to solve their problems. Then, I set it up to **automatically send one email every other day, or every three days.** This, in turn, frees up my time to work on other campaigns, since I know that every person who signs up for my email list is getting their first two weeks of content, with absolutely no additional work required on my part.

Automation is powerful, and should not be ignored. However, it might be a little daunting to learn about. No worries! We'll talk about ways to get around that a little bit later on.

A/B Testing, Data, and Analytics

DATA MATTERS. I'll shout that from the rooftops, until the cows fly and the pigs come home. Why? Because data will teach you **what works and what doesn't**.

Think about it: trying the same thing, multiple times, and expecting a different result is the definition of insanity, right? Right. That's why your communications need to be constantly changing, testing, and analyzing what has been effective, so that you can continue to make your emails, and communication in general, as effective as possible over time.

The average open rate and click-through rate on an email is 15-30% and 1-3%, respectively. If one of your emails only gets up to an 8% open rate, don't you want to know why? If you skyrocket to 45%, isn't it worth learning what made that particular email so effective?

Email clients like Mailchimp are exceptional at providing detailed analysis of every aspect of your email sends, and allow you to **A/B test** elements of your communications for maximum efficacy.

For example, just last week, I was scheduling an email to send to 40,000 people, on a Saturday. Naturally, Saturdays are a little trickier than weekdays in terms of finding an optimal send time, since people are out and about, not necessarily at their computers, and occasionally avoiding their inboxes altogether. So, I set out to find my optimal send time for my organization.

Before A/B Testing, I would have had to spend three consecutive Saturdays, and three consecutive email sends just to determine which send time was best. However, by using Mailchimp's A/B Testing feature, I was able to send 1/3rd of my emails at 11:15 am, 1/3rd at 1:15 pm, and the remaining 1/3rd at 3:15 pm, gleaning me a ton of useful data in one afternoon (by the way, if you were wondering, 1:15 pm performed the best).

Email clients provide a great basis for getting your outbound communications off the ground, so start researching! They will make everything so much easier for you moving forward.

CRM Integration

Another fantastic step to take on your nonprofit journey is to invest in a **CRM**, or constituent relationship manager. CRM's, sometimes referred to as Donor Database Systems, help remove a ton of weight from your shoulders, by providing an easy-to-use interface with up-to-date constituent (donor) data, segmentable by donor type, gift level, and anything else you can think of. They can also help you keep track of who is receiving, opening, and clicking your emails, allowing targeted sends based on behavior.

Essentially, nonprofits use CRMs to make data management a more **organized process**, which in turn leads to that same data being leveraged to more effectively **build long-term donor relationships**. Plus, most nonprofit donor databases come complete with other helpful tools like **online donation pages** and **email automation**.

It is definitely a great idea to find a CRM that **integrates** with your email client, allowing data to sync back and forth seamlessly. I am a particularly large fan of ProsperWorks, Google's CRM, as it syncs flawlessly with Gmail and with Mailchimp. As soon as someone replies to one of my emails, their full contact record is pulled up into my window, allowing me to see who they were last contacted by, when, and for what reason, giving me all of the context necessary to continue to push them along on their donor's journey, without having to dig and find any additional informations elsewhere, saving hours per day.

Different CRM's will integrate with different email clients, so make sure you **research compatibility before you invest a bunch of money into either**, to ensure that you're getting everything you need out of both platforms.

Also worth mentioning is that **many of the email clients and CRM's mentioned above offer steeply discounted pricing to nonprofits,** so take advantage of that! Plus, many, many fundraising software companies offer CRMs specifically designed for nonprofit needs and budgets. The free-market has decided over the past several years to support nonprofit work in a more meaningful manner, and you get to reap the benefits of this.

2) Reaching New Donors

Now that you know what to look for in an email client and CRM, let's discuss other ways to reach new donors and encourage them to engage with your cause. There are a myriad ways to funnel traffic to your website, engage with new supporters, and motivate them towards long-term support. Thanks to the digital age, many of these technologies are readily available and easier than ever before.

Google Grants

I promise I am not being paid to say this: Google's support of nonprofit organizations is nothing less than astounding.

In addition to fantastic technologies (like ProsperWorks) made available at a discount to nonprofits, Google has shown incredible generosity in offering **$10,000 per month** in pay-per-click (PPC) web-ads to nonprofits, completely free, as the Google Grants program.

By utilizing this incredible tool, you can place strategically targeted ads all over the net, enticing anyone who searches one of your relevant keywords to visit your site and stay there awhile.

The program speaks for itself, by using Google's targeted web-ads, we have seen a large spike in traffic, simply by capturing people who use the internet every day, and showing them a link to our site coupled with some impactful preview text. In this way, people who ordinarily wouldn't know we exist are now reading about our website, visiting it, finding something they like, and then engaging with us.

Like I said, this program is absolutely free, and, candidly, it is a huge missed opportunity to not take advantage of it. All it requires is a bit of front-end work to get started, and then BAM! You're enjoying large corporation level web-ad budgets, for free.

Social Media Ads

In a similar vein (though not free) are social media advertisements.

Did you know there are over 1 billion active profiles on Facebook? If you haven't been paying attention for awhile, that's **1/7th of the entire population of the planet**, all using one website. So, basically, you can inform 1/7th of the globe about your cause, for a very small amount of money.

For $20, you can boost a post on Facebook to reach about 10,000 people, **10,000 potential donors, 10,000 potential volunteers**. That is **powerful**. And, it's where good content comes in. Unlike Google ads, which take the form of simple text and a link, social media posts need the power of exceptional content behind them to really prove effective.

What is good content on social media? I'm glad you asked. You are a nonprofit, and that means that you aren't selling a traditional material product; rather, **your story, the stories of the people you help, are your product.** Put them to good use! You know that you're doing amazing work, and the rest of the world should know that as well. Putting together a heartfelt story, backed by a good graphic, is more than enough to make a successful advertisement.

Do you know what's better than a good graphic, though? **A great video**. I've written before about the importance of video in online fundraising, and the natural advantages that it enjoys over other types of media. Videos are more likely to be watched, provide potent stories and calls to action in multiple mediums (sound, visuals, and text), and allow for a more visceral storytelling campaign than simply hoping someone is willing to read a wall of text under a picture.

Additionally, videos contribute naturally to your SEO, or search engine optimization, lending additional credibility to your website, and helping more people to find and learn about your cause. Videos are also naturally advantaged on social media, especially on Facebook, where they are afforded increased exposure, showing up in more people's news feeds, for longer, than other types of media. **Utilize the video advantage**. Videos are becoming more popular by the day, and there is absolutely no indication that that trend is slowing anytime soon.

Social media platforms, like Facebook, also afford a convenient platform for building event pages, inviting people to them, and connecting and engaging with your supporters on a platform they likely already use every day.

When you incorporate your nonprofit, **one of the first things** you should do is lock down your organization's name on **all** social media platforms, even if you don't plan to use them just yet. This will prevent vultures, or innocent civilians, from grabbing your name and forcing you to pick a less branded name, or one that's different from all of your other accounts. Before getting started on any one social media platform, check them **all** for what is and isn't available, and pick a name that you can get on all of the different platforms, so that people can find you easier on their social media of choice.

For example, it's bad form to get @nonprofit on twitter and instagram, but @nonprofit_of_America on Facebook, Tumblr, and SnapChat (to reiterate, you do not NEED to use every social media platform in existence), as this causes brand confusion and makes it difficult for people to find you. Even if @nonprofit is closer to your actual name, if only @nonprofit_of_America is available on every platform, grab that name! **This will create a cohesive online brand identity for your organization.**

Social media is powerful, so use it! **Try to post at least 3-5 times a week,** as this will help your current supporters avoid growing bored, and your new supporters plenty of good, fresh content to feast on, connecting them on a deeper level to your cause.

Share Campaigns

This is more of an addendum to my social media advice than it's own bullet point, though it can be used outside of social media. A share campaign is a campaign in which the primary goal is to motivate your supporters to **share your message with their friends and family**, organically increasing your reach and enabling your message to find new people.

Share campaigns take many forms, but work especially well on social media platforms like Facebook, where a share button is located a few inches away from any content you post.

Consider providing an incentive for sharing; for example, "share this post to be entered to win a free porsche!" Now, I'm not suggesting that every campaign you put out needs the strength of a supercar behind it; however, a strong incentive will help skyrocket your engagement, which, regardless of the motivation for sharing in the first place, will help you find new people to engage, and put you on the radar of many more people than you would reach otherwise.

After all, are you more likely to try a new restaurant because of an ad on the radio, or because one of your friends, whom you love and respect, told you about how good the food is? I don't know about you, but for my part, my friends are much more powerful salesman than the company, since I know the company is **trying** to sell me on their product, instead of providing an honest assessment of its value.

You should always be thinking of ways to **turn your supporters into promoters**, for the exact reason mentioned above. Friends are a powerful thing, utilize those relationships to your advantage.

Text to Give

Of course, you will always run into people on the street or at events who are not yet engaged with your cause, and you will want an easy way for them to get engaged when you aren't armed with your clipboard.

Mobile-phone-centric technologies, like Text to Give, are powerful tools when it comes to engaging people on their own terms. Text to Give, made popular by Michelle Obama's Red Cross-backed Haiti campaign, is the fastest and easiest way for a brand new supporter to engage and donate to your cause.

By texting a KEYWORD to a SHORTCODE (text HAITI to 90999 in the example above), a donor can donate to your cause using the only app installed on every phone in America, text messaging.

Additionally, Text to Give can be used to send outbound messages to your supporters, keeping them up to date on upcoming events, helping your donors feel appreciated with a simple thank you message, a message about a new story with a link to your website, or a message of encouragement to share your cause with someone whom your supporters want to get involved.

Remember earlier, when I mentioned the open and click-through rates of email? Well, buckle up, because this next bit might shock you. **The average open and click through rates for text messages are astounding: 96-99% and 30-50%, respectively.** Basically, if you send a text to your supporters, it is virtually guaranteed to be read, and read quickly. In fact, over **90% of all text messages are read within 3 minutes of receiving them.**

This is an incredibly powerful tool and metric. Building a mobile subscriber list, in the same way you'd build an email list, will afford you an extremely reliable vector for getting information out to your supporters, as well as calling on them to act for any future donation asks. Some services, like mGive, provide multiple packages of Text to Give, depending on your needs, in order to help you get the most out of this relatively new and extremely effective technology.

3) Bringing in Revenue

Ah, the part you've all been waiting for! After all, donations are the lifeblood of any nonprofit: they're what allow you to spread your cause around the globe and help those who need it most, so we should certainly learn about how to bring in as much revenue as possible for your nonprofit.

Campaigns

We've discussed this a little bit before, but let's really dig in now: in the nonprofit world, **content is king.**

Good content will net you new donors, will motivate your current donors to donate, and will provide the affirmation that your supporters' money is going to good work. Indeed, people want to see where their money is going, so **show them!** A good story is easy for someone like you to find, since you're the organization making these stories possible.

It's not hard for a good mission to write a good story. Basically, you just have to tell people about **what you're doing, and why you're doing it.** Are you working with special needs students? Share the story of one of your students, show their progress, tell you supporters what your help has enabled them to accomplish. Are you working with veterans afflicted by PTSD? Tell the story of what one veteran went through in the war, how it affected them upon return, and how, with your help, they were able to return to a functioning and happy life.

Again, medium matters here, and I will **endlessly tout the advantages of videos.** Videos are powerful, and can work well as a conversion tool in email, text, social media, or any of the other communication forms we've discussed here. Throw a good looking screenshot of your video into your email send, with a big, juicy play button on it. **You, I, and your supporters will feel an instinctive need to click that play button.** Direct those supporters to a beautiful and simple landing page, outfitted with your video and a little bit of copy about your mission. Video is a powerful conversion tool, and sending your supporters to checkout a well-produced video will almost certainly motivate them to support your cause. Don't forget your email sign up form and donation form on your landing page!

Are you familiar with clickbait? I'm talking about articles about "10 things doctors **don't** want you to know about cancer! Number 6 will shock you!"

Annoying right? Yes. But, loathe as I am to admit it, **clickbait works**. Utilize some of those strategies to entice online viewers to click on your links, to travel to your landing page, and then, to engage with your cause. It might feel weird at first, but it will pay off when more and more revenue starts to pour into your cause.

A campaign can take the form of any of the mediums we've discussed. However, your goal should be to release **omnichannel campaigns**, instead of a simple email campaign, or a social media campaign. What is an omnichannel campaign? Thanks for asking!

An omnichannel campaign is exactly what it sounds like, it's a campaign spread via all of the vectors you have available to you: social media, email, text messaging, and anything else you can think of. Releasing your campaigns across all of the available mediums will ensure that no supporter is left behind, everyone will have the opportunity to donate to you and get involved.

I recommend releasing an omnichannel campaign for a month or two at a time, not as one single push. This way, people will be afforded multiple opportunities to donate, share your message, and get involved. Additionally, someone who didn't open your first email won't have lost their chance to engage forever. Maybe they'll open the second email, or the third, or fourth. A long-term campaign strategy will enable these procrastinators to get involved before it's too late!

When to Ask for Money and Ongoing Engagement

As I mentioned earlier, it stings a little bit to think that a nonprofit that you genuinely care about only likes you for your wallet. So, let's discuss when to ask for money, and how to split up those asks to prevent donors from getting tired of you.

It should go without saying at this point that **not all of your communications should be donation asks.** In fact, I recommend maintaining a **3:1 ratio** of non-donation asks to donation asks, in order to prevent the type of fatigue I'm talking about.

So what else can you offer your donors aside from asks? Simple, for starters, **say thank you**. A thank you message is a brilliant way to thank your supporters for sticking them around, making them feel vindicated and appreciated.

Additionally, **send out an engagement message!** Engagement messages can take many forms, though my personal favorite is to **ask your supporters a question.** This question can be anything, "why do you support [my organization]?" "What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?" "Giraffes? Or pandas?" Seems irrelevant, right? Wrong. These types of silly messages can make a donor feel as though they are part of a community, rather than a simple cog in your fundraising operation. Consider releasing the results across your platforms, sharing that, in fact, 54% of your supporters are giraffe people, compared to 46% panda people. You'll get a few chuckles, a few smiles, and you'll learn something (however incongruous) about your support base.

Ask for money during your campaigns, but try to refrain from asking for money in between them. Also, try to refrain from starting a new campaign too soon after one has finished, as your supporters will begin to wonder if this will just become constant, year-round asks for money.

Explore as many different donation platforms as you can find, and try to determine which ones will be effective. From donation buttons on Facebook, to online web-forms, to Text to Give, to donation cards on YouTube videos, there are hundreds of donation platforms available to you. Explore them all! **Don't, however, try to utilize all of them**. Too many donation operations could get confusing, and actually end up hurting conversion of your supporters, as they won't be as familiar with how you're asking them to donate, and won't necessarily know where you're sending them or what you're asking them to do.

4) Find Someone to Do It for You

Are you feeling completely overwhelmed by everything we just went through? Do the steps detailed above seem like more work than you can possibly handle, having just started your nonprofit?

I'm here to assure you that you **can** handle that workload, if you choose to. However, I also completely understand the desire to spend your time focused on your cause, and leave steps like finding an email client, CRM, building your social media, etc. to the experts.

Luckily enough, there are, in fact, **agencies for nonprofits**, companies that draw together all of the best-in-class technologies detailed above in order to make life easier for nonprofit professionals, allowing them to allocate their bandwidth in the places where it's needed most.

One such company is **Rally4**, a digital agency which works exclusively with nonprofit partners. Rally4 seeks to combine all of the elements I mentioned above, email clients, Text to Give solutions, a robust CRM, a social media publisher, and more, into one, easy to use dashboard specifically built for your new nonprofit, at a much lower cost than it would take to acquire each platform's capabilities individually.

If technology isn't your forte, if you don't know anything about social media, or you just don't want to spend your time learning about all of these technologies and would instead like to spend your time focusing on other aspects of running your charity, consider hiring a nonprofit agency like Rally4, let them worry about your content and campaigns, and focus your time instead on planning events, expansion, and even more next steps, knowing the wheel of your proverbial nonprofit car is in good hands.

Wrapping Up

Woof. Thanks for hanging in there with me. 5,000 words later, we have learned a ton together about **how to build your lists, how and when to ask for a donation, how to properly utilize social media, and more.** You're now equipped with many of the tools you'll need to turn your nonprofit into an online powerhouse. I know there's a ton to digest in there, so please, read and re-read, **get creative**, and take a few notes. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions, or for a consultation on your fundraising strategy.

There is no wrong way to change the world. I believe that you'll accomplish great things, and I can't wait to see what they are. Thank you, once again, for being you, for having the courage and ambition to get out there and change lives, and try to make our world a better place.

I'll see you on the front lines.

Yours sincerely,

Ethan

p.s., if you'd like to chat about how to strategize your next event, please don't hesitate to contact us today!

4 Best Practices Spotted in the Wild

This weekend, one of our favorite local Denver charities, Youth on Record, held their second annual block party, and were met with a rousing success.

Youth on Record's slogan is "Empowerment Through Creative Education." They work to help end the cycle of poverty and gang life by teaching kids how to play, write, and produce music. Throughout this experience, they earn high school credit, helping to increase the graduation rate across Colorado.

Sounds like a pretty worthy cause, right? Well, as we all know, the cause alone is not enough to inspire community support, or to ellicit donations. There are a whole host of other factors that go into making an event successful, and Youth on Record put many of them into practice.

You might even say **best** practice.

Throughout the event, I noticed a few things working in Youth on Record's favor, that could be implemented by any other nonprofit looking to make their events more successful.

1) Signage

Signage is first on the list because it was the very first thing I saw as I approached the venue.

Greeting me as I walked up the street were multiple, gigantic banners loudly proclaiming exactly what event I was at. There was no questioning if I was lost, no confusion over what was and wasn't part of the event. All of the major event locations were heavily branded, helping to create a very cohesive feeling to the entire atmosphere.

I've brought up signage a few times before, because it's so important when it comes to making your message stick.

I didn't have to look at this picture in order to remember Youth on Record's slogan. I was able to write it off the top of my head; because, throughout the entire event, everywhere I looked, I was met with their logo and slogan.

Inundating your supporters with your brand is **powerful.** Even since Saturday, I've run across an orange circle on a sign in the distance. Now, it turned out just to be a sign for Little Caesar's (pizza, pizza), but my **first** thought was, *"wow, how did Youth on Record get a sign all the way on the other side of town?"*

Great signage increases long-term brand awareness, which will snowball naturally towards more first time and recurring donors. Don't underestimate the impact of a good sign!

2) Community Support

You may have noticed that the stage in the last photo was not a Youth on Record stage, nor a permanent installation. Rather, it was carrying its own branding, supplied as it was by Groove Auto, a car dealership conglomerate with a presence here in Colorado.

One thing that really blew me away at the Block Party was the enormous show of community support. The stage was not the only evidence of Denver seeking to help out Youth on Record (and help themselves a little bit, too).

The most obvious example was, again, seen upon approach to event itself. The roads surrounding the event were closed to road traffic, creating a genuine festival feel. In addition to the road barriers, there were a couple of uniformed police officers in attendance at the event, lending an increased air of security and professionalism.

This type of community infrastructure support is easier than you might think to add to your event. Simply get in touch with your local city hall, and inquire about what process you need to fulfill in order to add such measures to your next event.

Also in attendance were several food trucks from local community companies. In addition to providing much needed refreshments to the event-goers, the trucks added extra "festival-feel" to the event, making the music festival vibe much more authentic for both the attendees and the youth performing throughout the day.

Elliciting the support of food vendors is also rather simple, and simply requires showing an indication that the event will be a sound fiscal investment for the proprietor.

That wasn't all, however. **Also** also in attendance were several tents from local publications, companies, and other nonprofits seeking to raise awareness for their own events; and, in so doing, drive additional attention and attendance to Youth on Record. Since each tent in attendance had some sort of nonprofit element, they did nothing to detract from the cohesive "benefit" feel of the event as a whole.

3) Their Cause in Action

I won't go into any more detail than this in order to protect my professional integrity, but my band was initially slated to play at the Block Party.

Why didn't we? Simple. There were **too many kids** who wanted to perform.

I can't ask for a better reason to lose out on a gig. You see, Youth on Record helps teach these kids how to perform; so, to get to show up and actually see it in action is no less than exhiliarating.

This is the best way I can think of to make your cause the center of your event: to **literally** make your cause the center of the event.

Throughout the day, the crowd transitioned between two stages, set up 180 degrees opposite one another, to watch all of the children enrolled in Youth on Record's programs show their stuff. The skill levels fluctuated with the genre and intensity of the music, but each performer looked proud and pleased to get to strut around on stage and perform for their friends, neighbors, and community neighbors.

I mean, just look at the results Youth on Record is showing to the world. Here's a short video of singer-songwriter **Bailey Elora**, 17 years old, performing an incredibly heartfelt version of Nina Simone's Blackbird.

Seeing a young performer like this, who has learned at the hands of the charity I'm currently supporting, made me feel as though my money was going towards a program with a real and tangible impact. I know the other donors in attendance felt this way, as well.

Showing your supporters the real-world impact of their dollars will help them to feel secure in giving money to you, and will make them more likely to continue supporting you in the future. Remember, it's all about those recuring donors!

4) Prominent Mobile Calls to Action

It always warms my heart to see a nonprofit utilizing Text to Give out in the wild. It's even better when I see them utilizing the best practices I'm always gabbing on about.

Youth on Record relies on their mobile subscriber list in order to keep their volunteers notified about upcoming events and opportunities to donate. They also use polling keywords to learn about their supporter base, and carrier-billing-style donation keywords to provide an easy method for their supporters to donate to the cause.

However, as anyone who's used Text to Give can tell you, it's not enough to simply **have** Text to Give. You must make it easily visible, and provide a solid call to action to make people aware of it.

Again, this is another item that I noticed immediately upon entering the event. I walked into Youth on Record's main building, where an open house awaited me with refreshments, custom T-shirts, and even more signage.

However, as I turned to the right, I saw something even more effective. Located at the front of the room, well-lit, and clearly visible, was a massive TV displaying a prominent mobile call to action.

As you can see, it works! There's a fellow on his phone right in front of the TV.

All of the necessary compliance language was included, the image itself is well branded, and it even includes an image of a cell-phone texting in the keyword, so there's no doubt for the donor about what to do.

Wrapping Up

Youth on Record was able to make their event successfuly simply by following some very common-sense best practices. By utilizing well branded signage, garnering the support of the community, turning their cause into the focus of the event, and displaying prominent mobile calls to action, Youth on Record was able to attract a ton of people to their event, both current supporters and new donors alike.

I won't pretend like setting up a large event is easy. It is a simple thing, however, to turn an event from being merely **fun** to being **powerful** and **effective.**

I'll be catching up with the director of marketing from Youth on Record soon to get her take on the event, and to learn about what she thought went well, and didn't go well, over the weekend. Check back later to hear from the lady herself!

Until then, be well, and keep changing the world. I'll see you next time.

Yours sincerely,

Ethan

p.s., if you'd like to chat about how to strategize your next event, please don't hesitate to contact us today!

3 Tips for Planning a Successful Event

Posted by Ethan Kotel on Mar 14, 2017 12:15:18 PM

As Told by a Local Musician

Ok, so you're ready to put on an event. You've done the research on your donor demographics, drummed up support for your cause, and gotten people to show interest in coming out to support you. Now comes the hard part: making your event fun, exciting, and successful.

Well, as a local musician skilled in the art of booking and hosting events with the primary goal of continued engagement and financial support, I've gotten pretty adept at successful event coordination. Here are 3 tips, not only for planning a successful event, but also to encourage further engagement from your supporters. Let's rock.

1) Make a Checklist, Ask Yourself Questions

Proper event planning is important, and having your event planned out and finalized long before the big day will help significantly to **reduce the stress and headaches** as you approach judgment day.

Remember: something will **always** go wrong, and you **will** need to fix it. However, by planning appropriately before the event, you **minimize problem-variables** and will have a much simpler (and more importantly, calmer) time dealing with any troubles as they happen, rather than allowing your problems to become overwhelming under deadline.

So, **create an event planning checklist**. Make a budget. Most importantly, **plan ahead.** As a general rule of thumb, if any more than 150 people are expected at your event, you'll want to start planning at least 3 months in advance. Add another two weeks for every additional 100 people you think might attend. **Your goal should be for all contracts (food, location, entertainment) to be finalized at least a full month before the day of the event.** Again, this will help you minimize problems when they do happen, and allow you to sleep easier knowing the concrete needs of your event are set in stone.

Lawyer pro-tip: get everything in writing. Although it's great to rely on the trustworthiness of people, getting all contracts in writing is always a best practice. This will allow you to more easily hold people accountable, and allow you to simply keep track of everything you have confirmed, without having to rely on memory or crawl through text messages and voicemails. **If a provider does not want to give you a contract, find another provider.** This is a red flag for any professional.

There are a few questions you need to ask yourself before staging any event. **Who is this event for? What is our goal in hosting this event?** Do we want donations? Email addresses? To raise awareness of our cause? Having a **clear and specific goal** will help you focus your event, and will impact the way in which you plan it, as you'll see in tip #2.

A clearly stated goal will also decide what your primary **Call to Action** will be for the event. This Call to Action will be the deciding factor in how successful your event can be, so be sure to structure the entire event around your Call to Action:

- If your goal is to acquire email addresses or mobile numbers to grow your community, have a table with list signups **clearly visible, centrally located, and staffed at all times**.
- If your Call to Action is to elicit a frenzy of mobile giving, plan your speech, banter, or announcements around **how and when you will ask your audience to text in your keyword**, and check out the video below on best practices for Event Calls to Action. Remember, **repetition is key**.

- If, instead, you're just trying to raise awareness for your work, structure the event around your ability to share stories: **have a booth nearby playing the stories of people you've helped**, invite beneficiaries on stage with you, or invite a leading expert in your sector to speak about your work.

Whatever you decide, make sure that your Call to Action is the **centerpiece of your entire event,** and make sure **nobody in attendance can miss it.** You can read further here for more tips on maximizing engagement and donations during your events.

When playing a concert, my band will ask ourselves the same questions. Occasionally, we want to maximize our profit from the evening. Our main goal, however, is usually to focus on supporter engagement and community building.

When we play a show, **we structure everything** from the set list to our banter between songs around how we want to make people feel, and how we can get them to engage with us. Our Call to Action -- asking people to sign up for our mobile and email lists -- is placed directly after our highest energy song, when people are most likely to be **paying attention, participating, and willing to listen to what we have to say**.

We even will restructure our set and banter in order to change the location of this Call to Action, to **test its efficacy** and provide us the data we need to make each concurrent concert more effective.

2) Pick the Best Possible Night for your Event

I can feel you rolling your eyes from here. "Oh, here's another blog post on '50 ways to use common sense.'" But, I'm here to tell you that "the best possible night" is not always a Friday or Saturday night. Date selection demands analysis and research to **ensure that your event is the place to be, no matter when it is.** Even the time of year will affect what day you aim to plan your event. A weekday night could be crucially under-attended in winter, but might get much more attention during the summer. **#ThursdaysTheNewFriday**

First, consider when your supporters are going to want to go out. This is when those questions from Step 1 come in handy. Consider your audience, and consider the type of event you're planning. If you're planning an event like a gala, concert, or party,

Fridays and Saturdays will be your best friend. People are always more willing to stay out late if they don't have work the next day, as I'm sure you know.

As a musician, we are **always** hoping to get a Friday or Saturday night. However, our preference for these nights is specifically centered around the fact that we are purely entertainment, and not at all related to people's everyday work or business lives. For more business-type gatherings, **weekend nights might not always be the best choice.** There's also **WAY more competition** for a Friday or Saturday night, so make sure to have a big HOOK to get people excited. (We'll talk about that below).

If, for example, you are conducting an event to celebrate the success of the PTA bake sale, it might be a better idea to pick a Tuesday or Wednesday night, when your event won't conflict with ball games, sleepovers, birthday parties, or other struggles that parents will be dealing with over their weekend.

So, to that end, here's a breakdown of the week, according to my experience with how people view each day. **Consider this as you plan your event:**

Monday: people are planning their weeks, getting motivated, and slipping back into work mode from weekend mode. This is almost always the worst night to plan an event, as most people do not want to exhaust themselves so early in the week. **Avoid Mondays if possible.**

Tuesday: less restrictive than Monday, though will still not be an ideal night for a party or humongous gathering. On Tuesdays, people are into the swing of the week enough to not be as wary of going out, and so will be more willing to accept an invite to something like a small get together, fundraising planning session, movie night, or other low-key activity. **This is a great night for engagement, less so for donations.**

Wednesday: hump day! People are getting a little bogged down from their work week, and are planning and looking forward to their weekend. **This is a great night for an activity that will end relatively early**, as people want to get home with enough time

to decompress before work-night sleep. Consider something like a movie night, brainstorming session, guest speaker/think-tank, or something low-energy, like a mini-golfing event. Dinner events work best on weeknights, so consider putting your pizza party on a Wednesday.

Thursday: almost to the weekend, and people are much more willing to go out on the town. This is the earliest in the week I'd recommend planning something like a concert, gala, or other involved event, though I would still aim to get that on a Friday or Saturday if possible. **Consider a higher-energy event that still leaves enough time to get home**, such as go-karting, a night at the park, or a potluck.

Friday and Saturday: The gold standard of days to do things. People are always looking to go out on a Friday or Saturday night, will be in a great mood after a long work week, and don't have to worry about waking up for work the next day. This is the optimal night if your goal is to raise funds or go crazy. **Utilize these days for your largest or highest energy events,** such as galas, concerts, fundraising events, and rallies. Make sure to plan for people staying late. Note, however, that these will be the two highest competition nights to hold an event.

Sunday: Sunday is kind of a weird day in the event planning world. People are willing to go do something during the day, but less likely to go out at night, as they are planning their coming week. **Consider using a Sunday for a low-to-mid-key event**, especially outside, such as a benefit in the Botanic Gardens, a march, a luncheon, or a guest-speaker. People are also more willing to give on Sundays, as many religions encourage alms-giving on the sabbath.

Another important consideration when picking the "right" day is **what other events are happening in your area on the same night or the nights surrounding your event.** If you have the opportunity to place your event on a Friday night, but it's on the same night as another huge event in your town, it is usually best to hold off and wait for a better date, as your audience will be split between attending both events.

Also, keep in mind the events on the nights on either side of yours. Will your audience be too tired after the Sting concert the night before to come to your benefit? Will they be saving their energy for the Sting concert the night after your event? Sting comes into town a lot, and **you want your supporters focused on you, not him.**

Take care to ensure that your event is the **dominant event in your area** on your desired night. If this is impossible, pick a night where your event will at least dominate in your industry, so that you might attract as many attendees as possible. A Thursday night where you're the only game in town will be better than a Friday night, if you're being overshadowed by a larger or more popular event.

Pick the right day for your audience and the event that you're planning. Once you have the day picked, make sure to contact your venue of choice and reserve it as soon as possible: losing dates because you waited too long to reserve a spot can have catastrophic results. Also, planning out far enough in advance helps you **lock down dates on people's calendars** before they book something else, so get those event notifications out early and often.

3) What's the Hook? Why is your Event Special?

This last, and perhaps most important question when planning your event will help you capitalize on a powerful and base instinct latent in each of your supporters: something we here at mGive refer to as **#FOMO**, or the Fear Of Missing Out. The fear of missing out is a crucial tool, and, when used correctly, will lead to **higher and higher attendance** at each concurrent event that you host.

In short, it is exactly what it sounds like: in designing your event to be as fun as possible for the people attending, you hope to win over people who aren't even there, by making them think "*wow, that seems like it was a ton of fun. I better **not miss out** on the next one.*"

In the band, this takes a very simple form: at every concert, we seek to play so well, and imbue so much energy into our show, that our fans will leave and want to tell their

friends about how awesome we are. We also choose fun and engaging themes for certain shows like a masquerade, costume party, or a benefit show for a great cause. This, in turn, will make those friends wonder about what they didn't get to see, and will be more inclined to come to the next concert, knowing that they're missing out on a great night if they don't.

So, for your nonprofit, you should **always be thinking of ways to make your events special and memorable.**

This is another important time to consider your audience. If your target demographic for this event is 18-35 year old men, consider looking into inviting a local professional football or baseball player to participate in your event, hold an autograph signing, or something similar. If you're trying to appeal to a small group of middle aged women, maybe consider something like Canvas and Cocktails, an activity centered around painting and drinking wine. If you're working on attracting middle-school parents, think about hosting an event that involves their children as well, like the previously mentioned go karting, or something centered around games. **Nothing** is more effective at getting parents in a room than their kids begging them to go.

By making your event unique, you can **turn your supporters into promoters**, helping to do your marketing work for you. Think about this, are you likely to want to go to an event after the person hosting it asked you to go? Or are you perhaps more likely to attend once one of your friends tells you how much fun the last one was? Indeed, **peers make the best persuaders.** By essentially **forcing** people to talk about your event after the fact, you are tapping into their network of friends and connections and making them want to attend your next event, all without ever saying a word to them.

Wrapping Up

With these 3 elements in mind, you can plan not only a great event, but an impactful and inspiring one as well. With proper planning, you can ensure that your event is prepared and ready to go off without a hitch months before the date arrives. With a solid and well planned Call to Action, you can engage your supporters and get them involved in real time. By planning your event for the perfect day, you can maximize attendance

and involvement. And, by utilizing **#FOMO,** you can turn your supporters into promoters, and watch as your attendance increases with every event you host.

These are all simple tips that will vastly increase the success of your events. We hope to see you utilize them and put on an amazing event! And be sure to read more on our blog to learn about best practices for following up after an event and more!

Yours sincerely,

Ethan Kotel

p.s. I am always here and happy to help brainstorm ways to make your event spectacular. Contact us with the button below to get in touch and start making your events shine!