

GETTING A FOOT IN THE DOOR:

How to onboard subscribers to your nonprofit e-newsletter

EPHRAIM GOPIN

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Intro.

You're a nonprofit with limited resources. You know that email marketing and e-newsletters are important but you're not sure how to get people to sign up. Where do you look? At the "big dogs", of course. Large nonprofits know what they're doing and we should follow their lead. But do they really know best?

Size Doesn't Matter

On December 23, 2019 I visited the websites of the 100 largest nonprofits in the U.S. (according to Forbes[1]) in order to subscribe to each organization's e-newsletter. My underlying assumption was that given their large budgets, they allocate the necessary resources to learn about best methods for boosting subscriptions and implement them on their sites. The goal? Ensure that their website e-newsletter subscription forms are converting at a high rate. (Converting = people fill in the form fields and click the "submit" button.)

I have no idea of their conversion rates but I can tell you this: They're not following best methods that have been tested and documented by field experts. In fact, results were very mixed.

Let's start with the first thing that jumped out at me: Almost 1/4 of the NPOs on the Forbes list do not have an e-newsletter! When I couldn't locate the form, I spent a minute or two looking on inner pages to see if there was a signup. But ¼ of them had no such form. (Note: The website for Disabled American Veterans has been down for awhile and I couldn't find out if they have a newsletter or not.)

That number to me is staggering, given that email marketing can be an effective method for keeping people informed, building brand awareness, mobilizing people to join advocacy efforts and yes, fundraising.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE:

On April 7, 2020 I rechecked the websites of the 24 organizations who had no newsletter back in December. I wondered if the pandemic would move these nonprofits to adopt and try new forms of communications with their donors and supporters; namely, start a newsletter. My findings? 1 for 24. Only one nonprofit started a newsletter.

So I am currently subscribed to 76 nonprofit e-newsletters. In case you're wondering, my inbox is over-flowing with e-newsletters and updates and URGENT MESSAGES TO CONTACT YOUR CONGRESSPERSON NOW. I read every single email I receive. I'm learning and chronicling best practices for nonprofit email marketing content, the follow up e-book to this one.

The Importance Of Email To Your Fundraising Efforts

A fundraising strategy should include a multi-channel approach: In person meetings, direct mail, email, social media, events, various campaigns and more. The goal is not to put all your eggs in one basket.

This multi-channel approach guarantees that your organization has multiple ways to reach current and potential donors: Send them a direct mail piece but invite them to donate online. Encourage sign ups to your e-newsletter, which then distributes information about your upcoming gala event.

Given that current donor retention rates hover around 40%, the ability to sign up new subscribers to your e-newsletter and eventually move them through the fundraising funnel can be highly advantageous to your overall fundraising efforts.

YES, EMAIL CAN EQUAL FUNDRAISING DOLLARS.

According to Statista[2], *almost 4 billion people worldwide use email*. It's an excellent channel for connecting and building relationships. Assuming people invite you into their inbox, which is what this e-book will cover.

The Blackbaud Institute 2019 Charitable Giving Report[3] states: *"8.7% of total fundraising came from online giving."* In 2018, $428B was raised in the U.S. alone by charities. 8.7% of that translates to over $37B. How can your organization get a piece of that pie?

Sure, direct mail can lead people to donate online. Your website can have a large, flashing neon "donate" sign and drive traffic to the online donation form. But what about email? What if we encouraged people to subscribe, got them involved in our mission and eventually solicited donations via email?

The first part in this process is onboarding: Getting people to sign up/subscribe and welcoming them to your e-family.

What's Included In This E-book

The data used in this e-book are from the 76 organizations that do have e-newsletter sign-up forms on their site. You're going to see examples of the great, the good and the not-so-good. *My intentions are NOT to call out a specific organization.* My goal is to help all nonprofits, especially small shops, learn how to maximize subscriptions as eyeballs visit their site.

In this e-book, I will discuss

- General content strategy
- Subscription form location on your website
- What fields the sign-up form should include
- Contents of a good welcome email
- Usage of pop-up ads to encourage subscriptions
- Testing via data

The goal is getting your foot in people's inbox front door. Then your organization can deploy its content marketing strategy and eventually use your e-newsletter as another channel for fundraising.

A Final Word- Thanks Lisa!

Lisa Sargent is one of the smartest, savviest and most compelling nonprofit copywriters I have the fortune of knowing. When I first told her about my research into this topic and that my data set was the largest 100 U.S. nonprofits, she laughed and said: "Did you know I did a similar study 10 years ago?!"

I didn't.

It was interesting for me to read her guide[4] and see what had changed over the last decade…and what unfortunately had remained the same.

As I mentioned at the outset: Just because the "big dogs" are doing it doesn't mean you should follow their lead.

And we're off…

Terms to become familiar with.

Below is a list of terms that will appear in this e-book.

CTA- Call-to-action. A piece of content which causes people to take an action.
CTR- Click through rate. This is the percent of people who clicked on a link in your email divided by the number of people who received the email.
Conversion rate- The percentage of people who have taken a desired action or completed a task on your website.
Conversions- When someone completes a task on your website, such as submitting a form or donation.
Footer- The bottom section of webpages. Often the footer contains a sitemap (a list of various pages on the site), the organization's address and phone number and social media icons.
Hero image- The main/large image that usually appears at the top (banner) of nonprofit websites. The goal is to have a visual which dramatically demonstrates what your organization is all about.
Multi-channel- Using multiple channels/platforms to fundraise and market.
Open rate- Refers to the rate at which your emails are opened by subscribers. If you have 100 subscribers and 46 of them clicked to open the email, your open rate would be 46%.
Opt-in- Permission granted by person to allow marketing materials to be sent to them.
Retention rate- The percentage of people that your organization keeps as donors/subscribers/other over a given time period. For example, nonprofits on average maintain an abysmal 40% donor retention rate. Out of 10 donors, 4 stay from one year to the next but 6 drop off. The cost of retention is cheaper than the cost of acquisition.

Chapter 1: Strategy.



People's email inboxes are over-flowing. You need to give them a good reason to provide you with an entrance to their inbox. That reason should be found in your overall fundraising, marketing and communications strategy.

Creating a strategy is a much broader topic. But I would like to briefly talk about it in regards to email marketing.

Strategizing

Throwing up a subscription form on your website and sending out e-newsletters without a strategy is like fundraising without knowing how to fundraise or who to ask. Here are issues your nonprofit needs to consider and answer before launching an e-newsletter:

Why: When I work with nonprofits looking to do something new with their fundraising and marketing, I ask "Why"? Do they believe that channel X will bring them more success or did they hear from someone that they HAVE to be on channel X and therefore have to start posting?

Answer the why before you start considering your email plan. Why are you adding email to your marketing mix? Why fill people's inboxes? Why should they pay attention to your organization and its work in the community?

Taking charge: Who on your team (in house or consultant) will be responsible for

- Collecting content
- Composing stories and articles
- Posting everything to your website
- Plugging everything into your newsletter template?



Besides content, you need to decide in advance how often you'll email your subscribers. Too often and they may unsubscribe because you're "cluttering up" their inbox. Too infrequently and they won't open your emails because they can't remember who you are or why you're sending them emails.

Donor centric: What content will you be showcasing in your emails?

DONORS WANT PROOF THAT THEIR GIFTS HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION ACCOMPLISH ITS MISSION.

Emails are like all fundraising collateral: Constantly talking about the organization gets real boring, real quick. You need to feature the word "you" throughout your emails. Your donors were the ones who helped those being served by your organization. Your newsletter is another vehicle to create that one-to-one relationship between donor and service recipient.

Touchpoints: In marketing, the 'Rule of 7' states that it takes prospects at least 7 views of your offer/services before they begin to interact with it.

Think about that: If I subscribe to your e-newsletter, I'm not going to donate based on your welcome email! It's going to take a LOT more than that before I even consider a donation. Which means…

Runway: Your strategy has to include the runway of how you move a new subscriber to donor. Welcome them in (more on that in Chapter 4), introduce your organization, explain how they can be making a difference, share stories and testimonials. Again, this is not a short-term strategy. It takes time to learn which emails and which content people react to. Which means…

Segmentation: Not all subscribers open every email and the great majority will not be clicking on links you include in the body of the newsletter. Here are the 2 data points you need to know: According to Campaign Monitor[5]

- The average open rate for nonprofit emails is 20.39%
- The average click through rate (CTR) is 2.66%.

So only 1/5 of subscribers are opening your emails and only 1/10 of those people are clicking on links in the email to read and learn more. Remember the Rule of 7? It's not as easy as it sounds.

You need to pay close attention and analyze the newsletter data you have available. Test subject lines, headlines, content and more to see what boosts open rate and CTR. Additionally, you can segment your list based on which types of emails and articles subscribers opt to open and click on. That allows you to personalize the e-newsletter experience and can increase your chances of building a relationship with individual subscribers. Same exact thing you would do with potential donors.

Example I: You're launching a new campaign aimed at helping young kids in your community. For those who consistently click on articles in past newsletters related to young kids, make sure this story is front and center in the e-newsletter they receive. People who are engaged with a specific subject matter may be more likely to engage with campaigns related to that subject.

Example II: Your boss is hell-bent on starting a new monthly giving campaign on January 2. You just finished bombarding people's inboxes every day over the last two weeks of December asking…no, almost begging for a year-end donation. Know when would be a bad time to launch a monthly giving campaign? January 2!!!

Avoid angering subscribers by cross-referencing your subscriber and fundraising database. See who gave to the year-end campaign and remove them from your email about the monthly giving campaign.

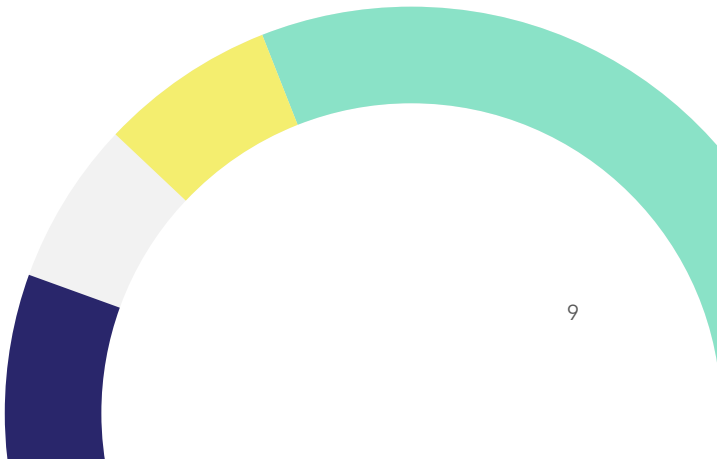
Segment your lists. Hopefully you're doing that with your donor list. Your email subscriber list is no different.

Plan, Implement, Test

Planning in advance helps determine success. Once you implement your email marketing plan, you'll be reviewing the data to see what's working and tweaking what isn't. You CAN have an open rate higher than 20%. You CAN have a CTR double and triple the industry average.

Strategy + implementation + constant testing = Success!

You have a strategy. Now let's get you set up with onboarding, the process of getting people to subscribe to your e-newsletter.



Chapter 2: Location, location, location.

Roberta wants to learn more about charities helping homeless persons in her city. She Googles "homeless charity Raleigh" and your nonprofit is the top search result. Hooray for your SEO efforts!

Roberta clicks through and arrives on your homepage. She immediately notices the flashing neon "donate" button. (Don't use flashing neon lights!) She starts to scroll the homepage and learn more about your organization's work and programs for the local homeless community.

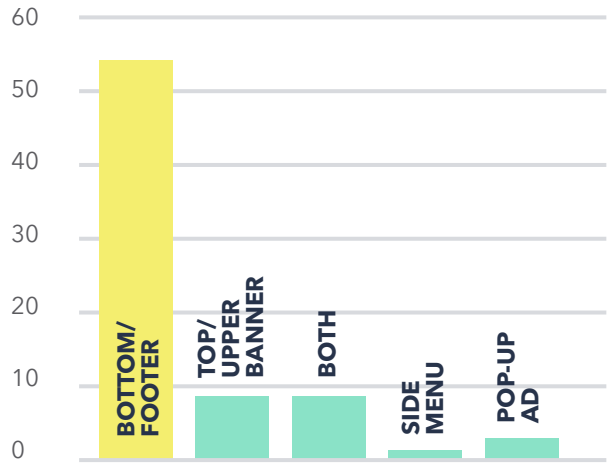
Since she's very busy but still wants to learn more, Roberta decides to subscribe to your charity's monthly e-newsletter. Where on your homepage should the sign-up form appear?

WHEN IT COMES TO FORMS, IT'S ALL ABOUT REAL ESTATE.

Homepage

The purpose of your e-newsletter is to use storytelling to build relationships, generate leads and eventually drive conversions, i.e. donations. This process starts with a sign-up form. That form must appear on your homepage (and as you'll see in the next section, on every page on your site).

But where on the page?



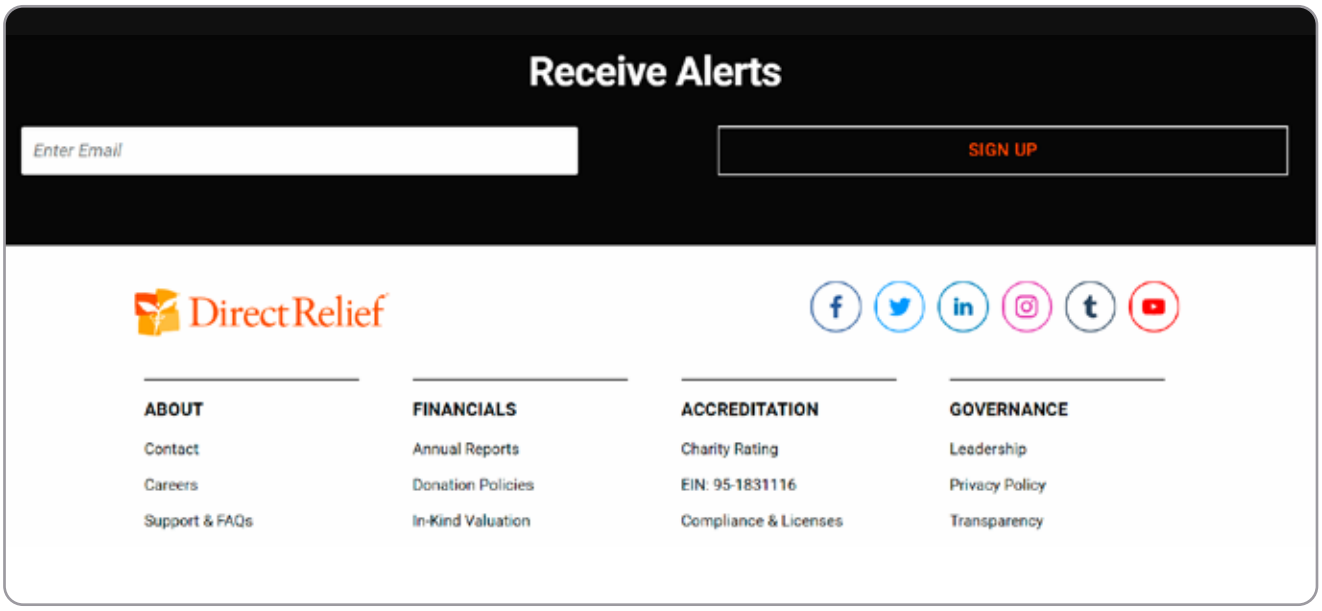
LOCATION OF FORM ON HOMEPAGE OF TOP NPO WEBSITES

Almost all nonprofit website homepages have a hero image at the top of the page. It includes one large image, main menu headings and a "donate" button which hopefully separates itself from the other menu items by being in a box, a larger font size and/or a different color.

If the purpose of this upper banner is to drive donations, don't place a newsletter sign-up form there. Having competing calls to action (CTA) complicates matters for the reader. Looking at this area should tell them what you want them to do: Click donate and go to the online donation form.

Where you **should** place the signup form is right on top of the footer or in the footer itself. In either case, you have to differentiate the form from the rest of the footer. That could mean using a different background color or a bright "submit" button. But it should stand out.

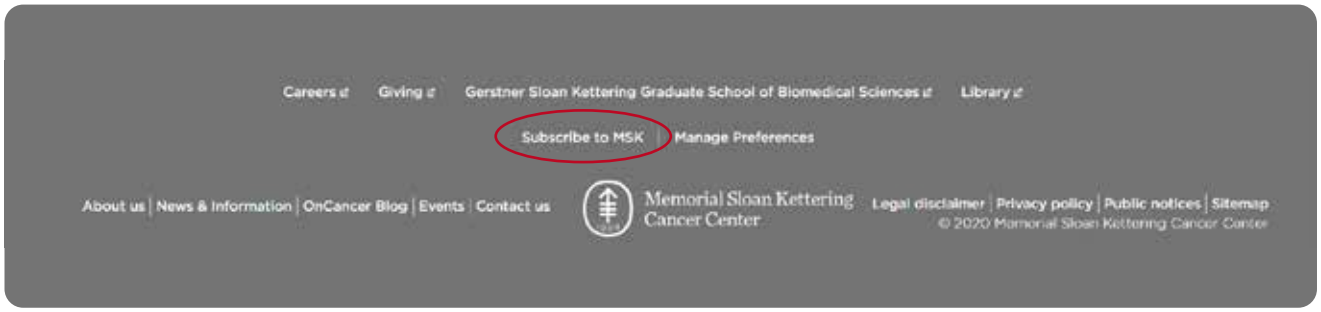
Let's look at 4 examples and what we can learn from them:



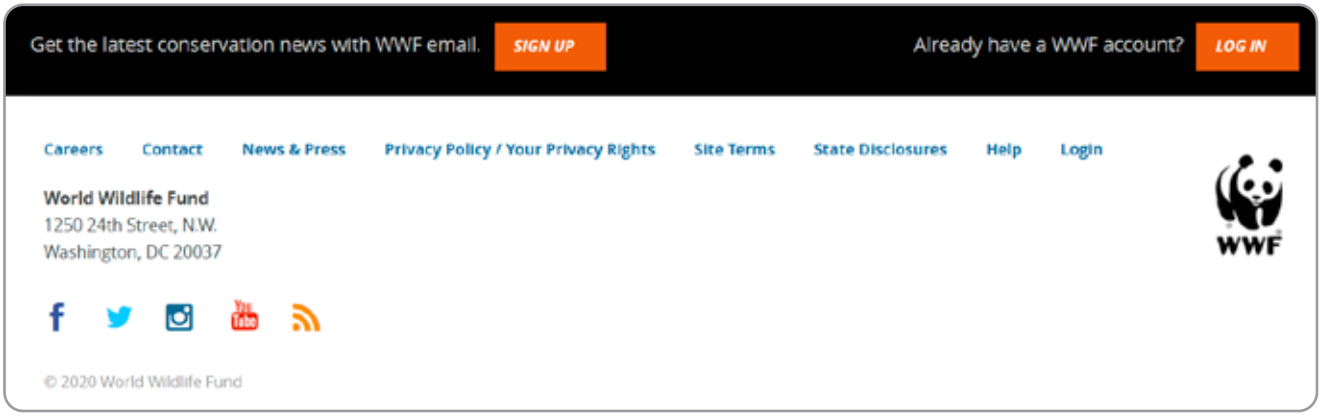
Direct Relief: *Right above the footer. The black background stands out in contrast to the white background of the sitemap below it.*



Goodwill: *The blue on blue makes it VERY hard to see the word "subscribe" and click.*



Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center *"hides" their sign-up link in their footer. It's extremely hard to find.*



World Wildlife Fund: *The background makes it stand out. The orange "sign-up" button also stands out. One problem: They're making users go to a new page to sign up. That can be a frustrating experience for people. They just want to sign up! Don't make it harder for them.*

Remember Roberta? She skimmed your homepage. She now knows more about your mission. Once she gets towards the bottom of the page, that's where you move her from someone who was curious about your work to a more informed member of the community. Assuming your strategy is solid, your e-newsletter will accomplish that.

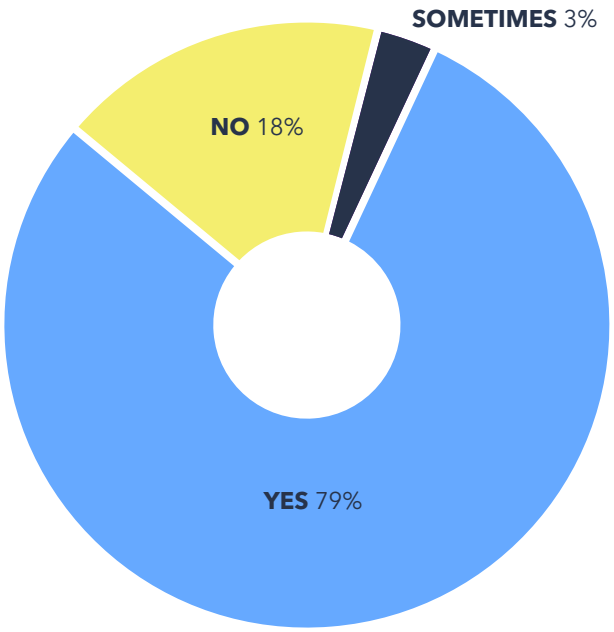


"Towards the bottom of the homepage, before the footer on every page of the site. I have tested it and it did convert better. I saw that after people engaged and consumed someone's content (and saw value), they were more likely and ready to sign up to a newsletter (to receive more valuable and exclusive content)."

MIRIAM ISAAC
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR
OF HUX (HOUSE OF UX)

Inner Pages

The same form which appears above or in the homepage footer should appear on every single page of your website.



SIGN UP FORM ON INNER PAGES OF TOP NPO WEBSITES

Remember: Many people reach your website because they clicked on a link in a tweet, Facebook post, email or Google sent them there. That doesn't mean they're viewing your homepage. They may come to your site to read your latest blog post or view pictures from your recent gala event.

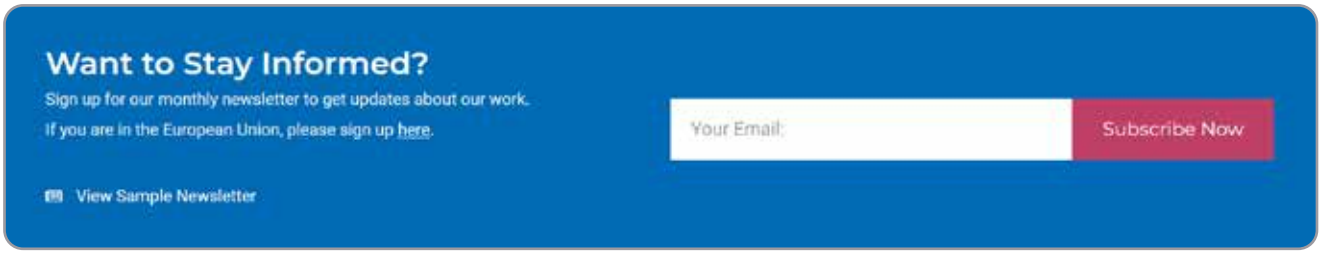
DATA TIP:

Use Google Analytics to review which pages receive the most traffic on your website. If you're not going to include a subscription form on every page of the site, your most heavily trafficked pages should include a sign-up form.



"If you're telling a story and proposing value, it doesn't make sense to interrupt that with a big "Get insights into your inbox" in the top right of the page. It makes sense to put it where someone's discovered your value. At the bottom of a landing page flow, end of a blog post or the end of any freebies/eBooks/white papers you send out."

JESSICA MH SMITH - UX WRITER, KIN + CARTA CREATE



The Task Force for Global Health *has this banner on every page just above the footer. The background color is different than the footer, the "subscribe now" button stands out, they offer a separate sign-up for EU residents and they offer a sample newsletter. That's a good idea for people who might want to see what you're offering.*

Donation Page

This one wasn't a slam dunk. Should your online donation form include a checkbox so people can opt-in to receive your e-newsletter? Just above half (53%) of the nonprofits I reviewed had a sign-up checkbox on their donation page.

On the one hand, you don't want to distract people. Let them come to the form, fill in the necessary fields, submit their donation and move on. You could add a link (or brief form) in the thank you message donors receive after their online donation has been processed. That message could appear as a new page on your site or in the thank you email you send. (You are immediately thanking your online donors, right?!)

On the other hand, having a checkbox with a brief CTA and sentence about your e-newsletter shouldn't sidetrack them. They can make a very quick decision about whether to sign up or not.

No matter what you decide…

1) Opt-in: Do NOT have a checkmark already appear in the subscription checkbox! This is related to privacy compliance issues and also allowing the donor to make the decision themselves, instead of you "forcing" them to remove the checkmark and say no. In my review, the checkbox was pre-checked on 58% of NPOs that had a sign-up checkbox on their donation form. Don't do that.

2) Always be testing! Place the checkbox, CTA and verbiage on the online donation form. See how often people click the checkbox to opt-in. A very small percent? Change the CTA. Change the verbiage. Keep testing until you reach a decent opt-in level or, if the percent remains extremely low, remove it from that page. People may want to donate and that's it.

Now that we've reviewed on which pages and where on the page your subscription form should appear, let's look at what the actual form itself should include.



"Should there be a checkbox on the donation form? Yes, yes and always yes. Because you want to speak to them again. A donation is never a single transaction, it's an opportunity to ensure that you're starting and maintaining a good relationship with a key supporter. If they felt strongly enough to donate to the charity, checking a box that says "Yes, I'd like to receive your monthly newsletter" won't be much of a stretch. You should always give a donor an opportunity to better connect with the organization."

JEREME BIVINS
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
GOOD DOG STRATEGIES



Smile Train's *sign-up on their donation page tells you what they'll be sending and offers you 2 options for receiving news. Unfortunately, both checkboxes are pre-clicked.*

Chapter 3: Proper form.

What's the first thing your organization needs in order to have a successful e-newsletter? A list of email subscribers. But like with marketing collateral, website and fundraising content, you need to think about the reader/potential subscriber. What will THEY get out of subscribing to your e-newsletter.

You have to demonstrate value and show why it's worth it for people to add another email to their inbox. Consider it like a transaction: You provide X (good content) in exchange for Y (their email address).

Want them to subscribe? Make the ask relevant to the reader! That means your form should include:

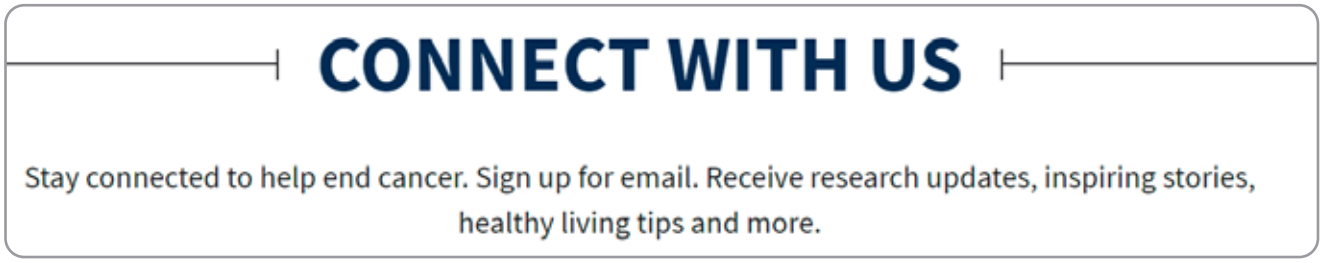
- A 1-2 sentence ask with a headline/CTA
- Field/s to fill in
- Submit button
- Thanks message/page (see chapter 4)

The Ask

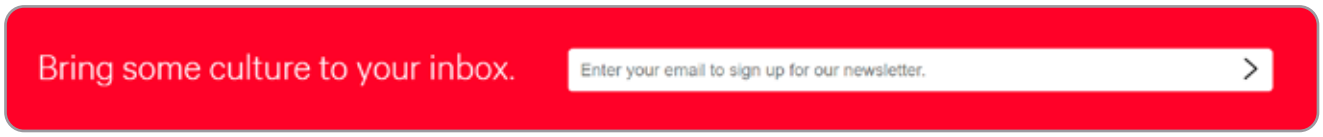
The ask should be short, clear and direct about what you're offering. One sentence should do it and two is for sure enough. Include a description of why they should subscribe and what subscribers will receive (e.g. type of content). You can also include language that lets them know how often you'll send them emails.

ONE THING TO AVOID: DON'T MAKE THE READER THINK OR GUESS TOO MUCH.

Offer value with a relevant ask and they will sign up.



American Cancer Society: *The first sentence is a CTA. The third sentence gives you an idea of what their e-newsletter offers. Since many of us know someone affected by cancer, learning more (research updates) and health tips are good ways to encourage sign ups.*

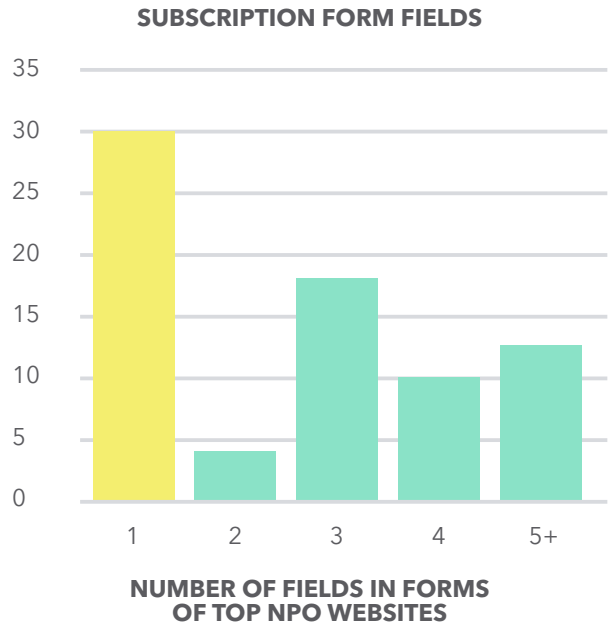


The Metropolitan Museum: *I like the verbiage they use to get you to sign up (though some people might find it a bit pretentious or condescending).*

One item to consider: A short privacy statement or link to your data privacy standards. Given new laws about using people's data and their worries about privacy and spam, it might help to put them at ease.

Form Fields

You are not asking people to apply for a bank mortgage. Therefore, there's no need for your form to require people to submit first & last name, email address, birthdate, phone number, address, zip code and blood type. (Please note: I've seen all of those fields except 1, required on various websites. I'll let you guess which field wasn't real…)



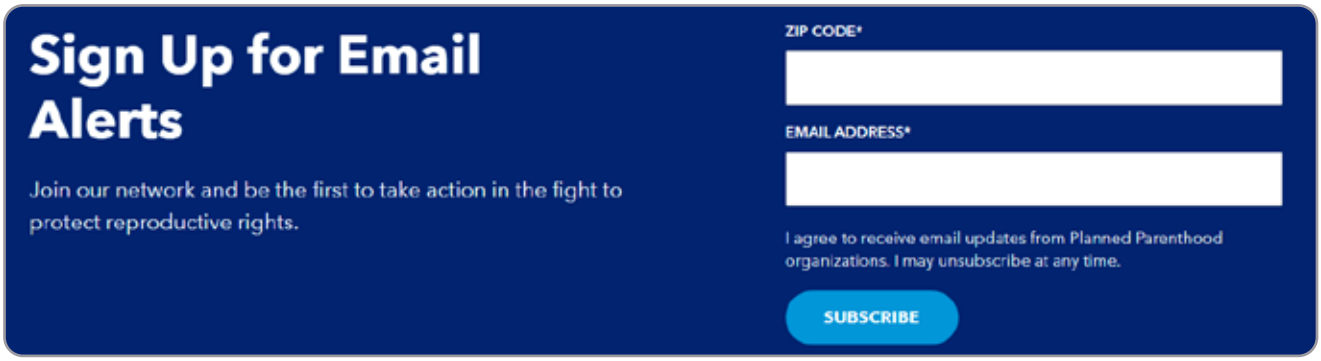
Need an example? Go to the Metropolitan Opera Association website[6] and take a look at their sign-up form.

Best practice? Learn from an expert:



"Every second of friction that's thrown at somebody, the less signups you'll get. Just requesting an email address gets you more signups. It is less personalized but if you give them more opportunities to engage (social media, follow up emails, etc.), you'll get their first name, intrigue them, interest them. The goal is sign ups."

TEVI HIRSCHHORN - UX CONSULTANT



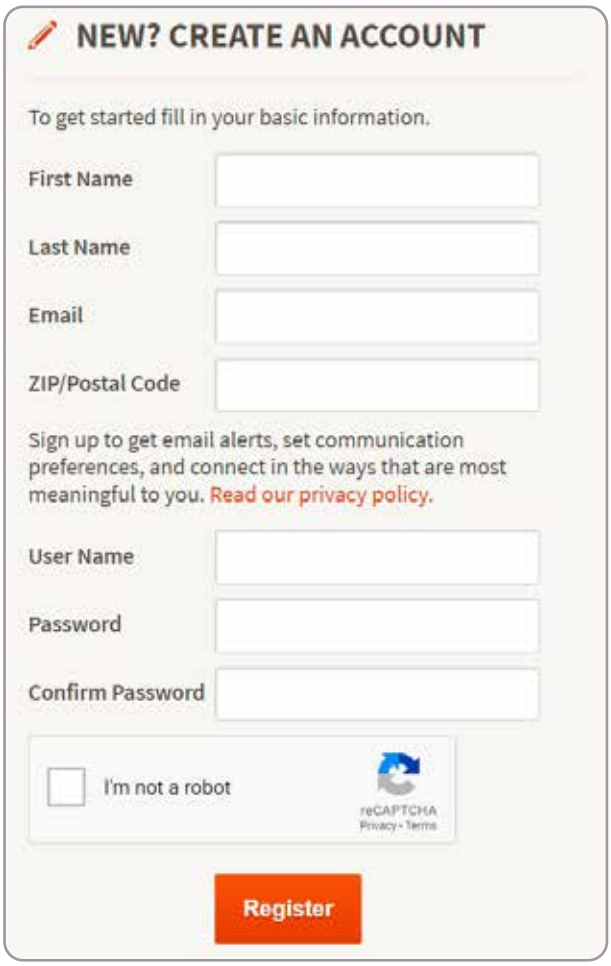
Planned Parenthood: *Very clear CTA telling me why I should sign up. Here they DO ask for the zip code and it's required. The reason? Allows the organization to segment subscribers and mobilize people for advocacy efforts at a local level when needed.*

Here's what you should avoid doing: Have a "sign up" button which, when clicked, takes people to a new page with a form to be filled in. Not user friendly- it's annoying. People just want to sign up and move on, not have to navigate through different pages on your site.



American National Red Cross: *The sentence describing the newsletter content is good. But by clicking "sign up now" you have to go to another page to subscribe. Not user friendly!*

What about asking people to register and/or create a password for signing up? Absolutely not! Do you want them to subscribe or not?! This isn't something private which is when registration and/or password is warranted.



National Multiple Sclerosis Society: *I have to set up an account and create a password before I register. I have no idea why I have to do that! If they have a reason, I would have expected them to list it. Otherwise, potential subscribers are not going to sign up.*

The Button

I thought that the subscribe button should have a CTA, rather than boring old "sign-up" or "submit." Maybe "join the community" or "join our fight." The experts I contacted were split on this issue. Some disagreed with me and stressed the importance of the verbiage on the form button being extremely clear for the subscriber. Others thought that using it as a call-to-action would cause more people to want to subscribe.

PLATFORM TIP

There are many platforms which can host your newsletter. Some allow you to choose which fields to display and some come pre-programmed. You can't add or remove fields. It is of course advisable to find a platform which provides you options. If you're 'tied' to a platform which doesn't offer choice, make the best with what you've got. Location still matters. Powerful CTA is crucial.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO? TEST, TEST AND TEST!

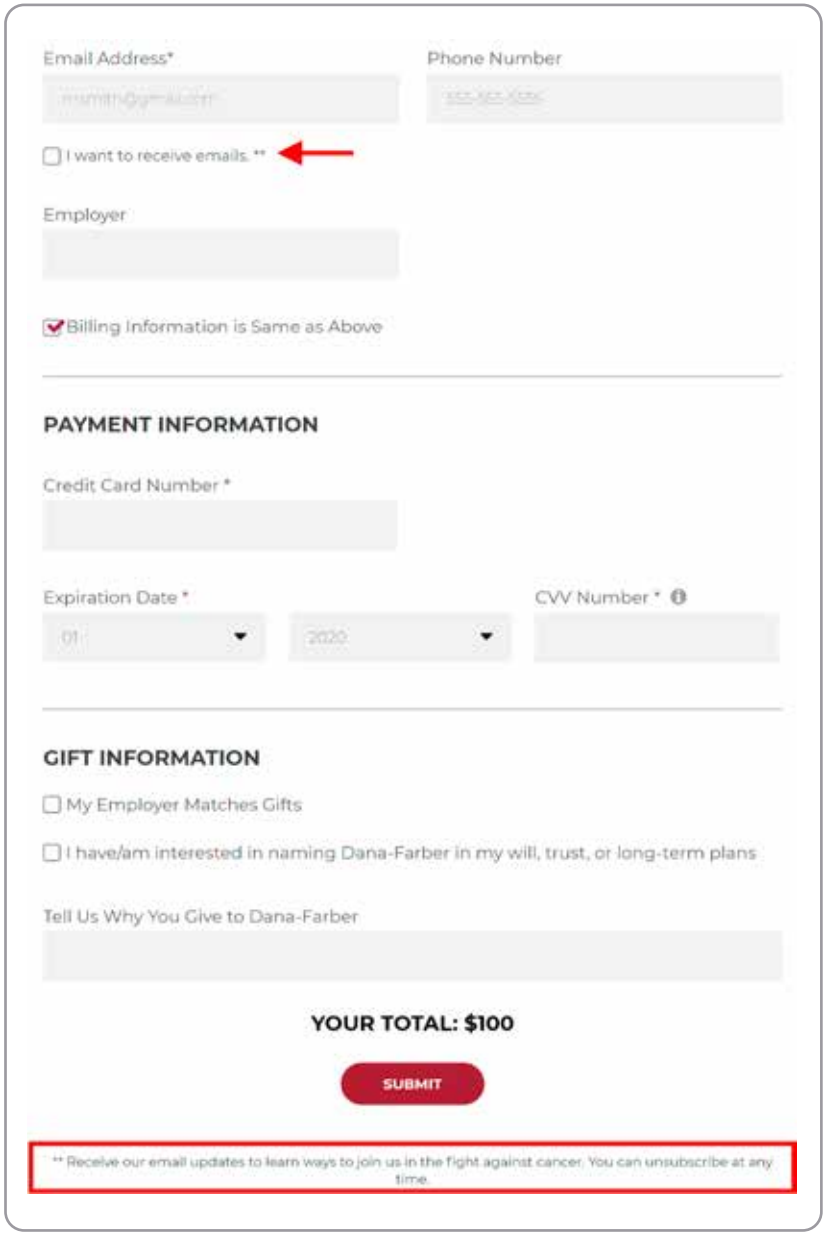
(See Chapter 6)

Could Be Better

Let's look at two places where the Dana Farber Cancer Institute advertises its e-newsletter.



They let subscribers know they'll receive useful content. The problem? The sign-up button sends you to a new page to fill out the form.



They have a newsletter checkbox at the top of their online donation page. However, want to know what's in the newsletter? You'll have to scroll all the way to the bottom of the form. Don't make people do that- they won't scroll to read the "fine print." Also consider those with low vision. The font size needs to be larger!

So now we know where to place the form and what content should be presented to the reader. Once they subscribe, what's next? Expressing your gratitude, of course!

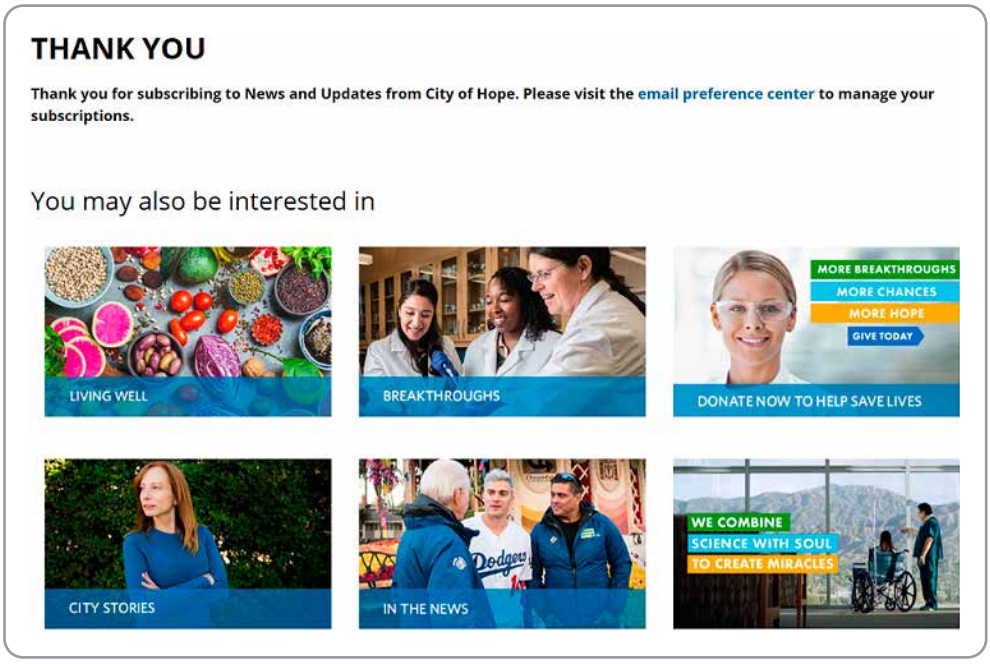
Chapter 4: Gratitude.

James clicks the "subscribe" button on your online form. Hooray- a new subscriber! What's next?

AS WITH A DONATION, THE FIRST THING TO DO IS EXPRESS GRATITUDE.

On Your Website

A pop-up message or new page should appear which includes a thank you to James. A simple "thank you" is not enough. Thank them for joining your community and becoming part of your movement/helping to end child hunger/finding a cure for cancer or some simple message about your mission.



City of Hope: *This is their pop-up thank you after subscribing. The opening sentence could be more descriptive. Offering people links to more information on the site is good. Asking for a donation? I'm not a fan, especially if this is the person's first exposure to your organization.*

Spam Check

Your thank you message should also include a brief note that new subscribers should check their inbox for a welcome email. Remind subscribers to check their Spam folder if the email doesn't arrive within a minute or two. It does happen that e-newsletters end up in Spam. So if they use Gmail, remind people to move the newsletter to their primary inbox. This ensures that future editions will not end up in Spam.

Additionally, remind subscribers to add the sender (your organization's email address) to their contacts. That will help minimize the spam hits.

If emails are ending up in Spam, it's costing your organization[7] a lot in potential lost donations.

An IMMEDIATE Email

• Very strange stat: *Only 50% of the organizations (whose e-newsletter I signed up for) sent me a welcome email!*
• A little less strange but nevertheless stat: *Of those who sent a welcome email, 75% sent it right away/within 24 hours. The other 25%? Took 2+ days. Unacceptable! The outlier? Special Olympics- took **70 days** to arrive.*
• Must have been a mistake stat: *One day after subscribing, the first email I received from the Carter Center was a FUNDRAISING email*. Four hours later my welcome email arrived. If their welcome email gets sent right away after subscribing, that doesn't happen. But for a new subscriber that could be a frustrating experience.

YOUR WELCOME EMAIL SHOULD ARRIVE AS SOON AS PEOPLE CLICK "SIGN UP."

This way it doesn't get buried under an avalanche of emails in their inbox. They just signed up, get them to take the next action: open the welcome email.

According to a GetResponse study[8] in 2019, the average open rate for a welcome email was 82%. (This is overall, not just the nonprofit sector.) This means there's a good chance a new subscriber will open your welcome email.

Here's a checklist of items for your initial email to subscribers:

√ **Mobile:** According to Adestra[9], 61.9% of email opens are via mobile. Additionally, if an email is not mobile friendly, over 70% of people will delete it in under 3 seconds[10]. Another 15% won't just delete it- they'll unsubscribe. Would be a shame for the first email interaction

with a new subscriber to be a negative one. Make sure all your emails are responsive (mobile friendly)!

✓ **The goal:** Begin building a one-to-one relationship with new subscribers.

✓ **Subject line:** Welcome them to your family/community/team. For example, here is the subject line from the ACLU: "You're part of a powerful team."

✓ **Who sent it:** Your introduction email should come from your CEO or senior staff. Don't send it from a generic email address such as info@org X- use a first name. That same first name should appear in the email.

✓ **Design:** The design of the email should be easy on the eye. Make it effortless for them to read and learn more. If the first experience is a positive one, that will help your open rate with future emails. You want to play "design golf" (term coined by the experts at Really Good Emails[11]). In golf, the goal is the lowest possible score. In email design, the fewer elements the better.

✓ **Personalization:** If your online form asked for the subscriber's first name in the form, personalize the welcome and subsequent emails! The email should start with "Dear James…" Personalization increases CTR by 14% and conversion rates by 10%[12].

✓ **Tone:** The email should be warm and friendly in tone.

✓ **Set expectations:** Let subscribers know how often you'll be emailing them. If future emails will be coming from a different email address or from a different person, make sure to note that in the email. Also, let people know their email address is safe with you. For example, this language from Combined Jewish Philanthropies: "Your email address is safe with us! We will never share your information with a third party."

✓ **Content:** Welcome new subscribers, give them a brief overview of your organization's mission, provide links to a few important pages on your website and add social media links so they can connect there as well. Don't forget to add a message reminding them how to prevent your emails from ending up in Spam.

CONTENT TIP

Don't assume I know much about your organization. Use the welcome email to help introduce me. The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society do wonderful work but their initial email to me was about fundraising for an upcoming triathlon. No context.

Take a look at these two welcome email examples:

If you haven't already, visit DoctorsWithoutBorders.org to learn more about

- Who we are and how we grew from a group of young doctors helping people devastated by famine in Biafra to being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize;
- What we do in countries like Yemen, Syria, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) , working on issues like malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis, and maternal health;
- Our commitment to our supporters—why we don't accept donations from the U.S. government and five industries to maintain our independence and impartiality (one might surprise you); and
- What it takes to become one of our team members on the ground (spoiler alert: a lot).

Doctors Without Borders *provides plenty of good links in their welcome email to help subscribers learn more about their work.*

Together we are a powerful movement committed to investing in life-changing resources, including needs-based financial assistance for dialysis patients, public awareness and education about kidney transplant, clinical research investigating kidney disease and kidney failure, and a kidney disease prevention program that reaches at-risk people nationwide with lifesaving health screenings provided free of charge.

American Kidney Fund *tells you about their mission in their welcome email.*

DATA TIP:

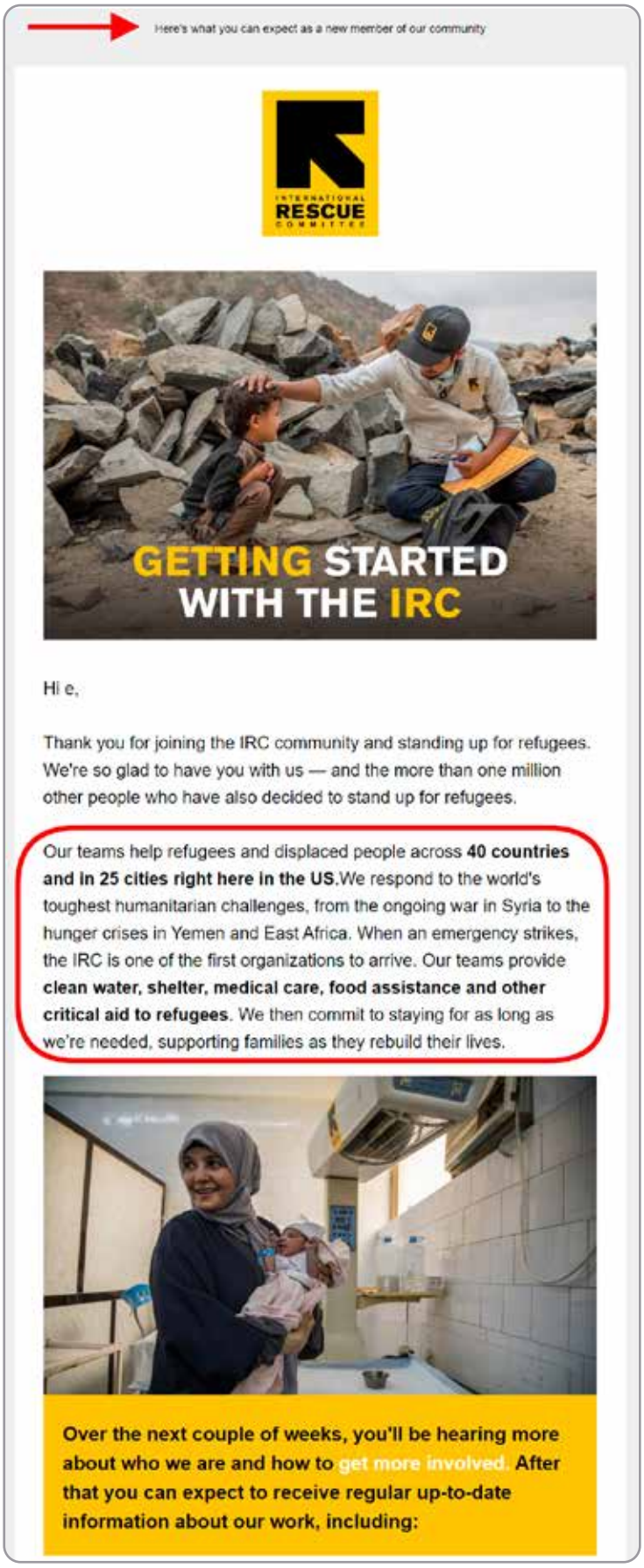
Misspelling a donor's name decreases their retention by 10% and reduces giving by 12% for those who don't churn. (Based on research done by Chuck Longfield and mentioned in the book "Data Driven Nonprofits"[13] by Steve MacLaughlin of Blackbaud.)

Why am I mentioning this here?

- *Personalization I:* If the platform you're using has been set up to automatically add a first name to each email, you shouldn't have this problem. However, you should be checking your new subscribers list because yes, people do misspell their own name (I have fat thumbs, so on mobile…). They won't remember they misspelled it and now, every time they receive an email from you, the first thing they'll notice is Dear That's Not The Correct Spelling Of My Name. If you think a subscriber made a mistake, contact them and ask. Play it safe; it could be worth money later on.

- *Personalization II:* If you are manually inputting names into your newsletter provider, better double and triple check name spelling. Same issue as above.

The International Rescue Committee's welcome email was excellent. I have broken it up into two parts:

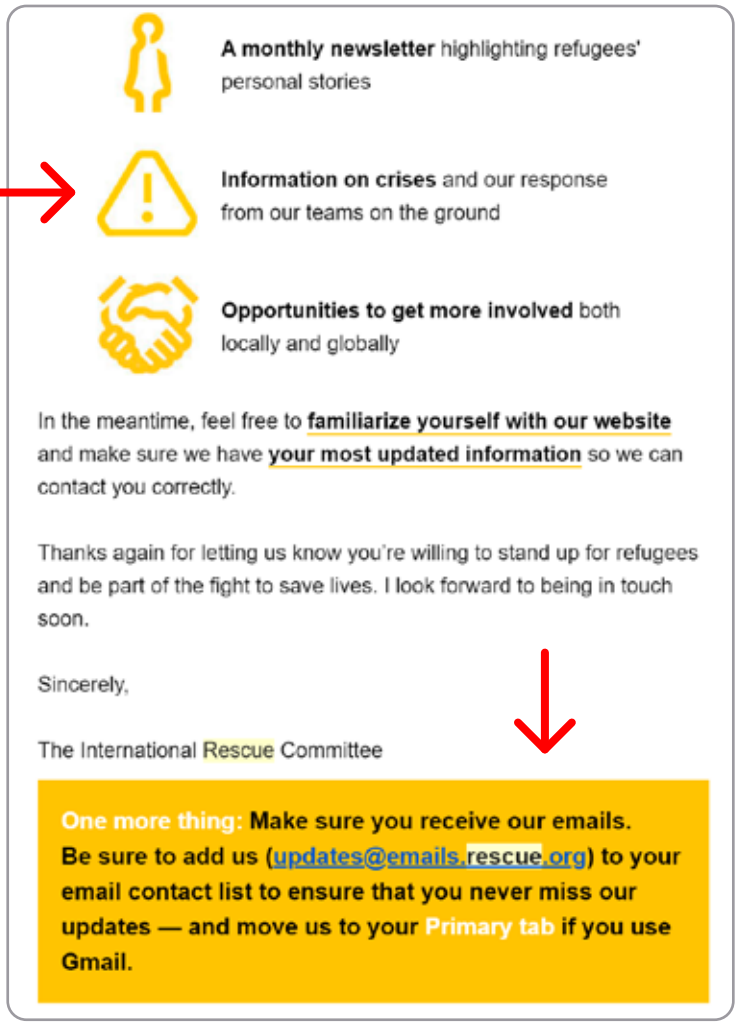


At the top they have a link which manages expectations (I would have preferred the details in the email but at least they have it).

Visually?
Both images really stand out.

The second paragraph gives you an excellent overview of their work.

Below the second picture they try to provide information about frequency. I would have preferred something more concrete than "regular."



IRC tells you what type of content to expect (good use of icons and white space).

They remind subscribers to check that IRC emails aren't going to Spam.

Now's NOT The Time To Ask

Here's one thing your pop-up thanks message and welcome email should avoid: An ask for a donation.

Pretend you were meeting someone (a donor) for the first time- would you launch into a sales appeal right away? Or might you introduce yourself, the organization, the mission? Try to get to know them better first. Let them know what they can expect. The welcome email is the first of many steps in developing a relationship with the subscriber. Make the subscriber feel valued and NOT like a cash cow!

Here's a better way to put it:



"Asking a new subscriber to donate - or do anything significant right away - is like asking you to marry them on the first date."

JULIE COOPER
FUNDRAISING COPYWRITER & COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIST, JB COOPER LLC

There are some fundraisers who say there's never a bad time to ask. This would be one of those times. James just signed up. Let's build and develop the relationship before moving forward with a donation request. This also means not placing a "donate" button in the welcome email.

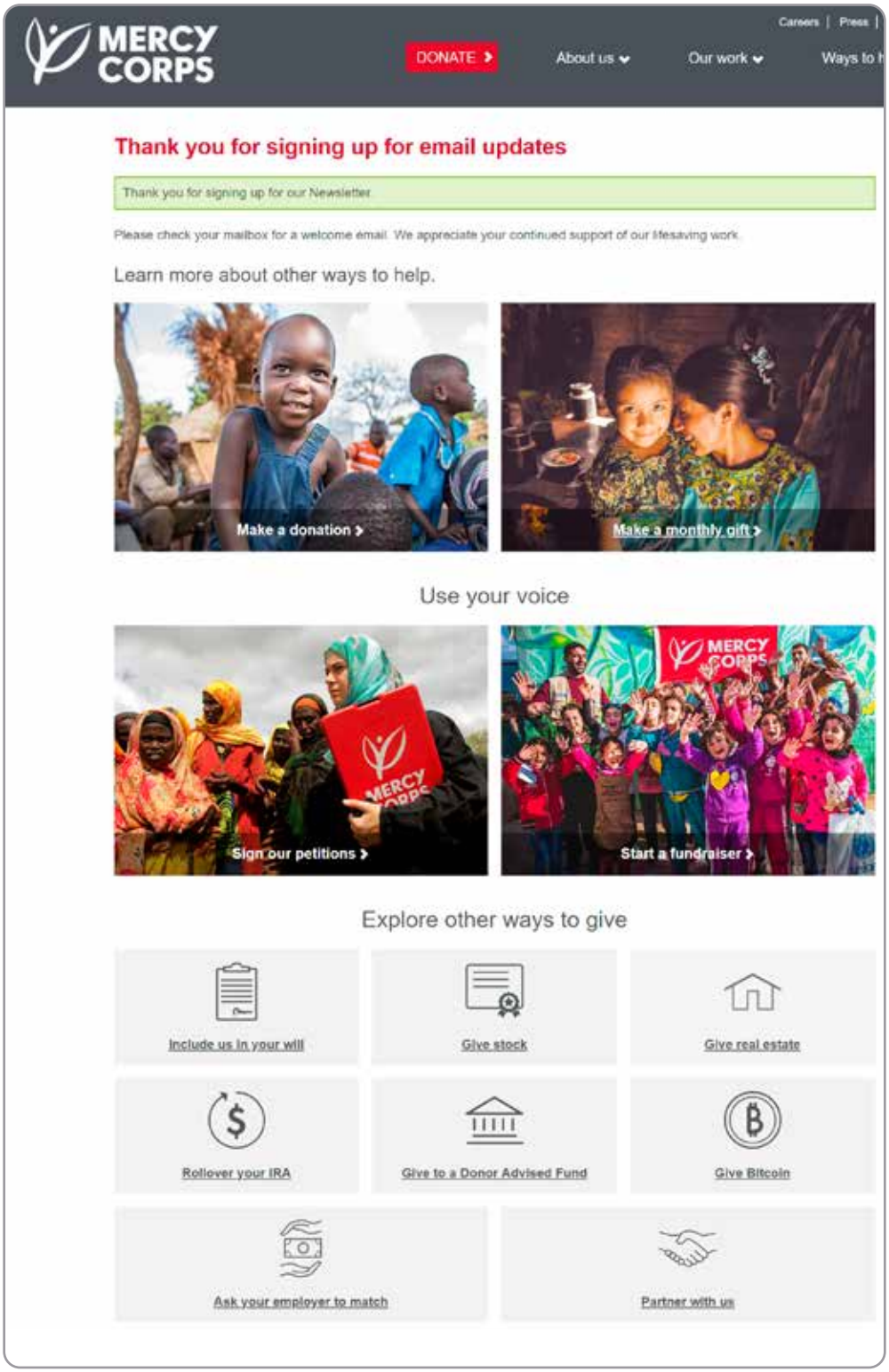
Welcome Friend! Thanks for joining us.

There's no way to sugarcoat it: we live in a dangerous world. Every day, children face violence, disease and malnutrition. Their most basic needs — a safe home and an education — are often out of reach.

That's why UNICEF exists. We never give up hope or let up the fight for a better world — and neither should you. **Give a child hope today by making your first gift.**



UNICEF: *This is the opening to their welcome email. They went straight into an ask! No introduction about their work, no warm and fuzzy feelings. Immediately with a link to their donation page. Note- I did not provide my first name. Therefore it says "Welcome Friend!"*



Mercy Corps *pop-up thank you: They say thank you and let you know that a welcome email is on the way. But the rest is ALL about asking for a donation (except the "sign our petitions"). Again, a person visiting the website for the first time who was moved to sign up for the newsletter shouldn't suddenly become a donation prospect. Give them a little room to breathe before making an ask!*

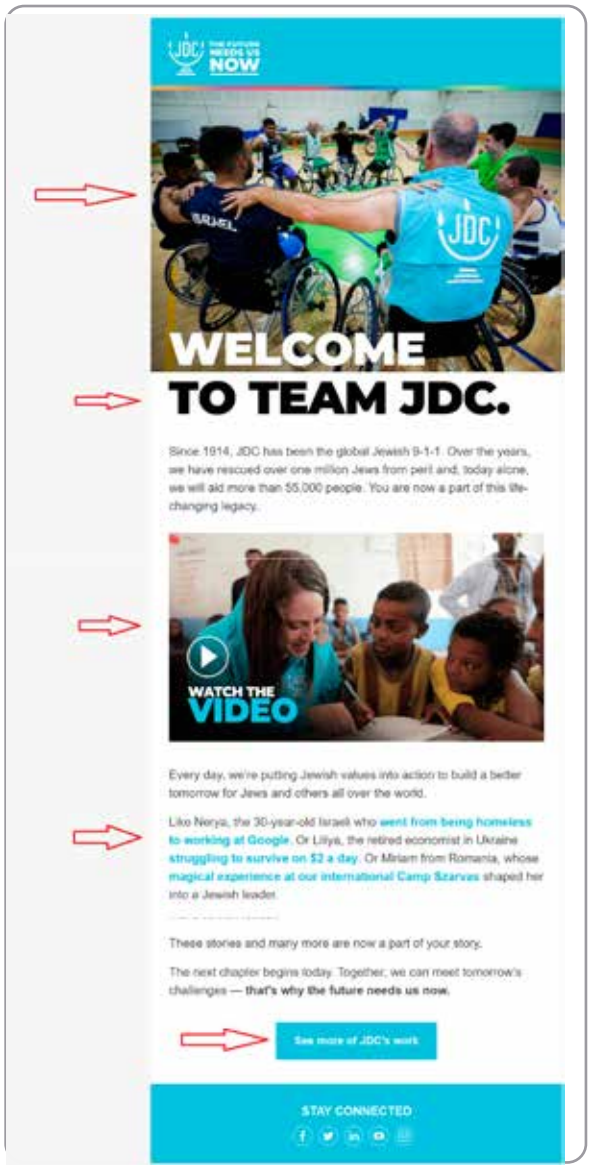
Important to note: Mercy Corps may have tested this thank you message and seen a high conversion rate. Meaning, it converts subscribers into donors. But for those coming to the site and learning about them for the first time, this thanks message could be off-putting.

After The Initial Email

Your welcome email is just the beginning of the bond you want to create with James. Your overall strategy should include a plan for the next steps beyond the welcome email. This includes asking subscribers for more information about themselves (a survey is a great tool for getting to know people better). You'll use storytelling to let subscribers know the impact donors are having in the community. You'll introduce your programs and staff and eventually, start telling subscribers how to become more involved.

For more information about the type of content your post-welcome emails should include, I highly suggest you download and read Julie Cooper's "Email Nurture Sequence Guide"[14] e-book. Chock full of tips and examples you can learn from and use.

Let's end this chapter with one more good example of a welcome email, from the Joint Distribution Committee:



EXCELLENT hero image at the top!

I like the white and black contrast- it's eye-catching.

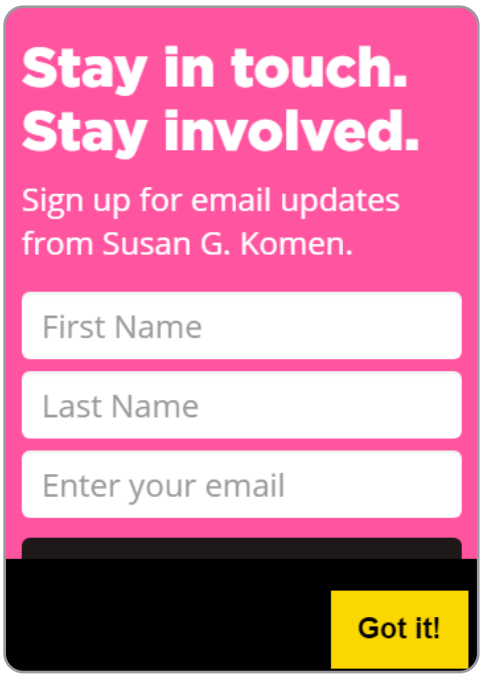
They have a link to a video.
Great way for people to learn more.

They use storytelling to engage the reader.

They provide links for people to learn more, as well as links to social media platforms where JDC can be found.

Chapter 5: Pop goes the ad.

They're annoying. They're effective. They're a pain to get rid of. They convert. I am of course referring to pop-up ads.



Should You Use Pop-Up Ads?

Pop-up ads are exactly as they sound: You get to a webpage and suddenly part of the screen is blocked with an ad that pops up.

In my review, only 2 nonprofits used pop-up ads as a way to ask people to subscribe to their e-newsletter. To the left is a pop-up ad on an inner page of the Susan G. Komen website.

The experts were divided with regards to using pop-ups for newsletter sign-ups. They are annoying but they get people's attention.

POP-UP ADS CAN AND DO CONVERT.

To make an informed decision, you're going to need to test and review the data. (See chapter 6)

Auto pop-ups that automatically appear on your screen when you access a specific webpage are the most annoying. If you

want someone to take action, give them a chance to read more about your organization and then they can make an informed decision.

THROWING A POP-UP IN THEIR FACE EVEN BEFORE THEY'VE HAD A CHANCE TO READ ANYTHING IS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE.

Think back to our discussion about sign-up form placement in chapter 2.

The average conversion rate for all pop-ups, according to a study done by Sumo, is 3.09%[15]. That may seem small but if your site has decent to high traffic, that 3% will go a long way towards helping you build an email list which you can use later on for fundraising purposes.

For more information about pop-ups, read this article from Right Message[16]. You'll learn about placement and the different types of pop-up ads.

What To Remember

If you're thinking about using pop-ups, you need to take the following under consideration:

• Close it: Make sure that the "X" or "close" button to navigate away from the pop-up is clear and not hidden or blurred. I know how much I hate when I have to search for the button that allows me to close a pop-up. Don't annoy readers.

• Make an offer: The ad should offer something to the reader. In the example on the previous page, I would have liked to see something more beyond "stay involved." Maybe "stay involved in the fight to defeat breast cancer."

BUTTON TIP

Although the yellow "Got it!" button on the Komen pop-up ad stands out, the words "got it" might confuse some people. Better to be straightforward and use "subscribe" or "submit." Don't make the reader guess.

• Not every page: Only add pop-ups on specific pages of your website. They visited your programs page? Now offer them the chance to learn more about your programs and constituents by subscribing. The goal is to match the

specific page content with the ask in the ad.

• Patience helps convert: The pop-up should optimally appear after the reader has spent a certain amount of time on the page or has reached the bottom half of the page. How much time should you wait before the pop-up appears? Check your analytics for the average time spent on the page where the ad will appear. That will give you an idea of how long to consider waiting.

• Exit pop-ups: You can also catch readers just before they exit a webpage. Hopefully you've already offered them enough value so that before they close the tab/website, they will be open to looking at a pop-up and signing up for your e-newsletter.

At the end of the day you need to test. Use pop-ups on a few select pages and see if they convert better than a form at the bottom of the page. Fiddle with the language on the pop-up to see what works best. Test having it appear after X amount of seconds or after the reader has scrolled through X amount of the webpage.

The data will help guide your decision making.

Chapter 6: Always be testing.

In 2015, I worked for a hi-tech company. My boss believed that EVERYTHING could be measured. The Excel spreadsheet we used at the outset to store data? 45 columns and 2,500 lines of data. My boss wasn't joking.

As an aside I need to point out: This specific boss was one of the best I ever had. He was the first boss who gave me a budget and then told me to spend it however I wanted, as long as there was growth. Freedom! After years of micro-managing and hovering-over-your-shoulder nonprofit bosses, this was a breath of fresh air.

In less than a year, the company went from 300 to 11,000 subscribers.

More important, I learned the centrality of data to our work. Doesn't matter nonprofit or for-profit sector. We have the data. Now we have to make use of it.

But I Hate Numbers!

Throughout this e-book I have mentioned how important testing and reviewing data is to achieving better results. Some of you reading this hate numbers. You'd prefer to visit Dictionopolis rather than Digitopolis. (I'm smiling because I managed to reference my favorite children's book!)

BUT THE FACT IS, THE DATA YOU HAVE AVAILABLE CAN HELP BOOST YOUR FUNDRAISING.

Want more subscribers to your e-newsletter? Test pop-up ads and different subscription form content to

maximize sign-ups. Test various subject lines to see what brings you a higher open rate. Test different calls-to-action in your emails to see what prompts a higher CTR.

Google Analytics provides you with a wealth of data about how people are using your site. If you decide to test pop-up ads, start by testing them on your most highly trafficked pages.

Mailchimp, Constant Contact and other email/newsletter platforms provide you with plenty of useful data: Open rate, click thru rate, what time of day most people open your email and more. Analyzing the data will help you decide what day and time is optimal for your organization to send emails, which subject lines increase open rates, what kinds of articles people click on and how best to segment your subscriber list.

Bottom Line

Your ultimate goal with an e-newsletter is to build a relationship with a subscriber and eventually convince them to become a donor. Without using the data you have at your disposal, you're making your job harder. You'll keep churning out material that doesn't interest your subscribers. Subscribers won't open your emails. In the end, your unsubscribe rate will go up. Fewer people to market to.

Data doesn't have to drive your decisions but it should certainly inspire them. Sift through the numbers. There are numerous gems waiting to be found and utilized.

Starting the journey.

My goal in composing this e-book was to help nonprofits get started on their email marketing journey. I especially wanted to assist small shops where workers each wear seven hats and may not have the time to figure out where to start and how to build their email list.

When you're ready, here's a checklist of items you need to consider:

- [ ] Where to place the subscription form on your website
- [ ] What fields should be included on the form
- [ ] Should you use pop-up ads to encourage subscriptions
- [ ] Should you ask people to subscribe via your site's donation page
- [ ] What your welcome email will include
- [ ] What data you should be seeking to analyze.

This is just the beginning. Once you have started along your email marketing journey, you need to continue providing value for subscribers, connecting them to your mission and at the end of the day, converting them into donors.

IT'S A LONG-TERM PROCESS BUT ONE THAT WILL HOPEFULLY PROVE BENEFICIAL FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION'S BOTTOM LINE.

Good luck!



About the author.

Ephraim Gopin is a third-generation nonprofit executive and fundraiser. Over the last sixteen years, he has been a CEO, fundraiser, alumni director, grant writer, event organizer, marketing and communications director for both nonprofits and foundations.

Ephraim is the founder of 1832 Communications, an agency which helps nonprofits raise more money through strategic and smart marketing and communications. 1832 partners with nonprofits to craft strategies which improve their website content, enhance their online digital presence, increase the efficacy of their marketing and fundraising collateral, advance their communications and media outreach efforts and of course, upgrade their email marketing.

Your bottom line? It's gonna get a boost.

Ephraim is the publisher of the popular daily nonprofit newsletter, Your Daily Dose of Nonprofit (YDDN). Every Monday through Thursday, YDDN delivers to your inbox content relevant to any nonprofit role you fill.

Remember Chapter 5? Ephraim uses pop-up ads to advertise the newsletter on the 1832 website. It has proven to be very effective.

Ephraim is also the host of the Your Weekly Dose of Nonprofit podcast. The podcast introduces you to sector leaders and experts and provides you with actionable items you can implement at your organization right away.

Ephraim is always happy to connect, talk shop and help you boost your bottom line results. You can find him on LinkedIn and Twitter or book a free, no strings attached 30 minute conversation with him.

Ephraim is a new recipe cooker, 80s pop music and culture master, Boston sports cheerer, puzzle doer and Looney Tunes lover. He is the proud father of three young adults, all of whom disapprove of how he takes selfies.

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