

BOOST YOUR DIGITAL HOLIDAY FUNDRAISING RESULTS



In this guide, we speak frequently of Christmas, recognizing that the holiday offers unique and important fundraising opportunities for Christian-based organizations. That said, we believe that much of the advice here will be useful to secular charities as well. We also hope that other faith communities and cultural groups will be able to adapt this information in a way that meets their year-end fundraising needs and supports holiday appeals at other times of the year.



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Introduction

The holiday season is a generous time in Canada, and charities like yours can benefit from society's greater sense of compassion and community spirit at this time of year. But success requires strategic thinking, smart planning, time, and hard work.



As a charity serving over 20,000 other charities across Canada, CanadaHelps knows the challenges faced by most small-to-medium-sized organizations. Many smaller Canadian charities function with limited budgets and small staffs while they deliver vital programs and services to their communities. Many organizations succeed because they attract versatile, tireless employees who are able to multi-task and take on multiple roles, including fund development. For many small charities, digital fundraising skills are acquired largely on the job and sometimes on the fly – we hear this story every day.

We want to help you benefit from the opportunities presented by the holiday season. We want to help you improve your holiday-time digital fundraising practices in a way that is sustainable from year to year.

We know that many of you are concerned about over-communicating, about asking too much of your supporters too often.

Our research and experience show that keeping your charity top of mind throughout the holiday season is essential for your fundraising efforts. A piece of direct mail or a single email that says little more than “please give” won’t do the trick. Your donors are likely expecting to hear from you at this time of year, and history shows that doing more can drive better results.



KEY MESSAGE:

Be strategic and learn from one holiday season to the next what motivates your donors.

Your donors are ready to be inspired. In this paper we:

- Look at why giving increases during the holiday period.
- Share a simple framework for crafting your holiday plan that you can revisit regularly to optimize each communication tool.
- Provide tips for getting the overall message right; it’s one consistent message that you use throughout the season across all your communications.
- Walk you through the key stages of an effective holiday campaign recognizing that your organization has unique experiences, challenges, and opportunities.
- Suggest complementary campaigns that enhance your core campaign, keep your organization top of mind, and improve your fundraising results.
- Offer tips for improving your results: optimizing your donation forms; writing effective emails; leveraging social media; and getting started with paid social media ads.

While CanadaHelps cannot guarantee a white *Christmas*, we can offer this white *paper* to help you think through your holiday fundraising plans. We wish you success as you aim to touch the hearts of current and prospective donors. We urge you to look at your holiday-time digital fundraising with fresh eyes. “Yule” be glad you did.

The importance of holiday-time fundraising

Holiday time is just around the corner. It is a time of good will, community spirit, and generosity. It is a time to take a deep breath, count our blessings, and express our affection and gratitude through gifts and acts of kindness. For many Canadians, it is also a time of spiritual reflection.

It is no surprise, then, that the holiday season is also the busiest time of year for many Canadian charitable organizations.

At CanadaHelps, we've observed:



30% of annual online donations are made in December 2017



The average gift amount grows by 80% in December



8% of annual online donations are made during the last three days of December

Thanks to research conducted by Ipsos Reid for the Red Cross in 2015ⁱ, we also know that:

- **68%** of Canadians agree that they are interested to receive “a charitable gift that would help someone else, rather than a traditional gift like a pair of socks or a sweater”;
- **73%** of Canadians agree that they like the convenience of buying gifts online; and
- **26%** of holiday gifts given by Canadians are purchased “last minute” or within a day of giving the gift.



KEY MESSAGE:

The combination of holiday spirit, a high receptivity to charitable gifts, the growing acceptance and popularity of e-commerce, and the year-end deadline for a tax receipt creates great opportunities for Canadian charities.

This combination of holiday spirit, a high receptivity to charitable gifts, the growing acceptance and popularity of e-commerce, and the year-end deadline for a tax receipt usually results in a flurry of online charitable activity in December. Your organization stands to benefit if you make a well-timed and compelling case for holiday and year-end charitable giving. While Canadians are more generous in December, the charitable landscape remains very competitive. What will you say to donors to inspire them during this time when they are more likely to give? What is your story? How will you ensure your message is doesn't get lost in the busyness?

The idea stage: Developing your program

The key to a successful holiday campaign is planning. Start by reviewing what you did last year. Pull out the notes from your post-mortem and review what worked, what didn't work, opportunities for improvement and expansion, and things to avoid. Here are a few matters to consider before you implement your 2018 holiday campaign:



Target Audience: Will you speak to your current active donors? Occasional donors? People who have never donated to you before? What list segmentation work is needed? What variations in messages will be required for each audience?



Primary Fundraising Campaign: Do you have a project you want to highlight for the holidays? Or will your ask be centred around your organization's general operational needs? Do you have a specific fundraising target that could inspire donors? How will you track, measure, and report results?



Complementary Campaigns: Maintaining your tone and frequency throughout the holiday is key to staying top of mind but typically requires some "softer" messages interspersed among your primary outreach activities. A complementary campaign like a Charitable Gift Guide push (see page 11) could be useful in engaging donors without taking away from your primary holiday appeal.



Communications Schedule: Giving Tuesday through December 31 is your prime period for fundraising. It is then that you can test the boundaries and err on the side of over-communicating. Your audiences will likely expect it and be more understanding. Today, most small charities are under-communicating. If you have capacity, why not test your campaign cadence to gain insights to inform next year's campaign?



Digital Channels: What digital channels will you use? Email, social media, paid advertising including search engine marketing, pay-per-click, display, re-targeting, and social media advertising? Email messages and Facebook posts might be your trusted go-to's, but maybe this is the year to pay to boost your results to ensure your message will be heard.



Integrated Marketing: Are you supplementing your digital efforts with direct mail, outdoor, electronic, or print advertising? How can you create momentum and synergy among your digital and offline marketing activities?



Resource Allocation: What is the best use of your funds? What is the right proportion to spend on digital advertising versus getting the support needed to develop engaging stories, images, and videos? Be careful in your planning. How much can you realistically achieve? What projects can wait until the New Year?

KEY MESSAGE:

Build a robust digital communication plan and consider an approach that features a primary campaign and complementary campaign.

The decisions you make about the above are specific to your organization. Considering these matters carefully is essential to ensuring that your campaign is thoughtful, effective, and manageable.

Get the overall message right

Your donors and prospective donors want to be inspired. They want to know that their previous gifts have done remarkable things, and they want to know that their new gifts will also have a significant impact.

According to a 2016 donor survey by CanadaHelps, 73% of donors say they are likely to increase their total annual donations if they know the impact their specific gift will have.

Remind donors that a significant portion of your organization's budget comes from charitable gifts. Without donors, your organization cannot help people. Tell them what their last gift did, and what their holiday gift will do. The more specific you can be, the better.

Consider the following messaging for an organization that works with newcomers to Canada:

Good message: "Your donations help us purchase sports equipment for young newcomers to Canada."

Better message: "Your last gift helped buy skates for newcomers to Canada. Your holiday donation will help buy soccer and baseball equipment for the spring."

Best message: "Your last donation bought a pair of skates for 12-year-old Alejandro, a newcomer from Colombia. Your holiday gift of \$100 will pay for soccer cleats for his 10-year-old sister, Isabella. Thanks to you, hundreds of young newcomers like Alejandro and Isabella join teams every year as they settle into their new Canadian lives."



While being as specific as possible, also use the holidays to remind people of your organization's purpose. Remind them of the impact of their gifts at a time of year when they are most receptive.

Why is it important for newcomers to have access to sports equipment? Why is this charity's work so important? What impact does the donor's gift have? Try sharing information like this:

- Sports help newcomers meet new kids and integrate into community life.
- Sports help newcomers manage the stress of settling into a new country.
- Equipment for sports and other recreational activities might be a lower priority for economically challenged families trying to establish themselves in a new country.
- Sports build self-esteem, encourage discipline, and teach children teamwork and respect. Today's athletes are tomorrow's community leaders.



KEY MESSAGE:

Remind your donors of the impact they have had with past gifts. Inspire them by telling them what their new donations can accomplish. Be as specific as possible.



Tell real stories, real well

Your organization works hard to address an important societal need and to make a positive difference. Speaking to this need and the difference your organization is making is the key to connecting on an emotional level with donors and inspiring their gift. Nothing amplifies a message or makes a case better than a true, compelling story with real names, real images and video, and powerful descriptions of your organization's real impact.

From the example on page 4, tell your prospects why Alejandro and Isabella's family came to Canada. What has their experience been like? How did Alejandro do the first time he laced up his skates? Did he fall and get up, then fall and get up again? (Is it a metaphor for the newcomer experience in general?)

Why can't their parents afford sports equipment right now? What challenges have they faced? How grateful are they for your organization and the donors who support it?

Tell Alejandro and Isabella's story in a compelling and memorable way. Write it well. Make it easy and exhilarating to read. Don't distract readers with jargon or generic corporate text that any organization could use.

Consider using the first person. In other words, maybe the story would work better if told by Alejandro or Isabella or one of their parents. Imagine that story told in video, complete with Alejandro taking a tumble or two on the neighbourhood rink before ultimately scoring a goal in a pick-up game and high-fiving his teammates.

Whenever possible, use relevant, real images or video to connect on an even deeper level that words alone cannot achieve.



KEY MESSAGE:

Nothing inspires like a great story. Do the heavy lifting required to tell authentic, compelling stories that connect donors to past and future results.



Holiday tie-ins

If your organization has a specific Christmas program or service that requires funding, then you can easily take advantage of holiday-themed messaging and imagery to inspire readers and promote giving.

Imagine a non-profit nursing home that raises funds for residents who have no family or whose mobility is limited. It could be a beautiful, inspiring, and effective campaign.



KEY MESSAGE:

If your organization offers holiday-specific programs and services, tap into the donor's passion for the season in your campaign copy and visuals.

Good message: "Your donations help our residents experience the joy of Christmas."

Better message: "Your gift is especially important for our residents who don't have family in town."

Best message: "Betty L. is 89-years-old and she never had children. Her sister passed away recently and her nieces and nephews live overseas. Her nearest relative is a cousin 1,000 kms away. Christmas is a sad time for Betty, but with your help, we can bring a little bit of joy. Every Christmas Eve, we hold a remarkable Christmas celebration. Your \$100 gift will put a beautiful Christmas dinner on the table for Betty, help us buy decorations for the home, ensure that we have a wonderful concert for all of our residents, and even buy Betty a little gift. Even if Betty doesn't have family, let's remind her that she does have a community."

If you don't have a specific holiday tie-in, consider a seasonal message that might resonate. For example, does the winter weather pose any unique challenges for the people your organization helps?

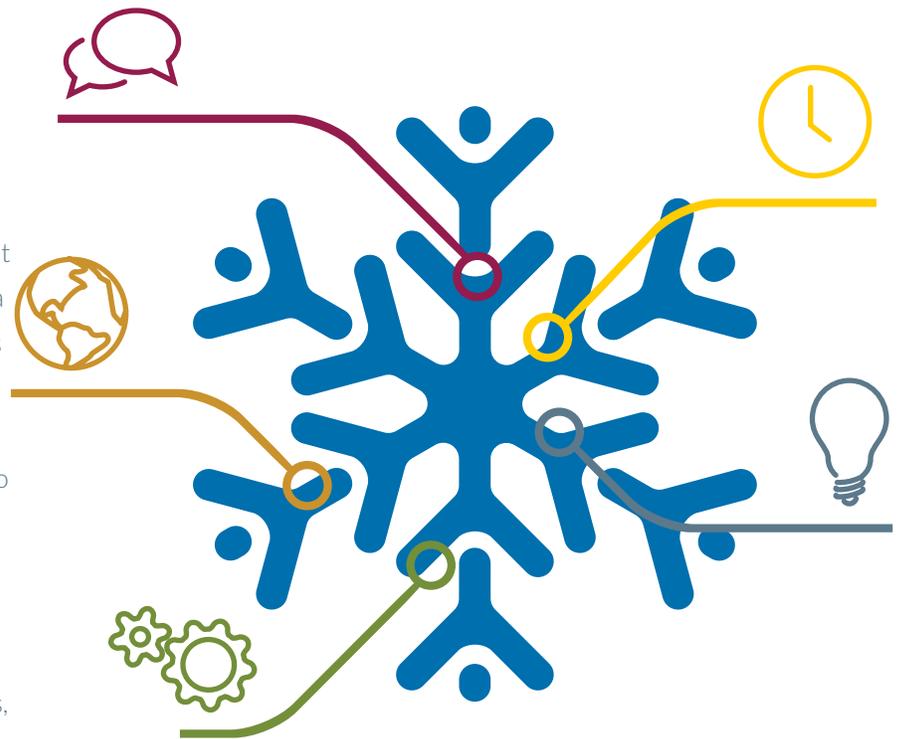
Your holiday plan architecture

When should you start a holiday fundraising campaign, and how often should you reach out?

On the issue of timing, there are different opinions. In some places, you can start to see house lights and holiday-themed store décor right after Halloween. And from time to time, there is a groundswell of opinion expressed that Christmas should not be on the public radar until after Remembrance Day on November 11, so that we do not diminish the commemoration of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

While a plea for funds would likely be seen to be less problematic than ill-timed Christmas-themed product advertising and mall decorations, perhaps there is a case to be made for waiting until after Remembrance Day before launching a holiday campaign.

If you already reach out to your supporters every one to two months, then consider launching your holiday-themed fundraising appeal by mid-November. Then, use GivingTuesday to ask again but also as an opportunity to ask your biggest fans to share information about the great work you do with a broader audience of prospective donors (on a day when people are likely more receptive to philanthropic messages).



KEY MESSAGE:

Within your primary campaign, consider multiple main asks:

1. **mid-November** to reach regular supporters;
2. **GivingTuesday** to reach regular supporters and prospects;
3. one or two asks **between GivingTuesday and December 24** (leaving at least a week between asks); and
4. a **post-December 25** ask to remind people to donate by year end to get a charitable tax receipt for the current year.

GivingTuesday: Donors are listening

On GivingTuesday, the country shines a bright light on philanthropy and its impact with Canadians, charities, and businesses coming together to celebrate giving. The numbers show that audiences are paying more attention to GivingTuesday every year and charities that actively participate in GivingTuesday benefit the most from this global movement for giving and volunteering. In 2017, CanadaHelps saw a 468% increase in dollars donated on GivingTuesday versus the same day in 2012.

As the first Tuesday after Black Friday and Cyber Monday, GivingTuesday always falls in late November or early December. The timing makes it an ideal time to launch or amplify a holiday campaign taking advantage of the groundswell of charitable stories shared on social media and on local and national broadcast media channels. There is no right way to participate in GivingTuesday. The most important thing is that you use it to share your story.

Here are just a few ways your organization can leverage GivingTuesday to lift donations on the day and cultivate the seed for year-end gifts:

- Showcase the people whose lives you've improved. These are the real stories that exemplify the need your organization addresses and the difference it has made. Get creative. For example, try a five-day countdown to GivingTuesday sharing a story each day and on GivingTuesday compile the stories and make the ask, socially and in email, that will enable you to improve more lives.
- If you already have a busy calendar of appeals, use the opportunity to personally thank your donors and remind them of the great work their gift has made possible. If you have capacity, go public with a thank you message to all donors that curates select donor stories of why they support your organization. By sharing their giving stories, your story will be told for you in a way that will inspire new people to help.
- Share what a gift of \$X, \$Y, or \$Z to your organization can do. Consider adding a fundraising goal for the day that your staff, volunteers, board, and supporters will get behind and help make happen, not just by giving, but by sharing the campaign and asking for their friends' and family's support. Sharing specific gift impact examples is a great way to connect with potential donors providing tangible examples of the difference their donation to your organization can make.

You can learn more about GivingTuesday and how you can participate [here](#).



After GivingTuesday?: Your donors are thinking about the holidays

A study by M+R Strategic Services, a U.S. consultancy, looked at how donors responded to single versus multiple emails.ⁱⁱ The results were clear. A single email message is not nearly as effective as a well-thought-out campaign of multiple messages. A series of two or three emails, the study showed, had four times the response rate of a single note and a significantly larger average gift.

A single email message is easily missed by the recipient. Sending multiple notes during the holiday season – a time of year where people are more receptive to appeals – is more likely to result in people actually opening the message and acting on it. The content, of course, needs to be compelling and inspirational to generate results.

The week after GivingTuesday through to December 24 is your core holiday fundraising period. Consider sending a message out to your donors and prospects a week to 10 days after your outreach on GivingTuesday. Perhaps another message a week to 10 dates after that, and then another on December 23 or 24 to inspire people to make “last-minute” donations or tribute gifts.

If you’ve planned your need- and impact-based messaging right, increasing your communication activity is easier than you think, leveraging different real stories supported by compelling visuals. To keep consistency, try to maintain the highly personal storytelling approach through the core holiday messaging period.





After December 25?: “It’s beginning to look a lot like year-end”

Yes, people contribute to your organization because they care about what you do. When they make regular, substantive donations, it’s because they care deeply. That said, there are many donors who are motivated to give to charity by the fact that their charitable donations are tax-deductible.

As you know, donations made before December 31 can be deducted in the current calendar year. So, what better time than just before the end of December to remind prospective donors of the good work you do?

By December 25, people who have responded to your campaign with a gift have presumably been motivated by your messaging, your mission, and the time-sensitivity of a holiday appeal. After they give, if you have the capacity, segment them out of any remaining hard asks for the rest of the year.

Between Christmas and December 31, consider sending messages to donors and prospects who opened your previous emails but did not contribute, as well as donors and prospects who have not opened messages so far (they might be inclined to act after Christmas Day).

While your content should be an extension of your holiday messaging with stories of impact and descriptions of emerging needs, now is the time to inject a sense of urgency and a reminder that donations made on or before December 31 will generate a charitable tax receipt for the current year. Do not be afraid of being direct.

Plan on at least two emails and be ready to re-send to un-opens with a new subject line or forward your email with a well-crafted, easy-to-read message from your Executive Director that speaks to the importance of the gift. To get you started, we’ve created a Tax-Time Toolkit. It includes sample messages and free graphics for your donor communications.

[You can download the Tax-Time Toolkit here.](#)

Raising more with complementary campaigns

Is your organization already actively running a core holiday campaign that hits all the bases above? Ready to do more? Here are some complementary campaigns to grow your fundraising results. If your organization is still working to create a campaign with a communications cadence and plan to take advantage of from the start of the holiday season, through the core holiday period, and end of year, don't feel you need to do it all in one year. Focus on doing what you can do well this year taking advantage of the tips outlined in the this section. e.g. "Focus on doing what you can do well this year taking advantage of the tips outlined in this section and coming back to these ideas next year.

Gift guide

There is a shift happening as more Canadians embrace the idea of receiving a charitable gift. In fact, research shows that 68% of Canadians are interested in receiving a charitable gift rather than a traditional gift.ⁱⁱⁱ You can benefit from this shift in a way that showcases your organization's work to a wider audience. Offer your donors a more impactful way to buy gifts and boost your donations in the process! It's also a great way to keep your charity top of mind with a fresh program that showcases your work. Launch your Charitable Gift Guide using CanadaHelps Customizable Donation Forms. Charitable gift ideas can be anything from physical items such as warm blankets, school supplies, or first-aid kits, to outcomes of donations such as the gift of a lifesaving medical treatment for a child in need. Learn more about gift guides by downloading our white paper, "Launch Your Charitable Gift Guide: It's Easier Than You Think", [here](#).

Securities donations

Donations of securities and mutual funds are increasingly popular ways for donors to express their support for an organization. Enable your donors to give more, benefit from a larger tax receipt, and avoid the capital gains tax on

appreciated securities. You can accept these gifts in minutes using the [CanadaHelps Donate Securities](#) service. CanadaHelps accepts the donation, facilitates the sale of the security, issues the tax receipt, and disburses the proceeds to your charity.

It's important to note that donations of securities can take longer to process than simple credit card transactions. If you are encouraging gifts of securities for your holiday campaign, consider making the ask in November so there can be more than enough time to ensure the gift is realized and the receipt issued before the end of year.



Events

There are some small charities whose primary holiday fundraiser is an event. Many other charities use events to coincide with holiday appeals to help meet year-end fundraising goals. People are generally more sociable around the holidays and holiday events are accepted and expected. Ticketed events can be a highly effective way of generating incremental funds while deepening relationships with your supporters. If your event is successful, attendees will associate your organization with a positive experience. And, if your speeches, materials, and videos are effective and memorable, your attendees will learn more about what your organization does.

That said, running an event requires a great deal of work, up-front expenses, and some tolerance of risk. CanadaHelps provides a comprehensive free white paper dedicated to charitable events that will help you identify just what's involved and assess whether you're ready to run a holiday event this year. If you do think you're ready, do a test run first. It's your established supporters who can seed the event's success. Reach out to ensure you have their support to attend and encourage friends and family to join them.

If you do decide to run a holiday fundraising event, be sure to enable online donations on your online event ticket page. It's a great way for those who are unable to join you in person to still support your cause. You'll also find that some attendees will want to top up their support, adding a donation to your organization when purchasing their ticket. You can download the Charitable Events White Paper [here](#).



**RAISE THE BAR
& RAISE MORE MONEY WITH
YOUR NEXT EVENT**





Elements of a successful fundraising program



Each organization has different challenges and opportunities when it comes to designing and executing a digital fundraising campaign. We would venture an informed guess that nearly every charity in Canada communicates with its donors via email to some extent. As for social media, there is a wide disparity in usage. And, as we know, the websites of charitable organizations vary in their effectiveness.

Choreographing your digital outreach and leveraging each channel for maximum impact is a special skill that requires strategic thinking, effective scheduling, and constant monitoring.

A match offer

Donors are especially motivated when a fundraising appeal offers a matching gift from a sponsoring business, board member, or supporter. There are many ways to make this a reasonable ask of your business partner – capping it to maximum match amount, for example, or making it a one-day offer such as on GivingTuesday.

If you have a key supporter whom you expect is planning a larger gift to your organization, opening a matching gift may be just what's needed to make the gift happen this year. If you are seeking a corporate sponsor to fund the match gift, bundle your ask to the partner with a strong sponsorship case that's aligned to your partner's objectives. You have a great deal of value to offer your business partners, a fact that successful businesses increasingly understand. Aligning with the right charity and the right campaign can be very good for business. Make the case.

An ask that will resonate, by segment

Your ask should not necessarily be one-size-fits-all. While there will certainly be some shared content for various audiences and channels, your message should ideally change for who is receiving it.

As part of your strategy consider how to organize your total audience into segments and communicate appropriately per segment. Examples of segments and what your objectives might be include:



Subscribers who have not yet given, need to be stewarded toward their first gift

Retained donors who upgraded need to be thanked and stewarded toward monthly giving

New donors need to be cultivated toward a second gift

Retained donors who downgraded need to be cultivated toward larger gifts

Lapsed donors need to be re-engaged

Retained donors who gave the same need to be supported and promoted toward more engagement and larger gifts in the future^{IV}

As you consider segments, consider what size of gift you are seeking. Consider an A/B test with your donors to see if a certain ask results in higher donations. Perhaps you do not need to name a suggested amount. If you do offer suggested dollar amounts for the donor to check off, remember that holiday donations are typically larger than donations made at other times of the year. There is probably room to test the limits here, but be sensitive to what you know about the capacity of your donors. And always leave an option called "other" if none of the donation categories you articulate resonate with the donor.

Email

Email is probably your most effective channel for reaching your audience. According to the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), email marketing has an average return on investment of 3800% and the highest conversion rate (resulting purchases or donations), when compared to social media and direct mail channels.^v

For an email campaign to be successful, people need to open your message, be inspired by what they see and read, and then act. And even when readers open the email, they will give you only a few moments of their time. They will read quickly, decide quickly, act quickly, and move on quickly.

A few tips for your consideration:

Subject Lines: Have a subject line that is compelling, not administrative. A subject line that reads “Holiday Appeal 2018 – Email 1 of 3” will not be opened. One that reads “Please Support our Holiday Campaign” will also not boost your open rates. Looking at the examples above, consider subject lines like “You got an assist on Alejandro’s first goal” or “What should we get Betty for Christmas?”. Then, come end of year, add a sense of urgency as the tax deadline nears.

Personalization: From referring to a donor’s past gift or an event they attended, to including the donor’s name in the subject line and in the salutation, there are many simple yet effective ways to personalize your emails to increase results. According to Campaign Monitor, emails with personalized subject lines are 26% more likely to be opened and personalized email on average delivers 6x higher conversion rates (e.g. result in a purchase or donation).^{vi}

Continuity: When you send more than one email over the course of the campaign, keep your stories connected and the tone consistent. In the case of the nursing home Christmas campaign, find more ways to talk about the program. Perhaps tell the donor more about Betty. Maybe introduce another resident. Don’t send another email announcing that you also need funds to re-pave the parking lot.

Readability: Keep the message in the body of the email concise. You want to keep the donor engaged and get them to click through to your donation landing page quickly and seamlessly before they lose interest. Keep the text legible. Simple fonts, large enough to read across platforms and devices.

Visuals: Add a meaningful visual element whenever possible. Alejandro smiling in full hockey gear is a good image to use. A generic community rink is less desirable.



Call to Action (CTA): Make the “Donate” link very visible. Including more than one call to action can significantly increase donations. Linking key text within the message copy to your landing page or donation form, and including a call to action button, will lift your results.

Adapt Based on Response: As donations start coming in, be sure to remove people from your lists if they have already donated. Take yes for an answer. When people open your email but don't contribute, make sure they get a compelling second ask. They are interested enough to read, but not yet inspired to give. Consider resending your most compelling asks to donors who did not open the email, update the subject line with increasing urgency, and consider adding a short message from your Executive Director.

Social media

Many charitable organizations in Canada depend significantly on social media and have invested the time to (a) grow their audience; and (b) populate their feeds with action-oriented, inspiring content.

If you currently have a limited presence in social media, you will not be able to generate much by way of results from social media for 2018 without the support of some paid social media advertising. However, you could use your holiday campaign as an opportunity to build a social media presence by populating your feeds with the content from your holiday campaign, inviting current followers to share your content, and encouraging new people to follow you.

If you are active in social media, use your Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other feeds to feature GivingTuesday, publicize any events you might be holding, articulate the impact of your donors, and tell the stories that fuel your campaign. Don't be afraid to share your stories across multiple channels; just be sure to optimize the delivery to match the channel. Being creative you can even get more engagement out of one story on social by teasing it out, sharing different aspects of the story in different posts.

When posting, include compelling visuals; studies have shown that posts that include images produce 650% higher engagement than text-only posts and the importance of video is unquestionable. In 2018, it is estimated that 79% of internet traffic is video content.^{vii} Use meaningful hashtags so people can find you across social media. And, especially during holiday a time when Canadians are ready to give, include a link to your donation page whenever appropriate. Today, over 8% of all donations through CanadaHelps are initiated from a social media site. You can drive donations through social.



Paid digital advertising

There is a lot you can do with paid advertising through social media, even with a small budget. And getting started is less complicated than you might think.

Facebook offers extensive controls for you to set your budget, monitor your performance, and adapt your spend based on results. Facebook also allows you to easily target your followers, friends of your followers, or others based on their interests and where they live. Similarly, Twitter provides budget controls and allows you to target the followers of others active on Twitter. For example, if your organization helps children, you might find targeting your ads to followers of your local toy store effective.

Like any other form of marketing, be clear with your ask and target your ask by audience whenever possible. If you are targeting existing followers, consider asking them to share your posts or ask them to make a donation. If you are targeting those who are not following you, consider asking them to follow you, sign up for your newsletter, share your content or experiment with a soft ask before making a hard ask.

If you have a more significant budget, but limited digital advertising experience, you will want to look for a contractor or digital marketing agency to assist you. Paid search and re-targeting campaigns will yield high results, but require more time and a larger budget. A significant holiday campaign will work best once you are already active with paid advertising as it takes time to test, assess, and optimize your campaigns.



Holiday-ready donation forms

A holiday campaign provides a good opportunity to take advantage of all the branding and customization options CanadaHelps provides. Embed your donation form so donors never leave your site. Adjust your suggested donation amounts to capitalize on the increased generosity we typically see during the holiday season. CanadaHelps has observed an increase in gift size of 80% in December.^{viii} Add custom eCards to delight your supporters and inspire incremental tribute gifts. Consider adjusting your copy, imagery, and page colours and your Thank-You email copy for the holidays. These simple changes will make a big difference to your fundraising results. Be sure to analyze and assess your results and record any substantive feedback from donors to inform next year's campaign.

Holiday-ready homepage

Traffic to your homepage will grow with your efforts during the season. Many will visit immediately after reading your email, social media post, digital ad, or direct mail. That means they are coming to the site with some information about your campaign, who you are, and what you do. That said, many others will come directly to your site. For those prospective donors, make sure that your primary fundraising campaign and primary message are very visible on your main homepage throughout the holiday season.



As you shape your page, keep the following tips in mind^{ix}:

Lead with the most important information and make it

scannable: People skim and scan web pages. They don't start at the top and read to the bottom, the way they are more likely to do with printed content. Your headline and subheadline should include your most important information. Keep them clear, concise, impact-oriented, and action-oriented. Images with strong captions are also important, but the page should provide a simple and gentle user experience, not an assault on the senses. You have mere seconds to make an impression.

Make an emotional connection by demonstrating the

impact: Your content should be impact-driven. For example, try copy like: "Your \$10 donation will feed one child for a week." Clearly communicate your goal and how a supporter can make a difference. It will make them feel good about choosing your cause.

Make it easy to find what they're looking for: Not only do you have a mere seconds to make an impression, your visitors must be able to find what they're looking for immediately. Think about why your donors are coming to your homepage and make it easy to find the information they're looking for. For instance, for those already intent on giving, feature a strong

Donate Now button in the top right corner. For those who are interested in your holiday campaign or an event, provide a button front and centre to drive visitors there.

Keep donating front and centre: Make it easy for donors to understand how to donate. A CTA (call to action) button should be highly visible—ideally one above the fold and another one at the bottom of the page. Make it big, bold, and obvious on both mobile and desktop. You should also ensure your donate button is on all key internal pages so they are not forced to go back to the homepage to donate later.

Make your donation forms easy: Once they click on the CTA, you still risk losing your potential donor if they are presented with a bulky or complicated form to fill out. Keep it simple, and minimize the level of effort required by the donor. Keep in mind that many donors will use their mobile device to make their donations, so your donation form must be mobile friendly.

Add social proof to demonstrate credibility: Include authentic testimonials, partner logos, and performance metrics. By demonstrating that others are supporting your organization, you will help convince your potential donor that your organization is credible and the right choice for them. It's human nature to want to conform to the behaviour of others if it is viewed as positive—tap into that desire.

Testing

First off, before your campaign goes out, be sure to test it from end to end. Proofread your copy, test your links, and test your emails and landing pages across devices. Today, an average of 20% of donations through CanadaHelps are made from a mobile device.

But what we're really getting at when it comes to testing, is ensure you are taking full advantage of the power of digital. In the digital world, you can easily and quickly conduct tests that will allow you to optimize and improve your results going forward. Occasionally, you may test two radically different communication styles to help point you in the right direction to continue to explore and test. Usually, you are looking to isolate and test a single variable.

What can you test? Almost anything!

Just a few examples include:

- Email subject line
- Sender name and email address
- Call to action text link versus button
- Colour of call to action button
- Copy in call to action
- Use of multiple calls to actions
- Including an image or not
- Inclusion of different images
- Use of image versus video
- The donation amount
- Short versus long copy
- Letter or direct marketing style

The testing possibilities are infinite and you can test almost all digital marketing efforts, from email, to landing page, social and paid advertisements.

Tracking and assessing

Tracking donor behaviour is essential to helping you allocate resources effectively and sharpen your performance for your next holiday campaign.

Compare your data to last year's numbers, and compare your data to your performance during other campaigns at other times of the year.

Some things to track and assess as you learn what works for your donors:

Web traffic: Did you see an overall increase? Were people clicking on your campaign buttons? How long were people staying on your site? Did they reach your site organically, through email, social media, paid advertisements, or other ways and how likely were each to donate? How effective were you in securing a donation from new and repeat users? How did results vary based on the visitor's device type?



KEY MESSAGE:

Measure and assess the results of everything you do every year. Use the data to tweak and refine next year's campaign if necessary.

Email: What was the open rate for your campaign messages? How many bounced? What was the unsubscribe rate? How many people clicked through right through conversion to making a donation? What did you learn from your tests?

Social media: Did your social media activity resonate? Be sure to look at reach and engagement including likes, shares, video views, and clicks. You can get excellent data from within Facebook and Twitter. Programs like Hootsuite or Sprout Social can also be helpful.

Paid social media, paid search, display, and more: Make sure you understand what is required on your side to accurately track your results. Tracking pixels will be required on your pages.

Track right through to conversion: Ensure you've linked your CanadaHelps Customizable Donation Form to your Google Analytics account (or Google Tag Manager if you are doing paid advertising) to track user behaviour right through to conversion. And, to get deeper insights than the standard Google Analytics, use unique UTM tracking codes for all your links across your digital channels.

Conclusion

This paper includes ideas and tactics that could elevate your fundraising performance and enhance your brand during the holiday season.

The keys are to:

 <p>strategize</p>	 <p>schedule effectively</p>	 <p>have the right message and articulate it with strong stories and compelling asks</p>
 <p>budget adequately</p>	 <p>use the right channels for your audience segments</p>	 <p>track and assess, so you can learn and tweak your campaign for next year</p>

Random digital acts will not produce the results you deserve. Think through your campaign and please consider using the resources on the CanadaHelps website to support your efforts.

CanadaHelps wishes you success with you holiday season digital fundraising.



This resource was created by Stu Slayen and CanadaHelps.

About the Co-Author:

Stu Slayen is an independent communications consultant based in Winnipeg. He works with non-profit organizations, marketing and design agencies, and small businesses to inspire readers through powerful storytelling delivered in plain language. Among other highlights, Stu has worked as a business communications instructor at the University of Manitoba, a magazine editor, and as a publications manager for an international research institute. He serves his clients as a strategist, writer, editor, and communications trainer. Stu has a BA in political studies from the University of Manitoba, and a journalism degree from Ryerson University in Toronto. To learn more about how Stu works with his clients, see <http://www.stuslayen.com/testimonials>.

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Resources

ⁱ Ipsos Reid, December 2015. [Source](#)

ⁱⁱ Network For Good, November 2007. [Source](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ipsos Reid, December 2015, and CanadaHelps Donor Survey, May 2018

^{iv} Hubspot, January 2014. [Source](#)

^v Campaign Monitor, January 2016. [Source](#)

^{vi} Campaign Monitor, January 2016. [Source](#)

^{vii} Larry Kim, Wordstream, November 2015. [Source](#)

^{viii} Donations through CanadaHelps December 2017 versus donations January through November 2017.

^{ix} CharityInfo, September 2016. [Source](#)

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