

20 Fundraising Tips for Tough Times

1. **Get to the point.** Respect your prospects' time. Further, assume that they're ahead of you and know what you want. What's valuable that you can tell them that they don't know? (Notice that we didn't waste your time with an intro.)
2. **Track, track, track.** A stake in the ground is your most valuable marketing tool. No figures from last year? Start now, because if you don't know what works, you don't know what's waste.
3. **Bring in the big guns.** Your own Board members may represent overlooked opportunities for corporate giving, foundation access, matching grants and even major individual gifts.
4. **Kill the dinosaurs.** Your client's still doing an annual report? Why? Rethink everything you produce in terms of its ROI (return on investment), and give yourself permission to break long-held traditions in favor of a better bottom line.
5. **Watch out for "We."** It's a classic error to assume that your fundraising focus is your organization, e.g., "We strive," "We hope," "We're proud." Nope. Focus instead on the benefits you offer your prospects that they find most compelling.
6. **Tell the truth.** People will do anything for you if they feel that you trust them with the truth. And nothing at all if they get the sense they're being lied to.
7. **Offer tax tips.** Twice. In January, remind donors how new tax laws may impact giving, and how you make it easy. Ditto April 16, to gently ask if they accomplished everything they wanted to the year before; if not, it's a good time to put a plan in place.
8. **Streamline your brand.** When prospects are receiving more solicitations, be more easily remembered with 3-5 brand attributes, tops. Refocus to 1, and be unforgettable.
9. **Align with Alumni.** Your Alumni Affairs office may see it as dealing with the devil, but it's time to eliminate system redundancies and coordinate integrated communications. Alums—old and new—will be grateful and more receptive to what you do send.
10. **Fix your face.** Your interface. If your system can't accept every form of gift online, fix it. Donors not only have fewer discretionary dollars than ever, they have less patience.

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11. **Ditch the metals.** Silver, gold and platinum are pretty ho-hum giving levels. Launch a new program—with just direct mail and your website—to get donors' attention and help them see that you understand that they have hard choices to make, too.

12. **Incent your respondents.** Now more than ever, you need to know what prospects really think and feel—because, frankly, you can't push buttons you don't know about.

13. **Don't take that tone.** (Elementary but vital.) Scolding, challenging, demanding? That's toast. Your job today is to determine your donor values, interests and satisfaction triggers in order to match them to your hierarchy of benefit messages.

14. **Blastoff carefully.** How many commercial emails do you read? Finish? Use email wisely. To initiate an email conversation, make your first blast both short and rewarding.

15. **Avoid the "p" word.** "Partner." Yes, it's what you want in a donor – but it's also the relationship that your donor's plumber, pizzeria and cable company are asking for. And in fact, donor/recipient is not a partnership. And donors know it.

16. **Measure, cut. Measure, cut.** Build a response mechanism into every piece you field, and you'll know precisely what needs to be improved in the next round.

17. **Get ideas straight from the source.** Pick two donors who are staunch, sensible, creative, blunt and discreet. Invite them to a quiet lunch and ask how to reach their peers. Take their advice.

18. **Loosen up.** Rewrite your communications to feel like they're from a friend rather than a committee, and you'll find that you're starting more conversations.

19. **Start some traditions.** Are there beloved or dopey or otherwise distinctive campus traditions you can (literally) capitalize on? If so, start a fund. If not...

20. **Don't fear the "ask."** The best salespeople recognize that the moment you ask, you simply hand the power to your prospect. And that's great. Either they answer "Yes" and make your job easy, or "No" and quit wasting your time. So get to it and ask. Like this: For smart, effective education and not-for-profit marketing, call Chris Martin at EM2 Design, 404.370.6050 x 114.