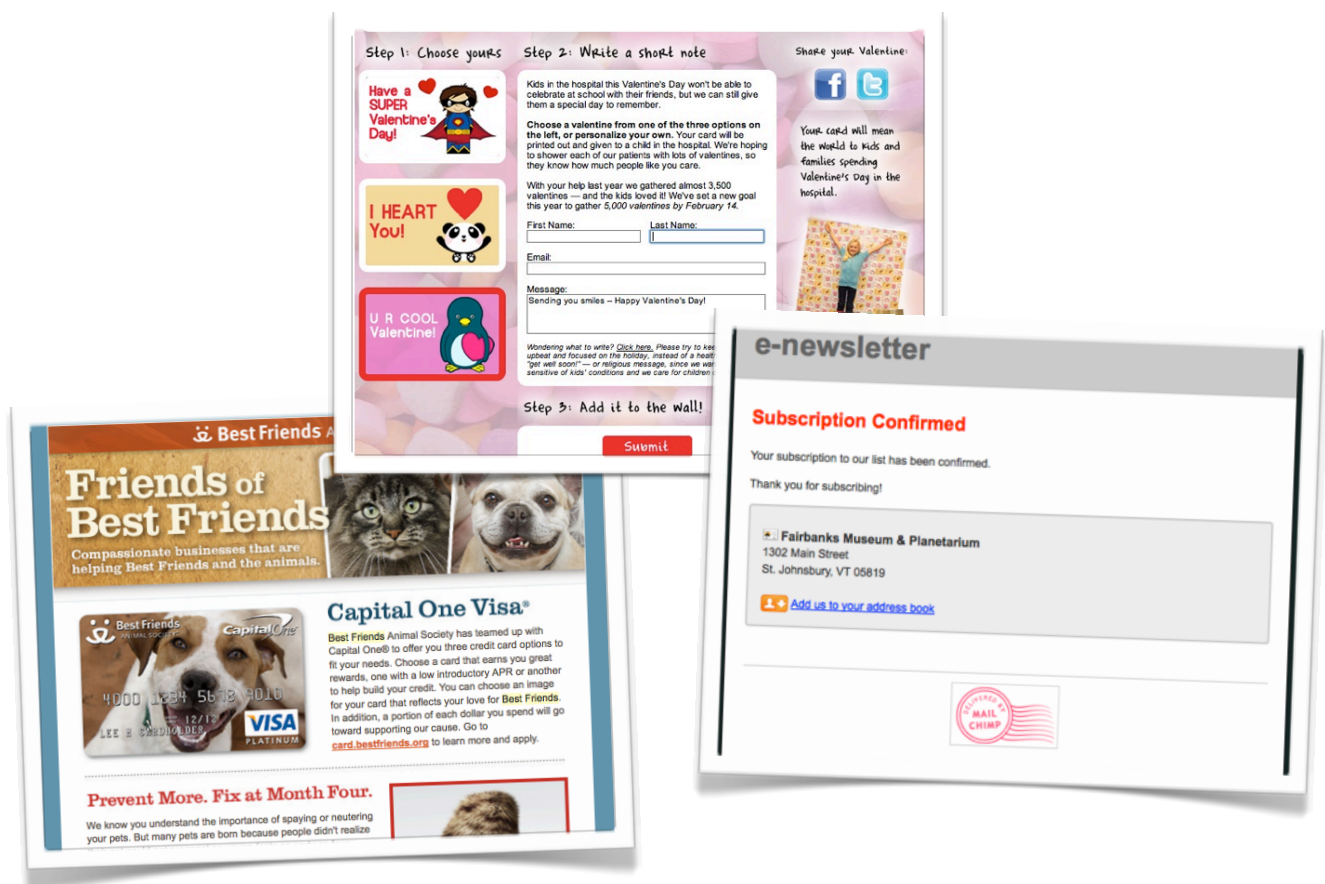


# Nonprofit Email Marketing Secrets



What small shop fundraisers can and should be doing

Pamela Grow  
2012

# Why email?

“Email is the anchor to everyone's online life" #CCemailtips

 a day ago

Kirsty Marrins



What's your first thought when someone says “nonprofit social media?” Facebook? Twitter? LinkedIn? YouTube?

And yet, what's the first thing that you check every morning?

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, a full **92 percent of adults** polled are sending and receiving email, with 61 percent doing so on a typical day. Where does that leave social networking sites? Pew notes that 65% of adult internet users now say they use a social networking site like MySpace, Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.

Clearly email is the “social” tool of choice for most.

So why aren't more nonprofit organizations using email to reach their supporters?

Savvy, donor-centered fundraisers know: email is a fast, easy and inexpensive way to build direct relationships with your organization's donors and fans. And it can be effortlessly incorporated into your organization's communication plan.

Like it or not, nonprofit fundraising has everything to do with sales. And one-step selling is very difficult.

Yet we expect every appeal letter to a new prospect to bring in a big fat check. We expect that by slapping a “donate now” button on our website, the online dollars will begin to flow in. We launch our first email newsletter and expect our subscriber list to snowball purely by osmosis ... and we expect those subscribers to donate!

So how can your organization begin the process of using email effectively?

## The basics

To create this sampling, I polled 60 organizations at random. Using Guidestar’s advanced search feature, I selected ten organizations from six different categories, each with an annual income between \$500,000 and \$1 million. I was tracking very simple criteria from their websites:

- Were they capturing visitors email addresses?
- What information were they capturing? Email address only? Name and email? Mailing addresses?
- How were they capturing email addresses? Were they using best practices of positioning their opt-in forms “above the fold?”
- What kind of followup were they practicing? Were new subscribers receiving a welcome email or being redirected to a thank you page?
- How often were they communicating?

Below are the results.

# Report

Twenty-three out of 60 of the nonprofit organization surveyed collected email addresses on their websites. Some categories fared better than others, but none did better than five out of 10.

In the category of **Arts & Culture, Museums**, five out of 10 of the organizations examined collected email addresses on their sites. A standout in this category was the **John Woodman Higgins Armory** in Worcester, Massachusetts, which featured their email opt-in form prominently above the fold, followed up with a personalized email, and scheduled the following winning email within days of sign-up:

The screenshot shows an email from the Higgins Armory Museum. The header features the museum's logo and name. The main subject is "Star Wars Day" on Saturday, May 12th. The email body includes a quote from Star Wars, a list of activities like comparing armor and lightsaber battles, and a link to the program schedule. A photo of a stormtrooper in a museum setting is included. A membership promotion at the bottom encourages members to skip the line and provides contact information for the museum.

**HIGGINS ARMORY MUSEUM**

## Star Wars Day

**Saturday, May 12th**


A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...

Jedi Knights and Imperial Stormtroopers are taking over the Higgins.

- Compare the stormtroopers armor to that of the Gothic knight
- See who will win a lightsaber battle between Darth Maul and the Higgins' own Jedi
- Even sign up for a lightsaber class and harness the force to discover if you have what it takes to be a Jedi.

[See a full program schedule.](#)

Members of the [N. E. Garrison of the 501st Legion](#) and the [Alderaan Base of the Rebel Legion](#) will be on hand to share their knowledge throughout the day.



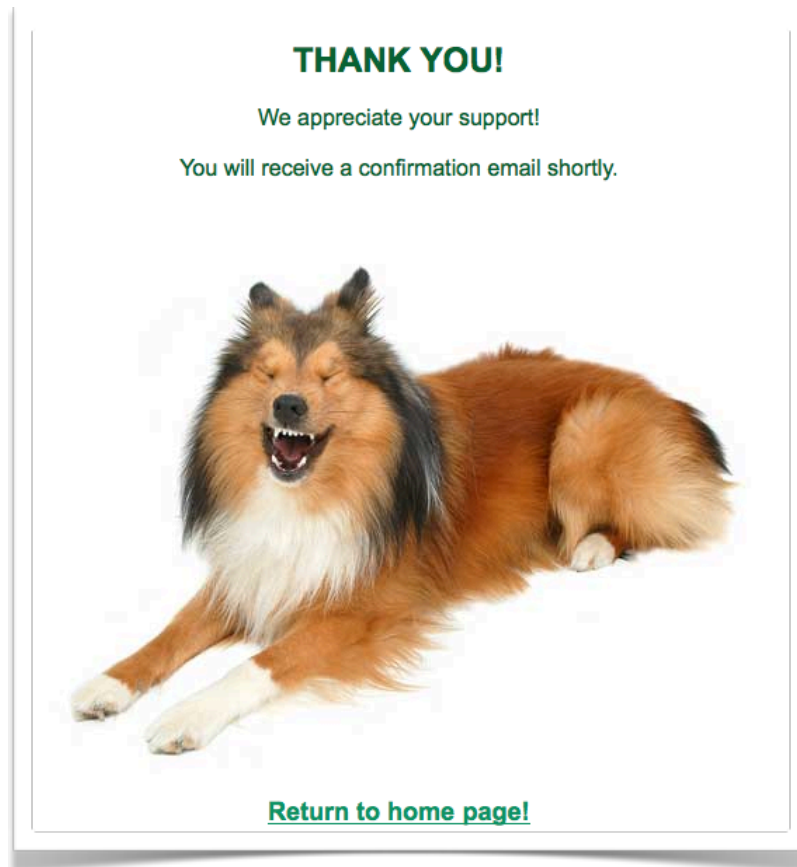
**Membership has benefits**

*Members get to skip the line!*  
Be sure to bring your membership card.

Not a member, yet? Head straight to the member services table in the lobby to join.  
[More information about membership.](#)

Higgins Armory Museum 100 Barber Avenue, Worcester, MA 01606  
(508) 853-6015 • [www.higgins.org](http://www.higgins.org)

The category of **Environment/Animal Protection Welfare & Services**, also scored five out of 10. **Actors and Others for Animals** scored bonus points for offering the opportunity to sign up for their enews not once, but twice on their home page and featuring this appealing redirect:



In the category of **Environment/Conservation & Education**, which also scored five out of 10, I liked **Sailors for the Sea**'s simple, donor-centric, text-based welcome email:

Thank you for your interest in Sailors for the Sea. To ease your mind right away, I will tell you that we do not send hundreds of emails to flood your inbox. We write a monthly e-newsletter that you will receive highlighting current ocean news and providing updates on what is going on at Sailors for the Sea. You can also follow us on [twitter](#) and [facebook](#) for more frequent updates. We have also recently launched a [blog](#), where you can find interesting stories and information about boating and ocean conservation.

Additionally, we may write you if something incredibly fascinating comes across our radar, such as a relevant event in your area. We hope you will not hesitate to contact us in any way to ask questions, [make a donation](#), give comments or just share some thoughts. Every voice is crucial, and your interest in our program gives us great hope. Please stay in touch.

Fair Winds,

Hilary [Wiech](#)

Sailors for the Sea

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Four out of 10 organizations polled in the category of **Human Services/Employment & Education** were collecting email addresses. The standout organization in this category was **Clothes the Deal**, a California-based nonprofit organization with a clean-user friendly site and straightforward signup procedure.

In the category of **Human Services/Agriculture, Health & Nutrition**, only two of the 10 organizations were collecting email addresses on their websites. **Top Banana Home Delivered Groceries** won kudos for their straightforward signup procedure and personalized welcome email (and who can resist an organization named Top Banana?).

Likewise, in the category of **Human Services/Housing**, only two of 10 organizations were collecting email addresses.

How can your organization do better? Read on.

## How to's

### 1. Locate an email service provider.



Nancy Schwartz' article entitled [5 Steps to Finding the Ideal Email Service Provider](#) can guide you through the plethora of choices. Keep in mind: cost is not your only factor. Ease of use, the ability to create more than one customer opt-in form, deliverability rates and customer service play major roles in the selection of an ESP. I recommend [iContact](#) for all three qualities.

## **2. Create an e-news sign-up on your homepage.**

Your signup form should ideally be featured prominently and located “above the fold” - meaning that viewers should not have to scroll to locate it.

## **3. Offer a compelling reason to sign up.**

I'm sorry. “Subscribe to our e-news” is not a compelling reason.

## **4. If your organization is more technology-savvy, consider an attention-getting floating popup box like that featured on my website.**

Yes, I know, I know. “Nonprofits don't do that!!” Plus I hear you protesting “but I hate those things!” Guess what. They work. Remember, now is not the time to emulate your unsuccessful peers – now is the time for boldness. Check out John Haydon's terrific [how to article](#).

Consider how much information you want to collect when designing your sign-up box.

Too much information (address, DOB, even asking for a phone number) may scare away a potential subscriber. An email address and first name is enough to begin the cultivation process.

## **5. Thank people for subscribing.**

Your sign-in box should redirect to a thank you page AND your new subscribers should receive a welcome email. If you cannot figure out how to do this, contact the customer service department of your ESP

(ohhhh, that's why you made the decision not to go with a free provider!).

Better yet? Create a three to five-part “welcome kit” in an autoresponder series.

**6. Make sure that you display your organization's privacy policy prominently.**

**7. Establish a regular schedule of communicating with subscribers - and stick to it.**

I recommend twice a month - or monthly at the very minimum.

**8. Humanize**

Effective email communications requires a lighter, more “human” touch. Now is the time to lose the “corporate-ise.” Write as though you're writing a note to a dear friend and use a signature for your email, not the nonprofit name.

**9. Study headlines.**

Headlines? Yes, headlines. You want your email opened don't you? Your email's subject header can be more important than your copy. [Words That Sell](#) is a great little reference source you'll want handy on your bookshelf.

**10. Truly engage your subscribers.**

[Survey them](#), request feedback, share your organization's triumphs (and challenges) - but always with the thought “what is in this for them?”

When sending a survey consider offering a \$100 amazon gift card to one lucky winner. Naming a new program or creating a new organization logo? Get their opinions!



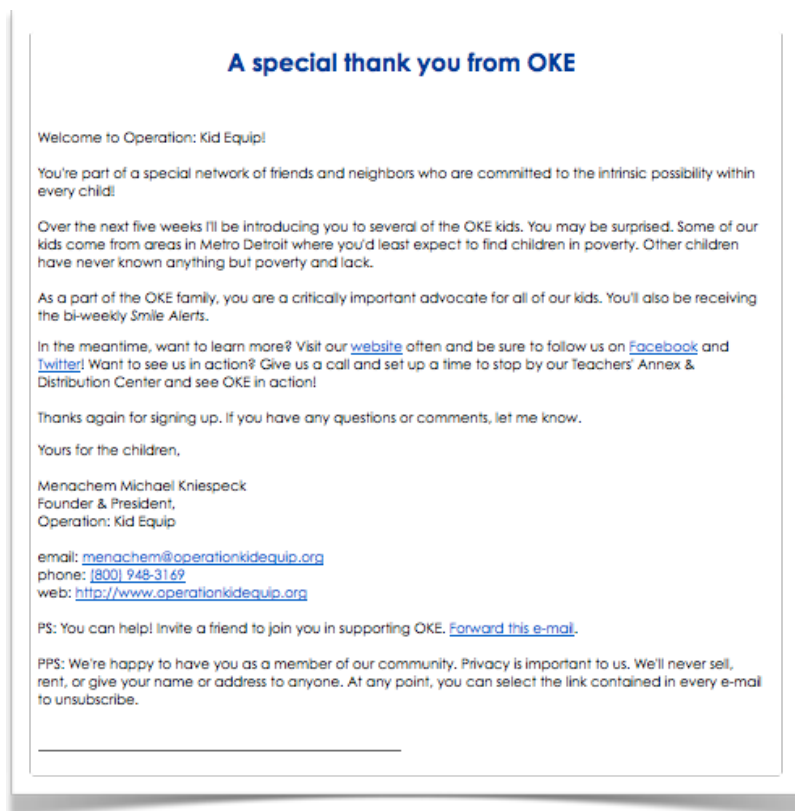
## 11. Think integration and cultivation.

Don't forget sharing! Every direct mail piece, every social media tool (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) should link to your home page featuring your opt-in.

# Further Reading and Best Practices

## Sample welcome emails

Note how this organization lets the new subscriber know exactly what to expect and gives an introduction to the organization. It includes the organization's privacy statement and invites the reader to further learn about the organization via Facebook and/or Twitter.



## A sample redirect page.

**Sailors for the Sea** also won kudos for this warm and welcoming redirect, which engages the subscriber further in the journey of becoming a donor:

Home > About Sailors for the Sea > Join Our Mailing List > Thank You

## THANK YOU

Thank you for joining our mailing list.

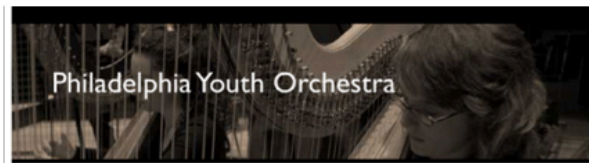
If you would like to connect with Sailors for the Sea in additional ways please follow us on:

Check out our New Blog!  
Focused on sailing and  
ocean conservation.



### Sample sign-up form.

An example of a well-designed and well-thought-out email subscriber form:



## Philadelphia Youth Orchestra

Thank you for your interest in joining our e-mail list. Please fill in the information below, and when you click "sign-up" you'll receive an e-mail confirmation from us.

**Required Fields \***

E-mail Address:

Name:

Address 1:

Address 2:

City:

State/Region:

Postal Code:

Country:

Phone Number:

Option to give mailing address (not required)

E-mail Preference:

I am interested in the following types of events:

- Philadelphia Youth Orchestra
- Philadelphia Young Artists Orchestra
- Bravo Brass
- Annual Gala

Can segment mailings in accordance with subscriber's wishes.

Please indicate your age range:

How many arts events did you attend last year?

Distance from your home to our venue:

If you have a preferred day to attend arts events, what would it be?

Are you a Philadelphia Youth Orchestra alumnus/alumna? (PYO, PYAO, or Bravo Brass)

Yes  No

Are you a parent of a current or former member of the Philadelphia Youth Orchestra program? (PYO, PYAO, or Bravo Brass)

Yes  No

## **Focus.**

One of my subscribers wrote recently: “What’s the easiest email marketing software to use? I have spent hours on Mail Chimp and iContact and ConstantContact. They all seem so complicated.”

Don’t get weighed down by analysis paralysis. Every package has its pros and cons. Regardless of which one you ultimately decide on, you’ll need to set aside some time to navigate and learn.

## **Create your swipe files.**

What are “swipe files?” According to Wiki, a “swipe file is a collection of tested and proven advertising and sales letters. Keeping a swipe file (templates) is a common practice used by advertising copywriters and creative directors as a ready reference of ideas for projects.”

You’ve probably developed your own “swipe files” without even realizing it. I’m talking about those flashes of brilliance when you managed to put onto paper exactly what you wanted to say. Those little gems that help you along, so that you aren’t continuously reinventing the wheel.

Maintain a separate email account specifically to subscribe to other organization’s email communications. How are similar organizations using email? Note particularly engaging email communications, like those from Minnesota Senator Al Franken (I blogged about his materials <http://www.pamelagrow.com/2058/al-franken-is-scathingly-brilliant/> and <http://www.pamelagrow.com/2071/more-email-marketing-take-aways-from-al-franken/>).

Study classic direct mail techniques that you can apply to your email communications.

P.S.: I don't remember when I came up with the brilliant strategy of including an extra "ask" in the P.S. of every email, but it may rank among the great campaign innovations of the last five years. [So won't you click here to make a contribution of \\$5 or more today?](#)

### **Offer special benefits**

Are there special benefits that you could offer to subscribers only?

### **Offline**

Gather signups at events. Offer incentives, such as donated prizes for signups.

Get started today. And factor a minimum of two list-building activities per year into your communications calendar. For an example of one organization's exceptional list-building venture, check out [my interview with Mark Miller of the Children's National Medical Center](#).

## About Pamela

Author, coach, copy-writer, nonprofit marketing consultant and political junkie, Pamela is the author of the foundation insider's "Five Days to Foundation Grants" and "Simple Development Systems," the only program created specifically for the harried fundraiser in the one-person marketing and development shop.

Pamela's been featured by the Chronicle of Philanthropy and the Foundation Center. She's the founder of #smNPchat on Twitter - the only Twitter chat geared specifically to the small nonprofit development shop - and she co-hosts Small Shop a regular column of Fundraising Success Magazine. She is a regular contributor to SOFII, the showcase of fundraising innovation and inspiration, and Charity Channel. Pamela has presented at the annual Nonprofit Technology Conference, the New Jersey Association for Grant Professionals, and Network for Good's 911 webinars. She hosts regular grant-training webinars with CharityHowTo.



Pam segued from six years working in programming and communications at a regional grantmaking foundation to the world of fundraising 10 years ago. In her first position as a 15-hour a week development director for an agency with a \$3 million dollar budget, she increased individual giving by 25% - while reducing costs by 31% - and increased foundation funding by an astonishing 93%! She's raised over \$10 million in funding since then and has been positioning small nonprofit organizations on the path to sustainable funding ever since with her "Simple Development Systems" of donor-centric fundraising methods.

With an eclectic 20 year background in politics, sales, marketing and philanthropy, Pamela's greatest satisfaction lies in teaching the small community-based nonprofits how to, in her words, "market like the big boys" with limited time and resources.