



Maximizing the Success of Online Events

How do you keep your online peer-to-peer fundraising events consistently successful and grow their strength each and every year? You're about to find out!

The following tips guide you in utilizing email communication to increase the number of returning participants, recruit new participants, and ensure that those who do sign up stay engaged with the available online fundraising tools. In addition, see how to design the layout of your emails to communicate the power of the event and optimize action rates.

Recruiting past participants and new prospects

Start early! The earlier you launch your event every year and begin to recruit new participants, the better results you'll see. Signing up online is quick and easy, so why not make registration available as soon as possible?

How early? Even if your event's web site won't officially launch until three months before the event, make some form of online registration available year round. It can be just a quick form that captures the information necessary so that you can send the constituents an email with a link to register once the event is live. Consider sending the form out directly after the current year's event takes place – or even posting it on your website – to take advantage of the energy and enthusiasm of the current year's participants.

Ask team captains first! Team captains grow the power of your event, recruiting friends, family member and co-workers to join their team. The earlier you get them on board, the earlier you'll build the momentum you need to achieve higher numbers of participants. Create an email campaign that has the first couple of messages going specifically to team captains – letting them know you value their role in making your event a success and want them to be the first to be invited back.

Send lots of emails! Even with full enthusiasm, past participants may not be able to make a commitment to participate when they first read an email. Sending multiple email messages serves as a periodic reminder during people's weekly routines to make time for the event. It may take two, three, or even eight emails before they can commit – but there's no harm in reminding them!

How much is too much? Depending on the type of event, you may want to send anywhere between six and 12 emails to past participants – and two to four emails to new



prospects – on a bi-weekly basis. Sending more frequently than bi-weekly runs the risk of seeing higher than average unsubscribe rates.

Endurance events, such as bike rides and marathons, typically involve a rigorous training schedule that can begin upwards of six months before the event. For these types of events, sending regular invitations earlier helps give participants ample time to balance their fundraising efforts with the physical preparation that often goes into participating. Consider offering training tips to these participants once they've signed up online, and make it a selling point in your recruitment email ask!

For new prospects, keep in mind that they may not be interested in that specific event. So send them a couple of announcements with event details, but with less considerably less frequency than you send to your past participants.

What should my emails say? Keep it simple. Let your participants know exactly where the money raised in the event goes. Highlight any fundraising incentives, festivities surrounding the event, and mission-oriented content related to the event – but not all in one message! Send one email highlighting event festivities, and send the next one that focusing on fundraising incentives such as prizes and awards. Different messages will appeal to different constituents, so varying your approach allows you to effectively target different groups without overwhelming your constituents with too much information.

What other tactics can I use? Video messages are hugely effective if your organization has the resources to create them. They can be as simple as a photo montage with a voice-over that effectively conveys the power of the event. Ecards provide a fun way for constituents to tell their friends and family about the event and spread the word through viral marketing. Also, if you have any 'spokespeople' for the event, have some of the recruitment email messages come from them and provide a more personal ask to sign up.



They've signed up – what's next?

Coach them! Create an email campaign that coaches your participants throughout the event season, keeping them up to date on event details, and most importantly, keeping them engaged with their online fundraising tools.

What should I say? Keep it simple! Don't overwhelm your participants with too much information in your coaching emails. Having one call-to-action per email gives them one concrete thing to do upon receiving the message, and greatly increases the likelihood that they will follow through with the intended action. When planning your coaching email calendar, be sure to vary the message types throughout the event season. For example, have certain emails that provide "the basics," or a general overview of the online fundraising tools, others that offer fundraising tips, and others that focus more on mission and motivation.

Effective calls-to-action! Ask them to update their personal fundraising page – and let them know that doing so will greatly increase their fundraising efforts. Ask them to update their fundraising goal – and make it something they can reasonably work to achieve. Ask them to send emails – and put a specific number on how many you'd like them to send that day. For example, ask them to email five friends asking for donations – make it a number that they can do in just a few minutes.

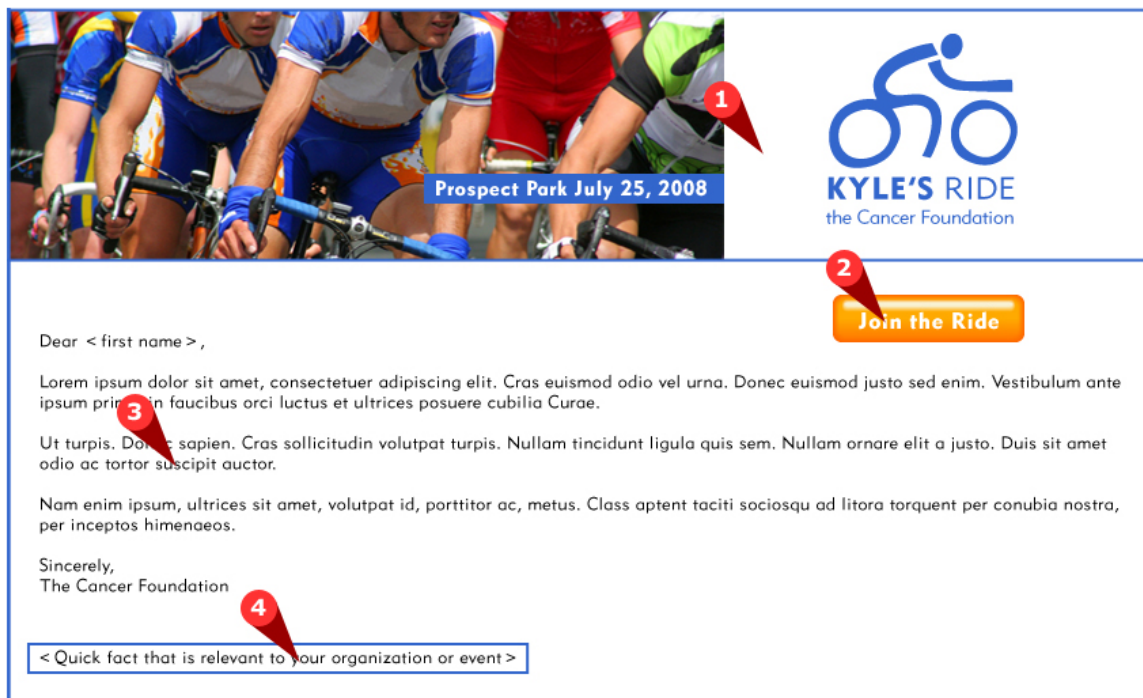
The hesitation of asking... Getting participants over the hesitation of asking for donations is essential to helping them achieve their fundraising goals. Remind them that no one donates until they're asked – and the worst that can happen is they don't receive a donation. Tell them to remind their friends and family that no donation is too small – and that each and every gift takes them one step closer to achieving their fundraising goal.

Competition! Highlight any competitive components to your event. Periodically send out the list of top fundraisers – both teams and individuals – to create a sense of competition. If you have fundraising prizes or incentives, highlight them regularly as the event gets closer to give your participants something to work towards besides their individual fundraising goal.

Value copy! Effective emails should contain a healthy mix of "value copy" along with specific fundraising requests. Value copy can involve any relevant factual information that your participants need or want to know regarding the event and its logistics. For example, as festivities around the event get confirmed, or as new sponsors come on board, inform your participants via email – while also asking them to take a specific action in increase their fundraising.

Designing effective emails in four easy steps:

1. Create an email stationery that effectively conveys the energy of the event with your organization's branding.
2. Have a prominent button that clearly conveys and facilitates the call-to-action requested in the email message.
3. Keep the messaging short, sweet and to the point. Many constituents will only skim the message – and keeping it short and direct ensures that they still grasp its call-to-action.
4. Consider placing a quick “factoid” that relates to your organization or its mission in the bottom of the email that participants can scan in just a few seconds. Doing so allows you to stay on mission, even when the content of the message isn't necessarily mission-oriented.



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