

Email Acquisition

A Plan for the Federation

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February 26, 2003

In order to reach the widest possible audience, we know that the Federation must now take the time to engage in email acquisition strategies. Unlike print, we cannot depend upon traditional mailing houses for audience-appropriate lists. They don't yet have them. And whatever response figures they promise with their medium (e.g. a 2-3% return) is specific to the medium they advertise. The Internet is a different beast, and returns do tend to be higher (10-20% higher), and significantly enhanced when supportive mechanisms are in place.

There are marketing-focused web companies that also help with email solicitations. However, you will find that they charge prices beyond our affordability and yet work the same key categories that I've outlined below.

So, in order to increase our numbers, we will need to depend on identifying and working a number of different strategies, online and off. The aim for any and all of these strategies is to be clear at the get-go that we are actively involved in meeting our email acquisition goals and that those responsible for implementation are in agreement regarding how they will work with the various vehicles available. Here are four of the most common:

a) Managing Our Solicitation Process

Currently, we send both letters and reminders to our donors to contribute each year. There are a number of things we can do in this area to make sure that email registrations increase.

A few examples include:

1. Encouraging donors who have made gifts to have access to a page or email that provides more information about a special online recognition gift we'll send them when they register.
2. Having all our email correspondence information in our signatures (or footers of e-newsletters) that speak to a current concern, fact or issue, and then points them toward further discussion of that issue on a web page.

3. Using bill reminders to continue to encourage online donations (where registrations are required). Early online payments can be encouraged through special incentives.
4. Having a useful item (e.g. a pen, keychain, flashlight, mini-globe, exercise ball) for all first contacts with first time or potential donors that welcomes them to the site. Our address is on this item and may lead them to a head page that looks like our head page, but is slightly different in that it may be more donor-centric (e.g. to help us track our effectiveness). From this page, they would be encouraged to sign up for other information packets or community offerings.
5. Having special access. From the donor-centric page, they can:
 - a. gain password-protected access to a great library of theme-based articles (for example, Stacey's collection of great Jewish women or a special introduction to selected articles from our new news site or a collection from sites that offer collections relevant to giving OR
 - b. gain entry into a special section that teaches kids of families how to manage money and makes it possible for them to make small donations (OR)
 - c. gain entry into a section which showcases Jewish activity or people in different regions (Tri-City, Contra Costs, etc.). This could be a database offering the opportunity to network with other professionals. In this scenario, peers 'opt in' to share selected information with each other. Whatever is chosen, visitor and parents and others are asked to register so the overall goal for email acquisition is furthered.
6. Using business cards (stickers on the back) or an attractive postcard promoting a new service (e.g., access to any special information reports or topics that will help people stay informed, such as current peace-keeping efforts or philanthropy in 2003, etc.). Or it can highlight our online pledge or donations web page address. When they go to this page, they register. Cards are handed out when donor calls are made or put in initial donor packets.

These are just handful of ideas that could be implemented. The most important aspect of this is that "thinking email acquisition" is in the mindset

of everyone who works in our donor developer community (the goal itself and how we intend to do it).

Currently, we may not be taking advantage of this group to facilitate email acquisition. It may not be understood why this is an important piece of regular campaign solicitation work. In addition, we have made limited use of our communications capacity online to do different kinds of solicitations and test their success. This falls under the campaign area and is something I know the staff would be very interested in contributing towards.

B. Pursuing Online Development Focused on Email Acquisition

Without something to go for, visitors won't feel compelled to part with their personal information. What could be done on a monthly basis is phenomenal. We are not talking big costs here but making it possible to regularly engage somewhat tentative audiences. Do we make it easy? Do we follow through on our promises? (e.g., we've made an impression with a free gift from our index page and have received only about 12 responses, and there is yet to be some follow-through on our part). Is our strategy one that is planned on a monthly basis? Are we taking advantage of the opportunity to do event extensions using web features?

The wisdom of developing online features becomes visible when the campaigns themselves are successfully planned (not piecemeal but integrated, taking advantage of all points of customer contact), and when the offers themselves are good).

One example has been the raffle idea; the winner of whom will receive free passes to film shows. This will encourage a largely-unaffiliated audience base, but represents only one in a world of appeals that will help us increase our numbers.

At the moment, we are beginning to encourage visitors through the content or our emails rather than through promotions. This is the next developmental phase of our work.

C. Increasing Website Traffic

Increasing website traffic is a third effort along the way to ensuring that our solicitations of emails attain the levels we need.

Certain approaches are a little passé. Just relying on search engines, for example, do have their place but may not give us the kick we need. What is important here is to use the media tools that can help us promote our *particular* services and activities. The questions to ask are: is it an integrated effort? Have we made effective use of banners, especially those from partnering organizations? What about local online –e-magazines? What is the degree to which we have taken advantage of reciprocity with those who support our cause? Have we collected benchmarks of activity? How effective is our messaging? How do we know it is effective (e.g., did traffic increase, how many conversions?) What are nonprofits doing locally to address this issue? What are we doing at events to elicit emails? How can our partners be helping us (e.g. do we now what to ask for and are program leaders asking for it?

There is extensive work to be done in this area.

D. Gathering Success Statistics and Making the Case for Further Investment

Right now, we have not organized what we know, and how well we are doing vis-à-vis two months ago, or a year ago. We are in the process of looking but have not completed how each department is doing in terms of increased dollars they have raised via the web, or the amount of savings they have already made or even identified what might be realistic goals for each activity period or program.

People need to learn how to use the system to best promote their programs. Then, they need to refer to these statistics in print and on the web to generate excitement about future programming (as more people come on board, we get to make the case that we really are becoming more of a hub). Success breeds success.

These suggestions represent just a brief sketch of possibilities. A more fleshed out plan that I could work on with Stacey could identify reasonable, cost-efficient approaches that significantly increase access to our online community through email. It could entail developing schedules for a rollout of activities and

department-specific implementation plans.

Quite clearly, with all our numbers going up in terms of dollar returns and event registrations, with our current abilities to appeal to a much broader customer base through the web, with the potential for strategic cross-partnering through the web, and with our ability to discern activity levels on the web, we are in a good position to take advantage of current momentum. In my opinion, if we set goals, and work a plan, the resources we allocate won't be squandered. I also believe this is a necessary and important next stage investment to bring in dollars, to underline our technology successes and communicate more effectively with those audiences we most want to reach.

I would like to stay connected with Federation to see its continued growth. It is an exciting time to expand community and to build meaningful relationships with donors. I've appreciated the opportunity to be part of this challenging experience.