

Apollo Fundraising Tips for Successful Digital Fundraising

Fundraising in a Digital World

The rise of digital technology has made it easier than ever before to carry out a whole range of tasks from the mundane (banking, checking train times, sending work emails on the move) to the exciting and the emotional (Skyping with your family on the other side of the road, catching up on last night's telly on the train or cooing over yet another picture of a cute kitten on Instagram).

Both charities and supporters have also benefited from the increased use of digital technology, with cheaper and quicker ways of reaching out to potential supporters, encouraging them to give, processing their donations and reporting on the impact of their gift.

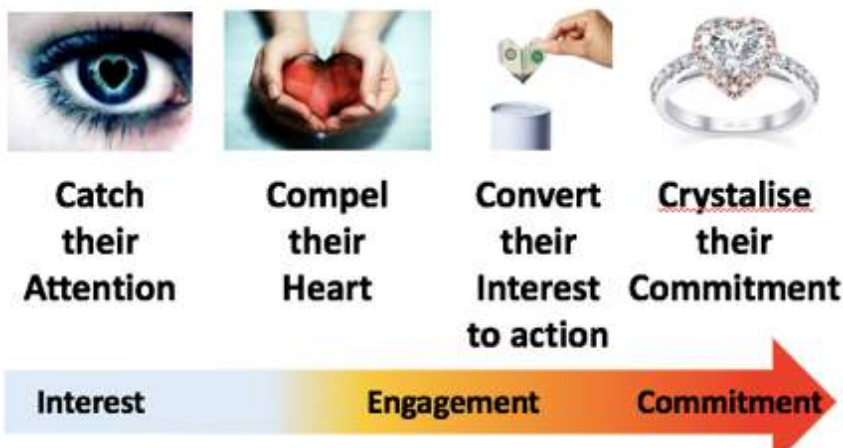
However, it is important to remember that digital fundraising doesn't exist in isolation. The same people engaging with you online (through your website or social media accounts) also exist in the real world. While you can use digital channels to communicate with them, that is just one of the channels available to you.

Digital technology provides you with a set of tools. For each channel, as with any other tool, there are jobs they can do well, and jobs that they are useless at. You should see these tools as an extension of your existing fundraising toolbox, complementing the tools you are currently using to build relationships with your supporters, rather than replacing them completely.

Supporter Relationships

When you are fundraising from individuals you need to take your potential supporter on a journey. You need to get them from their current state (unaware, uninterested, unengaged) to a state of engagement and commitment to your cause. In broad terms, this journey can be summarised as having four steps:

Supporter Journey – The 4 C's



1. **Catch their attention** – 99.999% of the time people aren't thinking about you or your cause. Before you can encourage someone to support you need to have their attention – even if it is just for a moment
2. **Compel their heart** – while we would like to think we are rational, calculating beings, the truth is that donating to charity is largely an emotional decision. Having got their attention you now need to tell them a story that will win over their heart. This story needs to explain the need you are looking to address and the role you are asking the supporter to play in a compelling, emotive way
3. **Convert their interest to action** – feeling emotionally connected is vital, but you now need to turn this emotional interest into actual engagement. Having shown them how they can help you now need to make it as easy as possible for them to do so.
4. **Crystalise their commitment** – having done something amazing and supported your work, you now need to remind them how amazing they are. Thank them, show them the impact of their gift and, when the time is right, present them with opportunities to help again.

So where does Digital come in?

When we say Digital Fundraising, what we really mean is the use of digital technology to help us get a potential supporter to move through one or most steps on this journey. Digital technology can help us do this in two ways:

- ⊗ **Content** – digital technology enables us to explore new ways of telling our story. Video, in particular, is now cheaper and easier to create, helping to bring our story to life.
- ⊗ **Channel** – digital technology enables us to share this story with a larger audience. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube make it easier to communicate with audiences that share our interests, removing previous barriers such as cost and geography. With most people now owning a smartphone, these communication channels are potentially open 24 hours a day. In addition to communicating with our target audiences, these channels also make it easier for them to engage with us, whether that is talking about our work, sharing with their friends, signing petitions or making donations.

When it comes to getting people to take action we need them to have “motivation” (i.e. they have to want to do it) and “ability” (i.e. they have to be able to do it). Digital technology can help us to build motivation in two ways – we can create compelling content to tell our story and we can then share it with people most likely to care.

However, even more important than building motivation is making something easy to do. The good news is that this is one of digital technology's greatest strengths. Digital channels make it easy for people to access our content and also easy to take action – such as making a donation or signing a petition.

However, digital technology does not provide us with a silver bullet. While it has a number of strengths when it comes to building the supporter relationship, there are also some weaknesses:

- ⊗ In a world of automation and efficiency, digital technology can feel impersonal – a weakness for a sector that has long understood that people give to people.
- ⊗ Linked to this, we can also become over-reliant on the technology to manage our supporter relationships, which may prevent the growth that comes when we really get to understand our supporter at an individual level.

- ⊗ The factors that make digital technology attractive to your charity have also made it attractive to everyone else – special interest groups, commercial companies and charities alike. There is now increased competition for attention online, making it ever-harder to stand out from the crowd.
- ⊗ Digital technology is not right for everybody. Where potential supporters do use it, it is not always their preferred way to receive information or complete certain tasks. You need to be mindful of the personal preferences of your target audience.
- ⊗ The digital world is ever-changing. As well as new technologies getting cheaper and more readily available, personal preferences also change. This can make it hard to know where to invest your time, money and effort. It can also leave you stranded if you have relied heavily on a digital tool that no longer serves a purpose.

Channels of Communication

While there are many social media platforms out there, here are four¹ that are worth being familiar with when it comes to fundraising – Email, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Below we have looked at how these channels can help us to move people through the four stages of a supporter journey.

Email

Despite 87% of us having an email address, fundraisers often forget how useful this tool can be when it comes to raising money. In fact, one third of online donations originate from email, giving it the best return on investment of these four channels.

Email



Advantages

- ⊗ More freedom to be creative with content
- ⊗ Guaranteed to reach a willing, engaged audience
- ⊗ Less competition
- ⊗ Good conversion rate and ROI

Disadvantages

- ⊗ Need consent – so not a channel for reaching new people
- ⊗ Guaranteed reach – but not guaranteed to be read

In order to maximise this channel you first need to focus on getting people to sign up to your mailing list. Make it easy for people to sign up from your website and when they are visiting your museum. Having got people to sign up you then want to keep them engaged. The best way to do this is to send them communications that they want to receive – information that is useful to them and stories that resonate with them. Don't just email them when you want something.

¹ At the time of writing!

One of the most popular tools for managing email campaigns is MailChimp. In addition to enabling you to segment and personalise emails so that people receive the most appropriate message, MailChimp will also enable you to track how many people opened the email, the number of incorrect email addresses, how long people spent reading the email and which links (if any) they clicked. This enables you to assess what worked, what didn't work and what you need to change for next time.

MailChimp is great for sending professional-looking emails but don't forget the power of personal messages that remind the receiver that they have a real relationship with your organisation.

Finally, if you are asking people to take action in the email, don't just ask once. Repeat the call to action a number of times, ideally at the top, middle and end of the email.

Facebook

Facebook enables you to "friend" individuals and "like" organisations to see updates that they post. This information is displayed on your Newsfeed. However, not all updates (text, images and videos) are shown to you. Facebook uses an algorithm to decide which posts it thinks you will want to see, prioritising posts that have a high level of engagement.

With 1.15 billion daily users, Facebook is still the social media giant, with 79% of internet users logging on, and 75% of users spending at least 20 minutes a day checking out what other people and organisations are up to. Facebook has a slightly older demographic than some channels – 64.5% are under the age of 44 and it is most popular with people aged 25-34.

Facebook



Advantages

- ⊗ Ability to engage tribes with shared interests
- ⊗ People identify their interest in you – you can see them
- ⊗ Can donate through Facebook
- ⊗ Your fans can fundraise on your behalf

Disadvantages

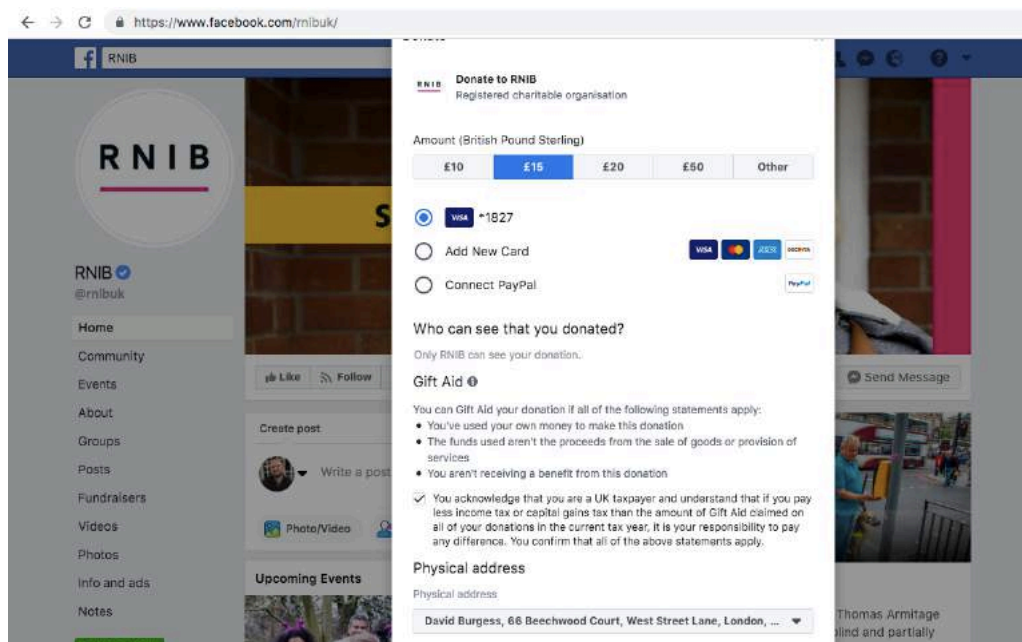
- ⊗ Only small percentage see any post
- ⊗ Algorithm favours person to person engagement
- ⊗ Rely on engagement and interaction
- ⊗ Moving goalposts
- ⊗ Data?

More and more content on Facebook is video-based, with the recent ability to post live videos proving particularly popular. There is a great opportunity for museums to use this to engage people with items in their collection, new exhibitions and work behind the scenes. Staff talking about their favourite items, conservators at work, a sneaky-peek into the store to see some of the hidden treasures – all can provide a hook to get people thinking about the work for which you need to fundraise.

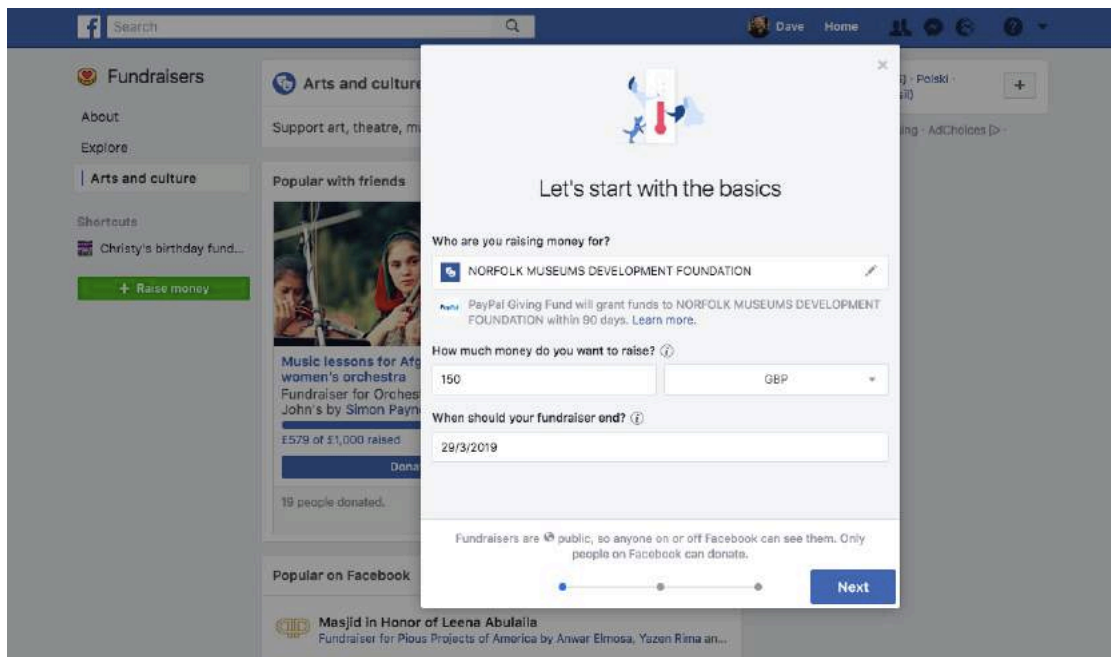
One way to ensure that your target audience see your post is to “Boost” it. Boosting enables you to increase the number of times you appear in people’s timelines, giving you a better chance of being noticed. You can define the parameters for who will see your post based on whether they follow you, where they live, age and other characteristics that help you identify your target audience. The cost of boosting your post will depend on how many people you are trying to reach and for how long.

In recent months, Facebook has announced updates to its algorithm which will see preference given to engaging content and posts from individuals over organisations. While posing a challenge for organisations, there is a great opportunity if you have an engaged group of supporters who can write about their personal experience of why your work is important.

Recently, Facebook has introduced two new ways people can fundraise for and donate to the causes they love. The first is the addition of a Donate Now Button. This available to any organisation with Charitable Organisation as their “Page Category”. It can take a little while to have your category changed but, once you are correctly listed you can add “Donate Now” from the “Call to Action” settings. Facebook can collect donations through its own donation platform, or you can also link to your own external donation page.



People can also start their own fundraising campaigns on your behalf. This has been increasingly popular with people asking for donations in lieu of birthday messages and presents. As with the Donate Now button, organisations need to be on Facebook’s list of Charitable Organisation. Your volunteer fundraisers can chose the cause to support, their target amount and the deadline for people to make donations.



While this makes it easy to get from a compelling story to making a gift, a note of caution – the supporter experience is pretty terrible. You might find that, until it improves, it is probably going to be better to use Facebook as a hook to get potential supporters onto your own donation platform.

Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform, which means it encourages people to share their thoughts and opinions in short posts. Until recently, Twitter users (Twits?) had just 140 characters to get their message across. This has recently been increased to 280 characters. In addition, tweets can include images and gifs (moving images) as well as weblinks.

As with Facebook, you can follow individuals and organisations to see their tweets on your timeline. Unlike Facebook, you do not need to rely on them to agree or follow you back to see what they are writing.² This means that you can send messages to, and join conversations with, complete strangers, potentially making it easier to make new connections and reach new audiences. Hashtags (for example #artsfundraising) are used to bring together people across the world talking about the same topic. However, it is one of the most oversaturated channels, making it increasingly difficult to stand out from the crowd and be noticed.

² However, you do need to be following each other to use the platform's Direct Messaging function, sending messages to each other without the rest of the world seeing

Twitter



Advantages

- Easier to reach out to any other Twitter user
- First point of call for consumers reaching out to you
- Can schedule messages in advance
- Easy to join conversations

Disadvantages

- Life of a tweet is only a few seconds
- A hook but not a donation platform
- Most oversaturated channel

For fundraising, Twitter works best as a hook – catching someone’s attention and directing them to another platform to continue their supporter journey. This means you need to create content that makes people want to learn more. The ability to add images to your tweets can help here (and has the added advantage of pushing other competing content further down the page).

The average lifespan of a tweet is only a few seconds before it is bumped down the page by other tweets. You can use Twitter Ads to promote tweets, which is similar to boosting posts on Facebook. However, a cheaper way of giving yourself the best chance of being seen is to repeat tweets at different times. You can use sites such as Tweetdeck and Hootsuite to schedule tweets, which removes the need to be at your computer at these times. However, you need to remember that Twitter is supposed to be a social platform and that you ideally want people to engage with your content. It does not look good if people are commenting or asking questions and they are not getting a reply. Similarly, you need to remember when scheduled tweets are due to go out and respond if something happens in the wider world that will suddenly make your tweet look insensitive or lead to it being misconstrued.

YouTube

While not really being a social or community platform in its own right, YouTube is still an important tool for fundraisers. YouTube is a video hosting platform, enabling individuals and organisations to upload video content and their share it via other platforms.

As mentioned above, YouTube is less community-focused than Facebook and Twitter. Instead people find videos by one of three ways:

- They followed a link from another site or email
- They had a video in mind and actively searched for it
- YouTube suggested videos similar to the content they have previously watched

For fundraisers, the first one is likely to be the most useful way of engaging your target audience with your content.

It is estimated that there are 2million YouTube video views per minute. While users are predominantly male, the demographic for YouTube is broad. It is particularly popular among 18-49 year olds.

YouTube

Advantages

- Ⓚ Video is a powerful tool for getting people to take action
- Ⓚ YouTube videos improve your SEO
- Ⓚ Video now easier than ever to film, edit and share



Disadvantages

- Ⓚ Unlikely to get same data on who is watching
- Ⓚ Harder to build loyal relationship with community
- Ⓚ Need to actively direct people to the video

Video can be an incredibly powerful way of telling your story in a compelling way. However, YouTube is not a reliable way of reaching your target audience. Therefore, it is usually best to host the content on YouTube but to share it on other platforms, embedding it into your website and linking to it from Facebook and Twitter.

YouTube enables organisations to register as a Non-Profit. Doing this enables you to add “cards” to your videos. These are clickable links that enable viewers to take action immediately, going straight from the video to your website or donation platform. However, if you are sharing your video on other platforms you need to make sure that the call to action is included in the video.

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As you can see, each platform has strengths and weaknesses and can be used at different stages of the supporter journey. No one platform is sufficiently good at every stage of the journey, which means you are almost certainly going to need a range of platforms – both online and offline.

Some Top Tips for getting the most out of these channels

- ⊗ Be clear on your aims and the purpose for using each channel. Who are you trying to reach? What stage (or stages) of the relationship journey are you aiming to take them through? This will help you to pick the most appropriate channel.
- ⊗ Remember – the relationship doesn't just have to happen online. A mix of online and offline activity might be needed.
- ⊗ Create a content plan for the life of the campaign. What content are you going to create? Who is going to create it? How is it going to be shared? When is it going to be shared? Vary the content throughout the campaign.
- ⊗ Remember – the aim is to create compelling content that stimulates two-way communication
- ⊗ Monitor engagement throughout the campaign. What content gets the most engagement? What content doesn't seem to work as well? What channels are driving most engagement? What other trends can you identify? (For example, are certain days/times better for sending messages than others?)
- ⊗ Identify which of your existing supporters and key stakeholders are engaging with you on social media. Make sure whoever is responsible for these channels is aware of their VIP status.
- ⊗ Use the channels to thank supporters – either personally/individually (where they are happy to be publicly recognised) or as a collective group. This shows potential donors that other people are supporting, which can be a powerful motivator.
- ⊗ Linked to this, encourage supporters to share the fact they have supported with their own network. This can help get the message out and build momentum³
- ⊗ Make sure the story is consistent throughout the journey, from initial engagement to gift to thanking and stewarding.

GOOD LUCK!

Some further reading:

[10 Ways to Increase Donations through your Website](#) – a look at the some of the psychology behind giving and the implications when you are designing your website and online donation platform.

[Digital Fundraising – Page Not Found](#) – an article that explores whether Digital Fundraising exists or whether it is actually a myth.

[The Curse of Boring](#) – the third in a three-part series looking at things that curse arts and culture fundraising. This part looks at some boring messages and what we can do to make them more compelling.

³ JustGiving reckon that a supporter sharing their gift on Facebook generates an extra £4.50 for a campaign, whilst a share on Twitter is worth an extra £1.80.

Looking for more inspiration? Check out [ApolloFundraising.com/Blog](https://www.apollofundraising.com/blog) for blogs and articles about all things fundraising.

What is stopping you from taking your fundraising to the next level?

Unsure about the steps you need to take? Worried that your team doesn't have the skills or knowledge they need to be successful? Nervous about putting your plan into action?

We all need a helping hand from time to time. Apollo Fundraising can provide the support you need to achieve your fundraising goals.

We can help you *find your direction* – we've helped arts organisations write their first fundraising strategy, planned large-scale capital appeals and reviewed the strategies of successful teams looking to take their fundraising to the next level.

We can help you *improve your skills* – we've trained arts fundraisers, volunteers, board members and senior managers. We've provided training on topics such as making the ask, making the most of digital technology and setting up individual giving schemes.

We can help you *build your confidence* – we've coached theatres on approaching major donors, mentored visual arts organisations on launching crowdfunding campaigns and supported museums to put their fundraising plans into action.

Need a helping hand? Contact us today to see how we can support you!



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