



Action Alert

From: Patrick Frame
To: List Services Fundraising International Relief Clients
Cc:
Date: January 13, 2010
Re: Haiti Earthquake - Considerations for strategy

By now you are likely knee-deep in action mode following the Haiti Earthquake. Most of you are scrambling to make things happen as fast as possible and have no time for anything. So we'll keep this short (sort of) and to the point (truly). If you don't have time to read this today, take it home and look it over so you can perhaps incorporate some of these ideas in the office tomorrow.

Our purpose is to share our experience with Emergency Prospecting and to help guide you to the best short- and long-term decisions.

- 1) Have you already moved emails out the door to your warm leads and lapsed donors? (and of course your core, active donors.. but this memo focuses on Prospecting and Donor Conversion).
 - a. This first two or three days are key for prospecting. But beware, donors acquired during this time will be the hardest donors to renew because they are the most impulsive. Accept them gladly but try to include some general messaging about your organization in addition to the disaster at hand. Their money is nice today but if you acquire un-renewable donors, you will ultimately lose net revenue trying to reactivate them.
- 2) Carefully consider whether direct mail prospecting is even feasible for you. For several reasons List Services advises it probably isn't.
 - a. First, if you use the Target Analytics Emergency file that you are probably being contacted about, remember that they are contacting every International Relief mailer in their co-op with virtually the same offer and the same names.
 - b. Second, direct mail is not timely in this instance. It won't get you in-home until the initial urgency has passed and the topic is lost in the media cycle.

- c. Third, if you do intend to pursue direct mail prospecting step back and project what your organization thinks the main issues 10-14 days from now are going to be. What will resonate with the donors when it actually gets in home?
- d. If you are going to use direct mail, be smart about it. It's likely easier to adjust mail programs already in the works—and cost-ineffective to try to develop something standalone.
 - i. If your mail program drops in the second half of January, get an insert into all packages and possibly consider a re-write of the letter. We recommend adjusting headlines, PS, and a paragraph or two to make it relevant but not change the core message. (Consider carefully if you are comfortable significantly adjusting your control package. Is it worth the risk of the “guaranteed revenue” when it will be in-home after the rush?) Also consider what strategies you could use with your multi-buyers. Will they get the emergency package first and the control package as the multi package to maximize impact and minimize risk?
 - ii. If your Acquisition program already dropped in early January, consider re-clearing all lists for an immediate re-use. You won't lose time re-running the merge and this will actually work similar to a multi-buyer strategy.
 - iii. If your Acquisition package isn't scheduled until February, consider adding an insert to the control. Be sure to avoid invalidating any pre-planned testing by only altering the control balance or panels which won't impact the future learning you were trying to gain. Remember, this crisis will pass sooner than you expect and people will go back to their normal lives. In crafting an insert project how the situation may look in two weeks based on your experience with past emergencies.

A large part of being able to use direct mail for prospecting effectively around an emergency is just luck. If you were already scheduled for this timeslot, you are lucky. If you weren't, consider carefully before trying to play “catch-up” through this channel.

The second part of success is preparation and flexibility. Organizations that have learned from past disasters know that they need an active response team and protocol internally to make sure that all the bases are covered. The organizations best suited to this will be using immediate media/channels and in a very calculated way.

- 1) Make sure your website can handle the traffic. (Early reports are that one of our clients has already raised more than \$200,000 in the first 24 hours online.) You can't have your website crashing.
- 2) Consider Telemarketing to lapsed and deep-lapsed donors and be sure to include prior disaster donors that haven't given since. Response is likely to be very high to this type of situation so the costs will be mitigated. (We only recommend this to organizations who already have TM experience and a good vendor relationship. If you aren't in this position then after the dust has settled, you may wish to plan for the next go-round.)
- 3) What will your presence on Social Media look like and is it highly conducive to gift-giving rather than gossip and consolation/empathizing? This is probably the best opportunity to fundraise with any scale via Social Media that we'll have for a long time. But if you weren't ready for it... you'll have a hard time playing catch-up now.
- 4) Consider other quick, targeted avenues. Two examples that we've worked with for many of our clients are Care2 and E-miles. (*As of 4:00pm on Wednesday there are no homepage appeals or petitions on Care2 about this disaster. This could be backlog or could be missed opportunity. As of 2:00pm there is a generic link that shows a listing of all organizations.*) If you're fortunate enough to have planned ahead and have a campaign "on the shelf" that you can update and implement quickly, push it out and be the first in every channel you can.
- 5) For those of you with Face to Face (street canvassing programs), make sure to contact your vendors and provide new scripts immediately. This is a great time to get new supporters in as sustainers and Face to Face is one of the best avenues to do that. Adapt messaging and rake in the rewards.
- 6) Speaking of sustainers, we recommend having sustainer language (and giving opportunities) on every prospecting communication you issue. Craft the message to remind people that a gift today is most needed but these poor Haitians are going to be in dire straits for a long time. You would really appreciate a 12mo sustainer gift or even just 3mos. You'll be surprised by how many people understand this now, but will be reluctant to give again in the future. Take advantage of their state of mind and desire to help while you can. This will also mitigate future retention problems.
- 7) Promise future communications regularly over the next month to keep them updated on how their donation is helping. You can worry about the logistics of providing this later but at least promise it now. It's a great opportunity to capture email addresses!

Remember, it's true that this disaster is a prime opportunity to recruit new supporters. And it's critical to do so while still putting in place your fundraising outreach to your

core donors where the bulk of money will come from. But this disaster is very early in the year and will not be the end all, be all, of your annual fundraising. Don't worry about capturing every opportunity; instead concentrate efforts on several areas you can do well and where you can either be first to market or best programmatically and executionally.

Perhaps most importantly, start talking early within your organization about what you will do with the influx of extra cash. It's highly unlikely this event was in your budget, so perhaps now is the time to lobby for re-investing some of this "windfall" into your prospecting program for the rest of the year.

One last thing... we understand most non-profits are stretched for staffing. But as with any high-intensity situation, it is most beneficial if you can assign at least one experienced individual to stay above the fray (a General of sorts) and direct traffic, spot opportunities, and coordinate the best response. If you allow everyone to get sucked into the excitement and melee, it's likely you'll lose sight of the big picture and miss some significant opportunities over the coming days.