



Annual Giving Micro-Campaigns for the Age of Digital Marketing

Research

Use this research to inform annual giving strategies for short-duration micro-campaigns. For more information on this topic, refer to the Winning Donor Mindshare Study.

Raising the Bar for Outreach

Commercial Marketing Strategies Shape Alumni Expectations

One of the reasons that annual giving offices struggle to win donor mindshare is that their appeals lack the modern marketing features that grab people's attention.

Commercial organizations and nonprofits have made a habit in recent years of circulating high-frequency, high-volume, high-urgency appeals. Customers and donors hear almost daily from the organizations with which they interact. They receive "expiring offers" emphasizing short-term deadlines for action. In many instances, they may also be promised a physical reward in exchange for financial support.

Annual giving appeals pale in comparison. Alumni hear from their alma mater infrequently, sometimes as rarely as once a year. Annual giving staff leave the time frame for action open-ended. Lastly, for alumni who increasingly ask, "What's in it for me?," the value proposition of annual giving falls flat.

Expectations of Today's Alumni...



Daily Offers

Constant product updates, sales pitches, and buying reminders



Buying Deadlines

Time-bound deals for customers who act quickly



Give to Get

Crowdfunding projects that offer incentives for donations

...Not Met by Annual Fund Outreach



Infrequent Outreach

One-off seasonal solicitations are easily overlooked and forgotten



Open-Ended Asks

Alumni are not given any time frame in which to take action



Unpersuasive Value

Annual giving staff are caught off guard by "what's in it for me?"

Practice: Concentrated Email Blitzes

Cluster Appeals into Micro-Campaigns

Practice in Brief

Advancement staff send donors multiple email solicitations in a short period of time. The appeals share a theme, such as student scholarships, faculty research, or year-end giving.

To avoid donor fatigue, staff position the appeals as a bounded campaign with a beginning and end, rather than an endless stream of email solicitations.

After the end of each campaign, advancement staff scale back donor communications and focus those that donors do receive on stewardship and engagement. The campaigns may repeat multiple times each year, albeit with different themes.

Problems Addressed

Donors receive either too few or too many email appeals. Many institutions send infrequent one-off emails that donors easily overlook or ignore. Interested non-donors who notice the first appeal but don't take action must wait months for a follow-up appeal—by which point their inspiration has subsided.

At other institutions, email appeal frequency is so heavy and so boundless that donors learn to tune out appeals or—even worse—unsubscribe entirely.

Institutions Profiled

Georgetown University

University of Florida

Capitalize on December 31

Multi-touch New Year's Eve Campaign Brings Outsized Returns

While many advancement leaders fear that they oversolicit their alumni, the truth in many instances is that they're not soliciting enough—or in a coordinated enough fashion.

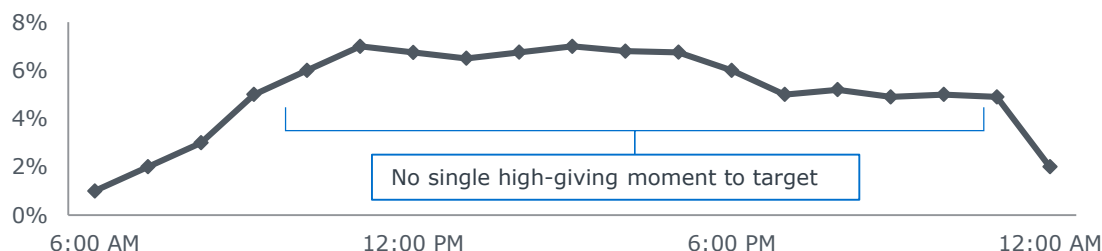
New Year's Eve is a great opportunity for determining whether alumni have a higher tolerance for digital solicitations. It is the highest-giving day of the year, and many universities take that as a reason to send out one last-chance email solicitation. Unfortunately, every other nonprofit also avails themselves of this opportunity, so the university's appeal quickly drops to the bottom of alumni's inboxes.

Georgetown University ensured that they would be heard over this noise by developing a one-day concentrated email blitz strategy. Starting at 7 a.m. on New Year's Eve, Georgetown sent its alumni four email solicitations. These simple solicitations issued a clear call to action to donate before midnight repeatedly throughout the day.





Georgetown's concentrated email blitz ultimately brought in 10% of all of its annual donors and raised \$740,000.

Last Minute Gifts Are Spread Across December 31

Percentage of Online NYE Donations by Hour for All Nonprofits



Georgetown's NYE Outreach Schedule

- 7 AM**  "Last day of 2015 to get your gift in!"
- 12 PM**  "We're halfway there!"
- 4 PM**  "Time's running out!"
- 10 PM**  "Only two hours to make your gift"



Phenomenal Results

2,490 Donors brought in by NYE emails

10% Of all donors annually

\$740K Dollars raised

Source: Network for Good, "2015 Online Giving Trends," <http://www.networkforgood.com/digitalgivingindex/2015-online-giving-trends/>; Advancement Forum interviews and analysis.

Building Momentum Over a Week and a Half

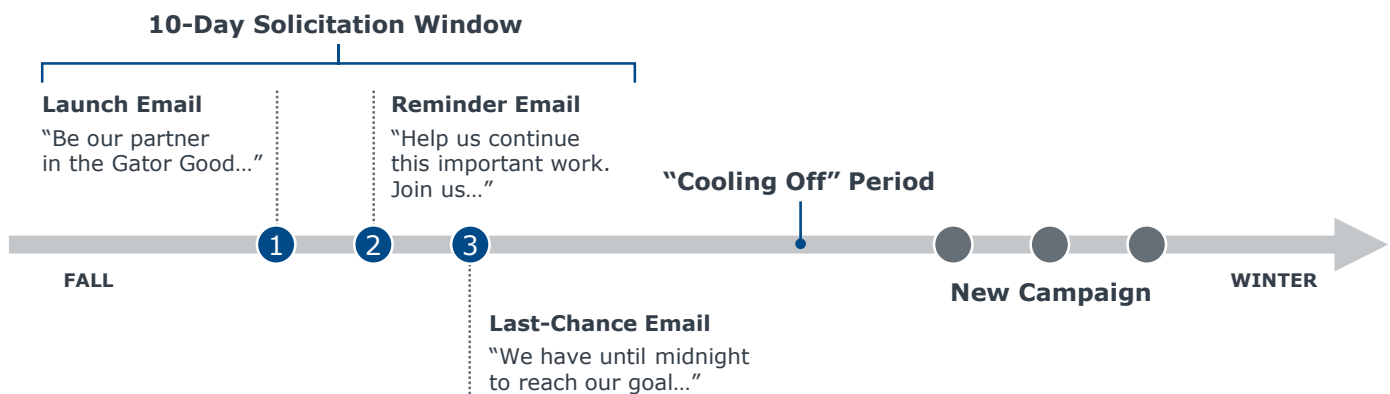
Email Micro-campaigns Develop an Audience for the Ask

The University of Florida implemented an even more comprehensive micro-campaign strategy starting in fiscal year 2016.

Rather than a one-day blitz, Florida sends prospective donors three email solicitations over a 10-day period once a quarter. The emails all share the same theme, such as the impact of student scholarships or faculty members' groundbreaking research.

In between micro-campaigns, Florida mandates a "cooling off" period in which prospective donors receive far fewer communications. Those they do receive focus on engagement and showing the impact of gifts.

Digital Micro-campaigns at the University of Florida



Getting Noticed in Crowded Inboxes

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We wanted to do more in the digital space. Our asks were buried in long copy and contained graphics that had been retrofitted from print media. We saw email and online giving as **an area of huge untapped potential for UF** and were excited to begin testing different tactics.”

*Elizabeth Keppel, Associate Director of Annual Giving
University of Florida*

High-Volume Strategy at the Core

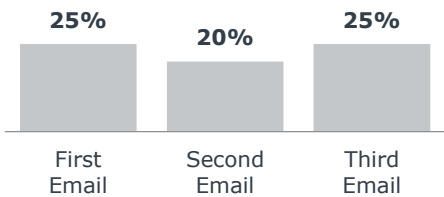
Multiple Email Reminders Significantly Boost Giving

The quarterly micro-campaigns see sustained engagement from alumni. Nearly a quarter of recipients open each of the emails, and clickthrough rates stay strong from the first to the last email.

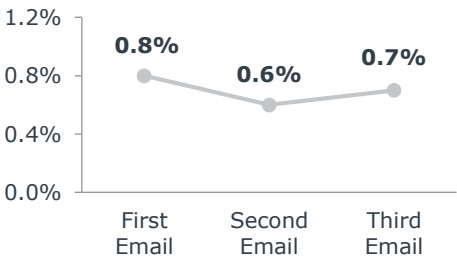
More important than engagement, of course, are the strategy’s results. Advancement leaders at Florida hoped the new approach would bring in more dollars and donors. They had no idea how successful they would end up being. The new digital strategy more than doubled their returns year-over-year, boosting dollar totals by 121% and donor counts by 149%.

Alumni Interest Sustained Over Duration of Campaigns

Campaign Email Open Rates



Campaign Email Clickthrough Rates



	Dollars	Donors
FY 2015 Results	\$143,540	1,017
FY 2016 Goal	\$186,602	1,576
FY 2016 Growth Goal	30%	55%
FY 2016 Results	\$317,359	2,540

121%

Growth over
FY 2015

149%

Growth over
FY 2015