

Connecting Online Advocacy and Fundraising

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In 2009, political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi faced charges that could have extended her house arrest in Myanmar for an additional five years. The trial came just days before she was scheduled to be released. Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) sent an email to constituents urging them to take action by writing letters to General Than Shwe, leader of the military junta, and by forwarding the email to friends and networks.

But AIUSA also took the campaign a step further. After taking action, advocates received a message thanking them and asking for a donation to support the organization's mission. Ultimately the appeal tied to Suu Kyi raised \$13,000, more than twice as much as a straightforward fundraising appeal on Sri Lanka sent to the same list at the same time.

Not surprisingly, people willing to advocate on behalf of a cause are frequently willing to support it by pulling out their wallets. You can tap that natural flow to boost your fundraising efforts, but it is critical to follow best practices and a well-thought-out plan to ensure the most rewarding outcome.

Executive Summary

Recent online campaigns have shown the potential to double giving response rates when connecting a fundraising ask with an advocacy initiative. Recent studies indicate that donors are seven-times more likely to give when using this proven strategy. In today's difficult economic climate, nonprofit organizations need fundraising strategies that yield solid results. It is critical to implement best practices to ensure the highest possible response rate to your advocacy appeal. The linchpin is the "issue du jour" – a relevant and timely news item that compels constituents to act and give immediately. Using this and other methods, any organization can build an advocacy program that organically leads to a more-effective fundraising effort.

The Tie Between Online Advocacy And Fundraising

If your organization pursues online advocacy, you already have a lead-in to online fundraising; if not, you should explore other ways to connect online with your constituents. Why? Because key industry benchmarks and trends show that engagement online through advocacy is an effective springboard for raising money.

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Options for Constituents to Interact and Contribute

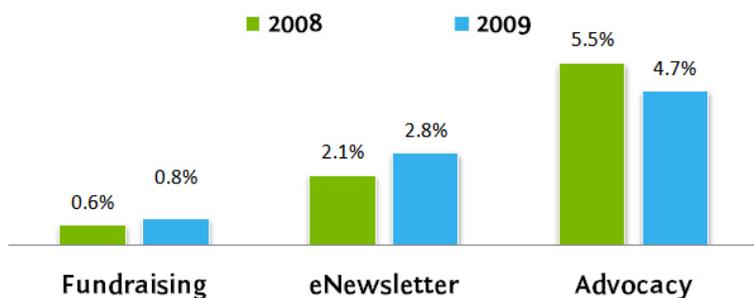
Opportunities for constituent action continue to evolve and expand, but most organizations rely on three primary channels:

- 1. Advocacy Action Center:** Traditionally, organizations use an online action hub or advocacy center as the basis for a central website. Action centers provide constituents a space to learn about and discuss topics, as well as to act. Actions often include online petitions, direct communication with elected officials, or an option to forward to a friend.
- 2. Email Communications:** Because timing is critical to most advocacy actions – for example, as a response to a bill in Congress or current world event – email has been the primary method used to deliver calls to action to constituents.
- 3. Social Media Program:** More recently, organizations have also used social networking to build activist communities that participate in discourse while promoting campaigns to support the organization. AIUSA routinely posts actions to its Facebook® page, which not only serves as a good means of engaging its Facebook® community, but also as a way of growing its social networks and email list and driving traffic to its website. Facebook® is regularly one of AIUSA's top five referrers of site traffic.

Higher Initial Click-Through Rates

Advocacy email click-through rates clearly outpace those of fundraising emails and eNewsletters (Figure 1). In fact, advocacy email results in action six times more often than a direct fundraising appeal. After all, taking action only requires an emotional commitment, not a monetary one. But advocacy also compares favorably with online actions that do not involve fundraising, such as writing a letter to the editor or volunteering. In fact, advocacy appeals perform as much as five times better than these other actions (M+R Strategies: 2010 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study).

Figure 1: Email Click-Through Rate Comparison
(M+R Strategies: 2010 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study)



Understanding Your Targets

But how do you move smoothly from advocacy to fundraising? First, look at who actually takes advocacy actions (Figure 2). Although super-activists make up only seven percent of a typical organization's database, they drive 31 percent of actions taken. Obviously super-activists represent your best targets for recruiting, volunteering, and, of course, fundraising. But the other segments also offer potential for follow-on fundraising appeals.

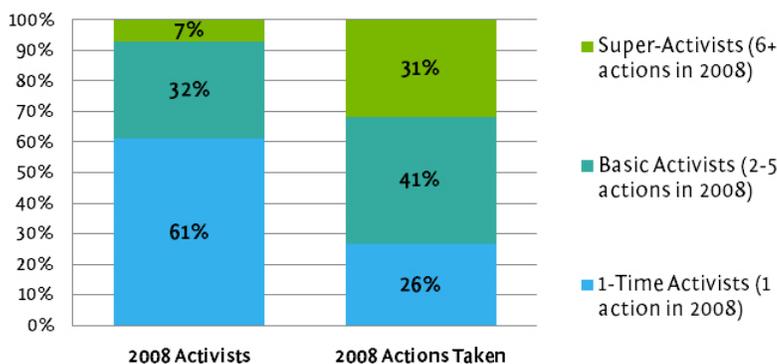
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About the Author

Mark Davis is director of technical solutions for Blackbaud based in Charleston, SC. After the acquisition of Kintera by Blackbaud, he jumped at the chance to move from San Diego to Charleston to experience the humidity of the Carolinas, where was born and raised. Over the past nine years he has worked directly with many of the largest nonprofits in the industry, such as American Heart Association, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Alzheimer's Association, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, and Arthritis Foundation. While he has worn many hats over the past nine years with Blackbaud, he works best when he's engaged with customers helping to deploy successful online fundraising solutions. As one of the original architects of the Friends Asking Friends® solution, he has actively participated in the development of the Blackbaud Sphere® product. He received a bachelor's degree in engineering from Duke University and a master's degree in engineering from Stanford University.

Figure 2: Activists and Actions Taken
(M+R Strategies: 2009 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study)



Findings from a recent joint study by M&R Strategies and Care2 show that online action campaigns are a powerful way to identify, recruit, and cultivate donor leads. In fact, activists are seven times more likely to donate, compared with supporters who did not previously take an online action for an organization.

So which activists represent the best targets for fundraising appeals? Two groups stand out (Figure 3). The first group includes activists who have taken action within the last 24 hours in response to an issue. The immediacy of the appeal is vital to link the advocacy campaign with the need for funding support. The second group includes the super-activists and existing donors who took action within the last month, because both groups showed recent interest in the cause.

Figure 3. Top Targets for Fundraising Appeals

Best Targets

- Repeat activist who took action within the last 24 hours
- Current donor who took action within the last month
- Super activist (6+ actions in last 12 months)

Better Targets

- First-time activist who took action within the last 24 hours
- Repeat activists who took action within the last week
- Lapsed donor who took action within the last month
- Basic activist (2-5 actions within last 12 months)

Good Targets

- One-time activists (1 action within last 12 months)

About the Author

Steve Daigneault is vice president of eCampaigns at M+R Strategic Services, putting his 15 years of experience as a grassroots organizer, communications specialist, and online strategist to work for M+R clients like the Save Darfur Coalition, the American Cancer Society, and more. Before joining M+R, Steve served as the managing director for Internet communications at Amnesty International USA, where he developed an email strategy that nearly tripled AIUSA's list in less than three years, launched award-winning campaign micro-sites, and helped grow AIUSA's online fundraising program, even in the midst of the September 2008 stock market crash. Steve has also been a consultant and strategist for the U.S.

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Database segmentation is critical to accurately targeting individuals who meet those key criteria.

Campaign success is augmented by employing these constituent segmentation strategies. The next step is to identify and prompt a recent activist with a specific donation appeal tied to the cause that most interests them. This appeal should occur on the same day or even on the same screen, once they take action.

Seize The Day: Start With An Issue Du Jour

The success of a follow-on fundraising appeal depends first on a successful response to the advocacy call to action. Nothing lifts response like a hyper-relevant “issue du jour” — an item in the news that compels constituents to react. You can build on the “issue du jour” to move constituents directly from taking action to donating funds.

Identify an Issue du Jour

No one cares about yesterday's news; they care about today's. Appeals for donations that launch from a current crisis prove the strongest of all. The 2010 Haitian earthquake offers an excellent example: Appeals were specific, urgent, and relevant to messages appearing in the news each day. If an issue relevant to your constituency becomes top news, grab the opportunity and respond immediately.

Choose Imperfect and Timely Over Perfect and Late

Although you may be tempted to get the wording just right before you send your initial advocacy email, follow this twist on an old adage: “Don't send tomorrow what's relevant today.” Open rates for advocacy emails containing an “issue du jour” are more than double those that do not pertain to a currently relevant issue. Further, the response rate for emails containing an issue du jour increases from 10 percent to 25 percent.

In March 2009, Amnesty International USA learned that Senator Jon Kyl had introduced an amendment to a budget bill that would bar all Palestinian refugees from Gaza from receiving resettlement protection in the United States. Within a few hours, Amnesty International sent an email urging its constituency to take action by adding their names to a letter opposing the Kyl amendment. Senator Kyl withdrew his amendment several days later.

About the Author

Milo Sybrant is the managing director of engagement media for Amnesty International USA, a Nobel Prize-winning human rights organization with more than 2 million members in over 150 countries worldwide. Milo directs the strategy and policy for the organization's online communications efforts. Before joining AIUSA, Milo was a senior client manager at Beaconfire Consulting. There he developed path-breaking online campaigns for Heifer International, the American Civil Liberties Union, and other major nonprofits. Milo seeks to leverage his experience with leading nonprofit organizations to develop the strategies for the next generation of online engagement.

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Tonight the Senate will vote on an amendment that would bar Palestinian refugees from Gaza from receiving resettlement protection in the United States.
Add your name right now to our letter opposing the Kyl amendment.

Dear Maria,

Over the weekend, we got news that Senator Kyl introduced a **shocking, discriminatory amendment that would bar the U.S. from accepting for resettlement Palestinian refugees fleeing Gaza.**

The Senate will vote tonight on Senator Kyl's amendment. The late breaking nature of the amendment means even just a few letters faxed to some key Senators could determine the outcome of this vote.

[Add your name to our letter opposing the Kyl amendment and we'll fax it automatically to your Senators' offices.](#)

Gaza refugees have endured massive hardships, and were **turned away from Israel and Egypt when fleeing their war-torn homes.** This amendment serves no good purpose other than to discriminate against innocent refugees needing a safe haven.

We've mobilized our crisis response team, and are speaking right now with other organizations asking them to sign onto our letter and meeting with Senate offices urging them to vote no.

Imagine your letters coming over the fax line just as our team sits down to meet with Senators. This is one of those moments when your individual action can make a dramatic impact.

[Add your name right now to our letter opposing the Kyl amendment and we'll automatically fax it to your Senators' offices.](#)

For decades our country has been a haven to refugees fleeing persecution. Senator Kyl's amendment serves no good purpose other than to discriminate against an entire group based on nationality alone. Any refugee who meets the criteria of the U.S. refugee program and the security protocols of the Department of Homeland Security should have access to our program irrespective of his or her nationality, ethnicity, or religion.

[Please add your name to our letter and we'll fax it automatically to your Senators' offices.](#)

Let's show the Senate that the America we believe in acts as a safe haven for refugees in need, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religion.

Sincerely,

Sarnata Reynolds
 Policy Director, Refugee and Migrant Rights
 Amnesty International USA

[Tell the Senate to oppose discrimination](#)



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TAKE ACTION NOW!

TAKE ACTION

DONATE

BLOG

“Open rates for advocacy emails containing an issue du jour are more than double those that do not pertain to a currently relevant issue.”

Especially when reacting quickly to a pressing issue, you can prepare in advance. Build your email list and write some stock email text, such as your mission statement. Then modify the email to address current events. And remember, to earn higher open and response rates: Choose timely and imperfect instead of perfect and late.

Show Relevance

Frame your message around what is in the news that day, even if your issue is not the top story. Then use an excerpt from a newspaper article with a footnote that links to further information. For example:

“The Amnesty International rapid response team for Iran sent a 2009 email to its constituency urging action after several newspapers reported the largest public demonstrations of opposition in three decades. The message linked to reports in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal and to the Amnesty International USA blog.”

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Don't Fake It

Real news trumps fabricated stories in advocacy appeals. Before you write an advocacy email, check the news and uncover items relevant to your mission. Then tie your call to action to that specific news.

Build Your Advocacy Program

After you've identified an "issue du jour," you can use it to develop a campaign around a key issue. Here are the steps from start to finish:

1. Identify an "issue du jour."
2. Set a goal that uses the issue to move your mission forward.
3. Develop a campaign around the issue that uses emails, social media, and your website.
4. Develop a calendar to schedule multiple messages to your constituents over several months.
5. Plan actions that move from easy to hard.
6. Show movement and success.

This last step is critical. Too often, organizations forget to report back and tell advocates the results of their actions. Even if results are mixed, thank activists for their support and tell them how their efforts moved the cause forward. If the advocacy appeal achieved a major victory, be certain to share it and describe how supporters contributed to the effort.

Advocacy-Led Fundraising

Unlike organizations that seek contributions to support services that combat hunger or poverty, pure advocacy organizations often struggle to make online fundraising pitches tangible. A solution that AIUSA and other advocacy organizations have pursued is "advocacy-led fundraising," an approach which can help extend the shelf life of your organization's news-driven advocacy campaigns.

Advocacy-led fundraising focuses on soliciting donor contributions to cover discrete advocacy efforts. As part of its Counter Terror with Justice Campaign, AIUSA called on activists to help the organization purchase bus shelter ads at more than two dozen locations in and around Capitol Hill in the weeks leading up to President George W. Bush's 2007 State of the Union Address. After the campaign, AIUSA shipped the ads to donors who had made contributions that were equal to or greater than the cost of a single ad.

To its delight, AIUSA's online team discovered that several of these "major donors" were actually student groups that had pooled their resources to cover the cost of the ads. This effort not only succeeded in making AIUSA's work to condemn abuse and ill-treatment in the U.S.-led "war on terror" more tangible, but it also served to engender a sense of ownership on the part of the organization's supporters.

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Even if your organization does not engage in traditional advocacy, you can come up with creative ways to connect with your constituency. Find news relevant to your organization and craft stories that engage constituents in your activities. Look for ways to open up your organization to useful actions related to your mission. Your constituents will feel more involved.

Transform Actions Into Money

So how do you clear a path from taking action to giving money? Closely follow actions with messages that thank supporters or report on results – and then add a request for donations to support your cause.

To capture potential donors as soon as they act, you might send a follow-up email that includes these three elements:

1. Thank your constituents for taking action. Emphasize that their actions contribute to a cause that's important to them.
2. Remind them of your organization's mission. Explain the change you're trying to bring about and the need for money to run a productive campaign.
3. Integrate a fundraising appeal. The more specific you can be about how your constituents' money will be used to respond to an issue, the better.

Integrate Actions and Appeals

You can incorporate appeals into your email messages in a variety of ways. For example, you might include the appeal directly in the text of a thank-you message; include a “donate” button in the footer or in a follow-up appeal for action. For example:

“You’ve signed our letter of support, joining 20,000 others demanding action. Our success depends on help from people like you. Would you please take the next step and make a donation today? Your support is critical to our fight.”

OR

“Great news! We delivered more than 20,000 signatures of support, demanding action. You signed our letter, and your voice was heard. Thank you! We depend on your support and dedication to continue our important work. Would you please take the next step and make a donation today? Your support is critical to our ongoing fight.”

The Gift that Keeps on Giving: Build a Sustainer Program

We have already seen how striking while the iron is hot can boost response rates on action alerts and fundraising appeals. One of the ways to further leverage news-driven advocacy opportunities is by encouraging donors to make recurring gifts. While this may diminish the overall response rate, it will help you grow a dependable revenue stream and increase the lifetime value of your donors. In fact, donors from AIUSA's sustainer program are more than two-times the estimated lifetime value of single donation contributors.

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Conclusion

Your organization can reach doubled fundraising response rates by enhancing your fundraising appeals with timely and relevant advocacy campaigns. The integration of advocacy and fundraising has proven successful with many organizations because advocates are seven times more likely to give, compared to non-advocates. Identify an issue du jour, and be sure to quickly articulate how donor support helps your organization respond. Find creative ways to involve your constituency and open your organization to useful actions related to your mission.

Customer Success Stories

Equality California: “No on 8” Campaign

Equality California (EQCA) ran a “No on 8” campaign to support gay marriages in advance of the November 2008 election. The campaign included a Gift Registry. Through the campaign website, couples could register in honor of an anniversary, wedding, or ceremony, as well as tell their personal stories and send requests to friends and family to donate to EQCA. EQCA used the funds to build and maintain a statewide grassroots field effort to win the right for same-sex couples to marry.

Thanks to the issue’s timeliness, press coverage, and emotional connection, more than 1,700 couples signed up and raised more than \$1 million online toward the effort.

Common Cause: “Recapture the Flag” Campaign

During the 2008 election cycle, Common Cause reached out to supporters with a campaign-centered microsite to encourage the public and congressional candidates to commit to fighting abuses of power by signing a pledge to “Recapture the Flag.” Along with freshly rebranded national and state affiliate websites, Common Cause garnered nearly 40,000 registrations and raised more than \$50,000 for the cause.

The campaign integrated several social tools that captured the magic of the 2008 political season. To encourage activism, the web module was augmented to find candidates by map location – whereby enabling activist communication to more than 1,300 candidates in the module. The entire project came in under budget, freeing additional funds for Common Cause to apply towards other necessary resources.

Where To Go From Here

This paper provides a starting point for building a program that increases the response rate to advocacy appeals and transforms actions into donations. Blackbaud offers products and services that can help maximize the impact of your advocacy and fundraising efforts.

Blackbaud Sphere®:

Engaging in the political process and communicating with elected officials are essential components to successfully promoting the policies that are important to your organization. With Blackbaud Sphere Advocacy, your organization can quickly mobilize activists with information that matters to them, increase

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your advocacy action targets, and rally your activists. Sphere easily integrates with other databases, third-party applications, and The Raiser's Edge through Blackbaud Connect™.

Blackbaud NetCommunity™:

Blackbaud NetCommunity is a comprehensive Internet marketing solution that integrates with The Raiser's Edge and Blackbaud CRM™ for website management, online community-building, and email marketing. In addition to many feature enhancements, the new version of Blackbaud NetCommunity has been built on Blackbaud's next-generation Infinity platform, making the solution even more scalable, secure, and flexible. The Infinity SDK provides developers with new options for customization, data access, and extensibility.

The Raiser's Edge®:

The Raiser's Edge has been the nonprofit industry's standard-bearing fundraising system for nearly 30 years. It comes with a robust set of APIs and powerful native integrations to both Blackbaud NetCommunity and Blackbaud Sphere, making it a great choice for nonprofits looking for a total solution.

M+R Strategic Services:

M+R delivers highly tailored campaign strategies and services to leading nonprofits working on behalf of the public interest. Our teams specialize in campaign planning and execution, online advocacy, online fundraising, government affairs, communications, field organizing, and activist training. We integrate these advocacy tools within a single firm, providing our clients with a pioneering approach to "full service" campaign planning and management.

¹ Charitable Memberships, Volunteering and Discounts: Evidence from a Large-Scale Online Field Experiment. May 2009, National Bureau of Economic Research, A. Lange, A. Stocking.

About Blackbaud

Blackbaud is the leading global provider of software and services designed specifically for nonprofit organizations, enabling them to improve operational efficiency, build strong relationships, and raise more money to support their missions. Approximately 24,000 organizations — including The American Red Cross, Cancer Research UK, Earthjustice, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Lincoln Center, The Salvation Army, The Taft School, Tulsa Community Foundation, Ursinus College, the WGBH Educational Foundation, and Yale University — use one or more Blackbaud products and services for fundraising, constituent relationship management, financial management, website management, direct marketing, education administration, ticketing, business intelligence, prospect research, consulting, and analytics. Since 1981, Blackbaud's sole focus and expertise has been partnering with nonprofits and providing them the solutions they need to make a difference in their local communities and worldwide. Headquartered in the United States, Blackbaud also has operations in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit www.blackbaud.com.

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