

# 2011

## Nonprofit Communications Trends Report

*...and What It All Means for Your Good Cause*



**Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com**

# Summary of Survey Results

This report is based on a survey of 780 nonprofits in December 2010 conducted at [Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com).

After the survey data, Kivi Leroux Miller, president of Nonprofit Marketing Guide, offers three suggestions for how nonprofits should address these and other 2011 trends.

- **51% of nonprofits have written marketing or communications plans** for 2011. 34% have notes, but no formal plan.
- **Email marketing and websites will be the most important** communications tools for nonprofits in 2011, followed by direct mail, in-person events, Facebook, and media relations/PR.
- **Texting and paid advertising will be the least important** communications tools for nonprofits in 2011, followed by audio (e.g. podcasts) and phone calls/phone banks.
- When you combine the “very important” and “somewhat important” rankings, **Facebook follows websites (96%) and email (94%), with 79% identifying it as a very or somewhat important communications tool**, trumping more traditional forms of nonprofit communication, such as in-person events (67%), print marketing (67%), and media relations/PR (57%).
- **Monthly emailing is the most popular frequency** for nonprofits at 43%, followed by every other week at 17% and quarterly at 16%. **Three-quarters of nonprofits (75%) plan to email their typical supporters at least monthly.**
- **Quarterly direct mail is the most popular frequency** for nonprofits at 35%, followed by twice a year at 23% and once a year at 16%. **Only 10% expect to send direct mail to their typical supporters at least monthly.**
- Nonprofit communicators are **excited about new ways to connect with their supporters, their increasing use of social media, and better communications planning and integration.**
- Nonprofit communicators are **scared about economic uncertainty, the difficulty of implementing marketing strategies, and the lack of staff time for communications.**

Download this report and graphics at  
[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends).

# Introduction

Through Nonprofit Marketing Guide's weekly webinar series, my Nonprofit Communications blog, and dozens of in-person workshops, I talk to thousands of communications, development, program, and executive directors of nonprofits – especially small ones – each year.

They are hungry for information on how they can do their jobs more effectively. They often feel both overwhelmed and isolated, and want to know what other nonprofits are doing as a way to gauge whether they are making the right choices for their own nonprofits. The majority of questions I get start with,

## “Should we . . . ?”

To give these nonprofit leaders some additional perspective beyond my own, I surveyed nonprofits and 780 responded with answers to these questions:

- In what shape are their marketing plans for 2011?
- Which communications tools do they see as very important, somewhat important, and least important to them for 2011?
- How often do they plan to email the typical supporter on their email list?
- How often do they plan to send direct mail to the typical supporter on their mailing list?

- What excites them about their work in 2011?
- What scares them about their work in 2011?

You'll find the answers to these questions on the following pages. Staff at nonprofits of all sizes participated, and the majority are from small to medium-sized nonprofits in North America. However, the demographic data is incomplete and therefore not included. I'll work on that in future editions of the report, as I'm sure many will wonder if and how these results vary based on size, budget, staffing, and location.

While I believe the survey results are very interesting and helpful, they still don't fully answer the “Should we . . . ?” questions. To provide some additional guidance, I've added a section on what I believe are **three essential approaches for nonprofit communicators today**:

- Be Your Own Media Mogul
- Connect the Dots for Your Supporters
- Wear Your Personality and Values

Thanks for reading, and I look forward to hearing what you think about the report!



*Kivi*

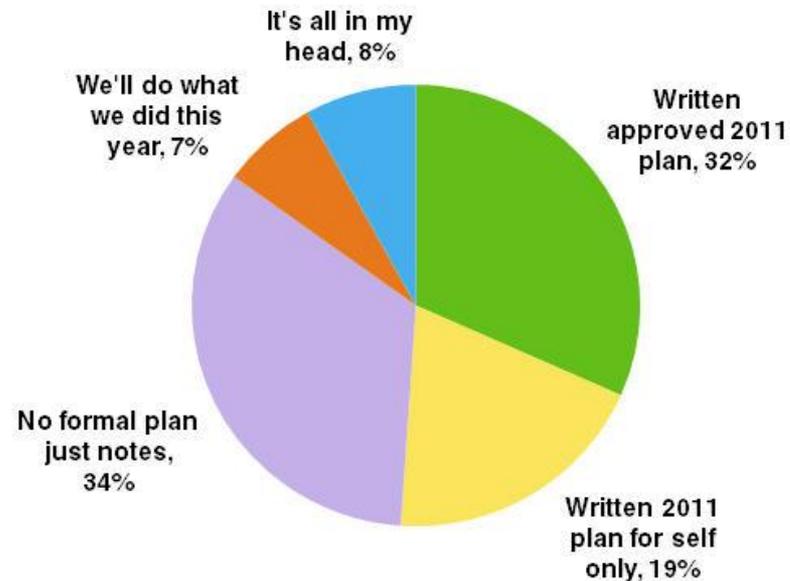
**Kivi Leroux Miller**  
President, Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com

# Marketing Plans

When you put a plan in writing, you increase the likelihood that you'll follow through on it. But only **51% of nonprofits said they have a written marketing or communications plan for 2011**, either as a written, formally approved plan or as a personal written plan.

Another 34% have informal notes, while 8% said their plan lives only in their heads. Another 7% of nonprofits will just do what they did last year.

## What Best Describes Your 2011 Marketing or Communications Plan?



# Communications Tools

Nonprofits have more communications tools available to them than ever before. This survey listed **14 options** and asked participants to select **up to three** that were most important, somewhat important, and least important.

- Email Marketing - E-Newsletters
- Print (Newsletters-Direct Mail)
- Website
- Blog
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Video (YouTube etc.)
- Photo Sharing
- Audio (e.g. podcasts)
- Media Relations/PR
- Paid Advertising
- Phone Calls/Phone Banks
- Texting
- In-Person Events

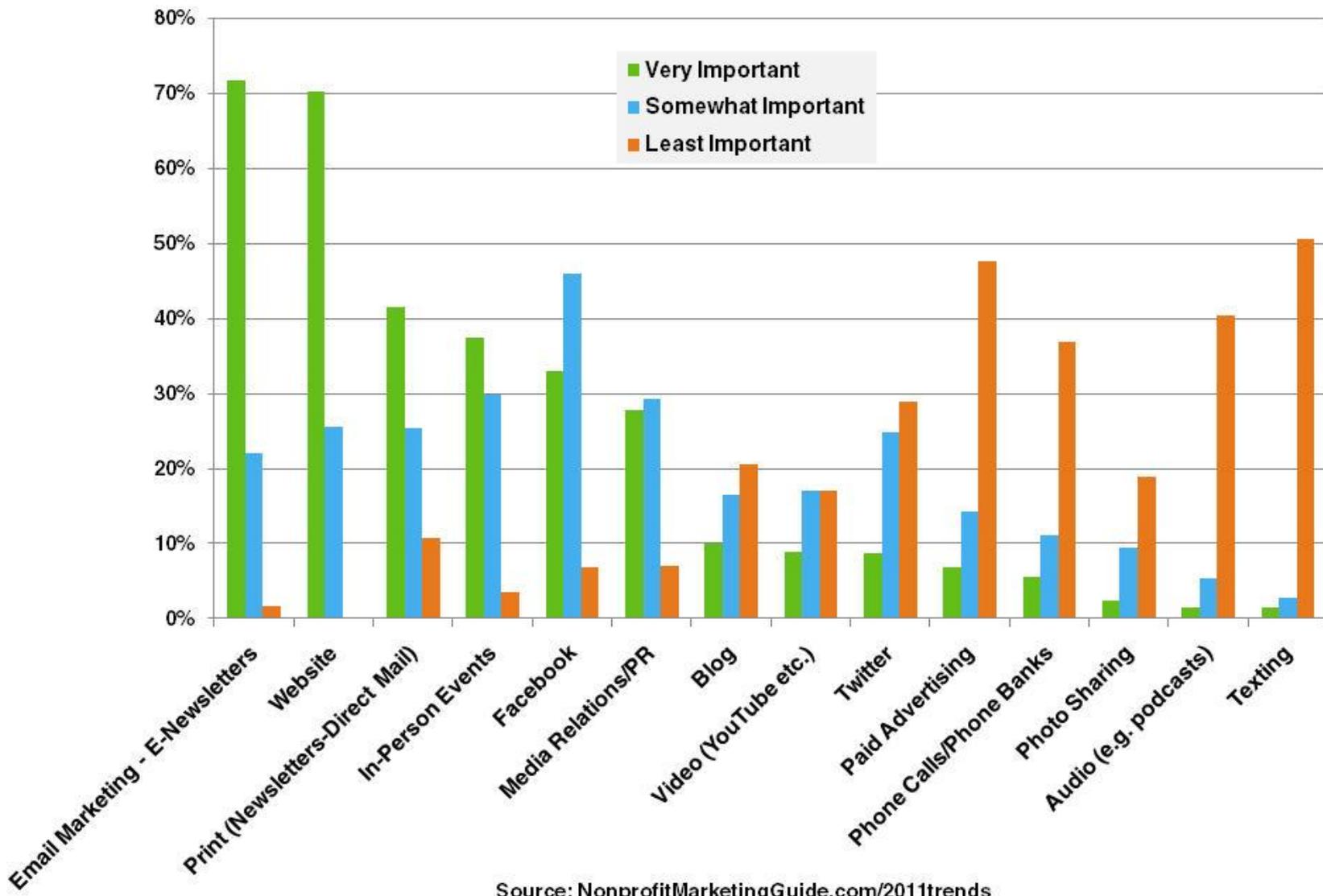
**Email marketing and websites are the most important** communications tools for nonprofits in 2011, followed by direct mail, in-person events, Facebook, and media relations/PR.

**Texting and paid advertising are the least important** communications tools for nonprofits in 2011, followed by audio (e.g. podcasts) and phone calls/phone banks.

# Communications Tools

Communications Tool	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Least Important
Email Marketing - E-Newsletters	72%	22%	2%
Website	70%	26%	0%
Print (Newsletters-Direct Mail)	42%	25%	11%
In-Person Events	37%	30%	4%
Facebook	33%	46%	7%
Media Relations/PR	28%	29%	7%
Blog	10%	17%	21%
Video (YouTube etc.)	9%	17%	17%
Twitter	9%	25%	29%
Paid Advertising	7%	14%	48%
Phone Calls/Phone Banks	6%	11%	37%
Photo Sharing	2%	9%	19%
Audio (e.g. podcasts)	1%	5%	40%
Texting	1%	3%	51%

## Relative Importance of Communications Tools to Nonprofits in 2011



Source: [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends)

# Communications Tools

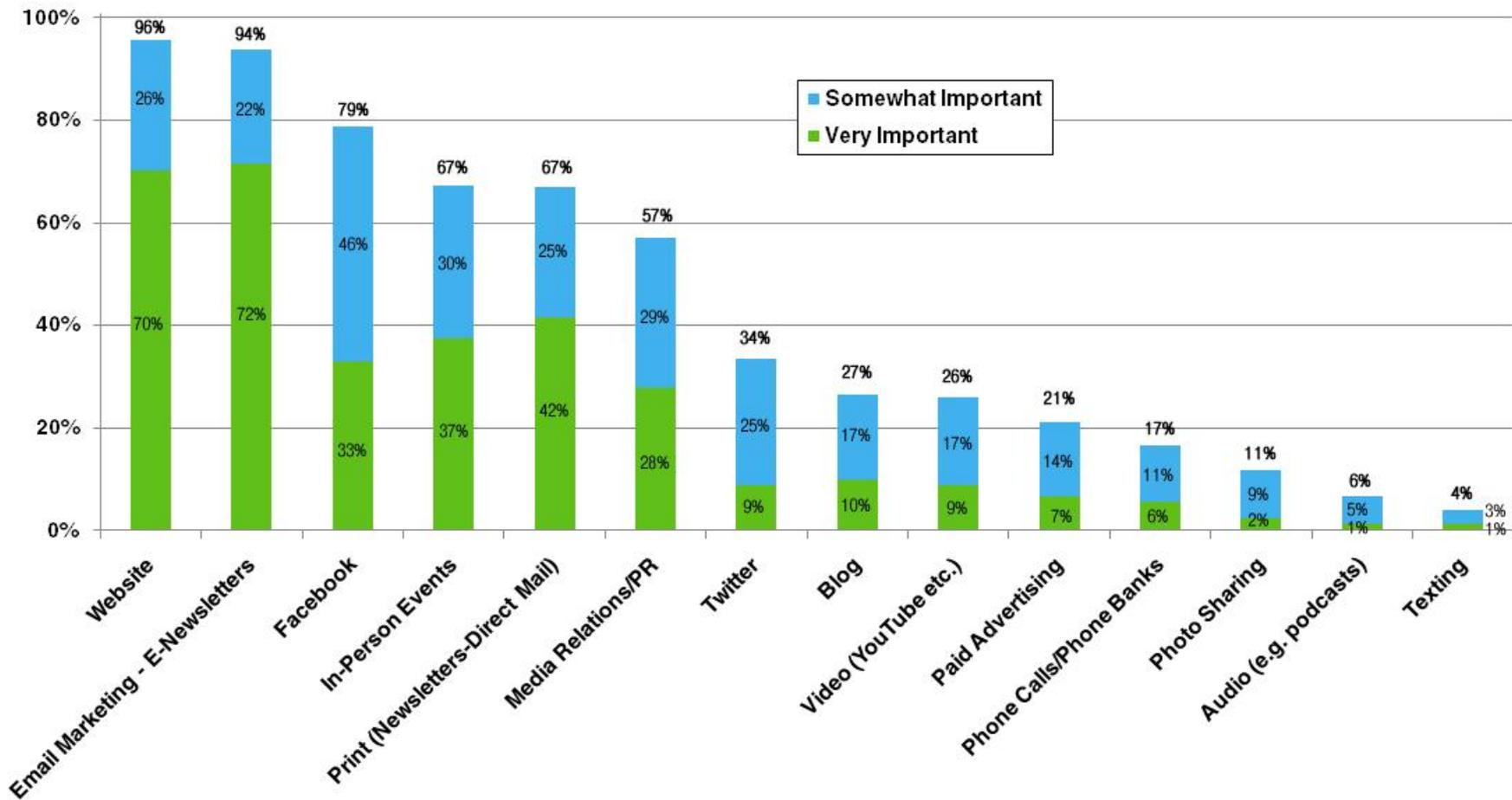
When you combine the “very important” and “somewhat important” rankings, you see instantly how **online marketing tools now dominate**, with **96% of participants identifying their website as being a very or somewhat important tool**, and **94% identifying email marketing the same way**.

**Facebook follows in third place, with 79% identifying it as a very or somewhat important communications tool**, trumping more traditional forms of nonprofit communication, such as in-person events (67%), print marketing (67%), and media relations/PR (57%).

**With the exception of Facebook, other social media tools fall far behind**. Only 34% of participants identified Twitter as very or somewhat important, followed by blogging (27%), online video (26%), photo sharing (11%), and audio-podcasting (6%). It’s worth noting, however, that while these tools ranked lower individually, many nonprofits do rely on blogging, video, photo sharing and podcasting to keep their website, email, and Facebook pages fresh and engaging.

**Paid advertising (21%), phone calls/phone banks (17%) and texting (4%) garnered little recognition** as important tools for the majority of survey participants. Given that smaller and medium-sized nonprofits represent the majority of survey participants, it’s not surprising that these tools, which typically require larger financial investments, ranked poorly in the survey.

## Relative Importance of Communications Tools Combining "Very Important" and "Somewhat Important" Ratings



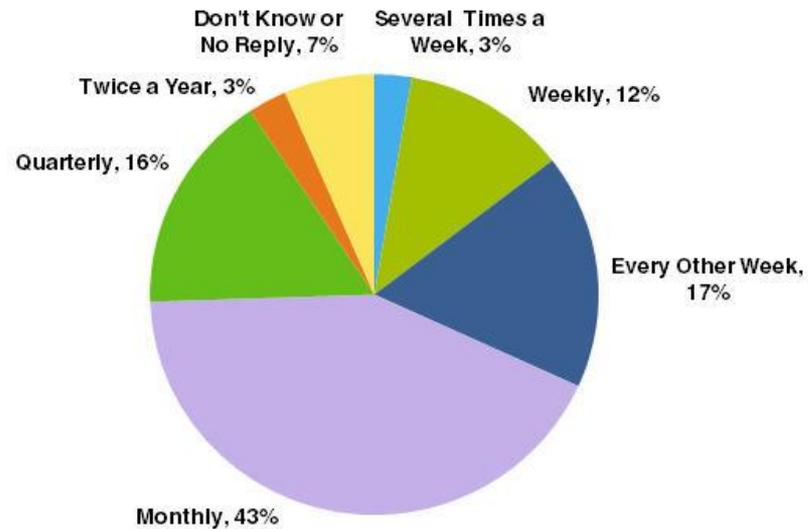
Source: [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends)

# Emailing Supporters

**Monthly emailing to a typical supporter is the most popular frequency for nonprofits at 43%, followed by every other week at 17% and quarterly at 16%. Three-quarters of nonprofits (75%) plan to email their typical supporters at least monthly.**

Not surprisingly, the more important a nonprofit believes email to be as a communications tool, the more frequently they expect to email supporters: 81% of the nonprofits that ranked email as a “very important” tool will email at least monthly, with 35% emailing every other week or more. On the other hand, of those ranking email as only “somewhat important,” 67% will email at least monthly and only 26% will email every other week or more.

## How Often Will You Email the Typical Person on Your Email List?



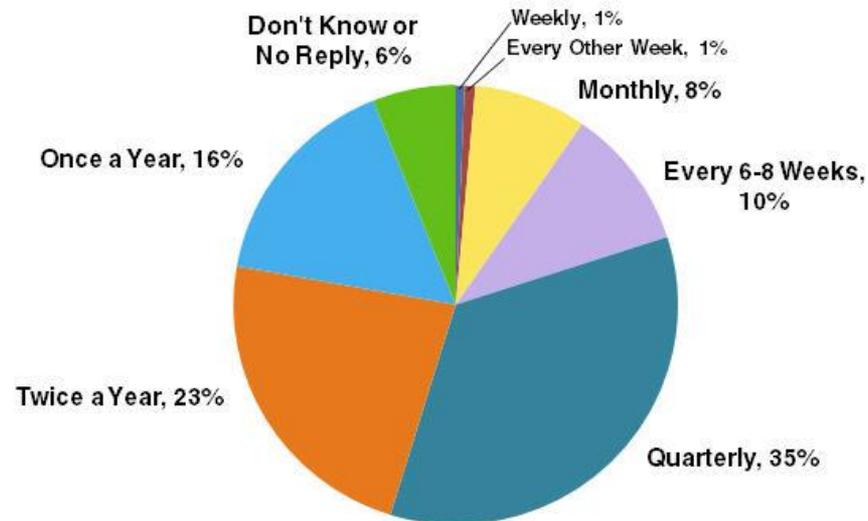
Source: [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends)

# Sending Direct Mail

Quarterly direct mail to the typical supporter is the most popular frequency for nonprofits at 35%, followed by twice a year at 23% and once a year at 16%. **Only 10% expect to send direct mail to their typical supporters at least monthly.** This is compared to 75% of nonprofits who expect to email their typical supporters at least monthly.

As with email frequency, the more important a nonprofit believes direct mail to be as a communications tool, the more frequently they expect to use it: 70% of the nonprofits that ranked direct mail as a “very important” tool will mail at least quarterly, with 26% mailing at least every 6-8 weeks. Of those ranking direct email as only “somewhat important,” 64% will mail at least quarterly, with just 19% mailing at least every 6-8 weeks.

## How Often Will You Send Direct Mail to the Typical Person on Your Mailing List?



Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2011trends

# What Excites You?

To let participants speak in their own words, we asked two open-ended questions:

- **What excites you most about your work in 2011?**
- **What scares you most about your work in 2011?**

While the answers to both questions fall across a wide spectrum, a few trends are clear, as seen in the word clouds and some representative samples below. We'll be doing additional analysis on the answers in the coming weeks and will share that information at [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/blog](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/blog).

## **What's Exciting: Three Trends from the Survey Results**

### ***1. New Opportunities to Connect with Supporters***

The word “new” was by far the most popular word used to respond to this question (see word cloud). Whether it's new approaches to social media, new programming, or new people, nonprofit communicators are excited about the changes around them.

“Reinventing the way we connect with our donors and prospective donors.”

“Creating content that excites our donors in new and inventive ways.”

“Establishing and deepening relationships with newly targeted segments of our mailing list.”

### ***2. Increasing Use of Social Media***

Many organizations are just now starting to experiment with social media like Facebook and Twitter, while others are moving beyond the start-up phase and thinking more strategically.

# What Excites You?

“We are launching a Twitter account. I’m excited to see what works and what doesn’t.”

“The opportunities to use social media to really engage our donors.”

“We’re starting to get momentum with Facebook and Twitter, and it will be fun to see what this yields as we’re increasingly strategic with both.”

### ***3. Better Communications Planning and Integration***

Many participants are excited that their nonprofits are “finally” embracing marketing:

“We finally have a team to focus on marketing!”

“I think we will FINALLY be allowed to send emails to our donors for the first time.”

“Having a new design for our website and e-newsletter, finally getting our communications and fundraising program running smoothly.”

Others are excited about their communications maturing into integrated strategies:

“A consistent social media plan for the Foundation that works across all platforms.”

“Getting consistency in the organization’s editorial calendar and communications, improving the web presence, and more fully integrating social media.”

“Establishing our digital marketing team and updating our website to increase its interactivity with users who can share their own stories.”

“We are going to plan out our communications a year in advance and follow a plan for the first time.”



# What Scares You?

## What's Scary: Three Trends from the Survey Results

### *1. Economic Uncertainty*

The economy and lack of funding, both for organizations as a whole and for communications specifically, is a top concern for nonprofits.

“Getting funding is a bear.”

“The economy affecting our membership numbers and conference attendance (where we get our funds to run the program).”

“Limited communications budget so program investments don't receive the marketing they deserve.”

### *2. Difficulty of Implementing Marketing Strategies*

Many organizations expressed frustration with knowing what they wanted to do, but fearing that they don't have the information, tools, or skills they need to effectively implement their plans.

“My ability to create a message that will capture people's emotions.”

“We don't have email addresses for a lot of our constituents, and a lot of people don't open or read their email anyway!”

“That it will be hard to reach the audiences we want to target.”

“My organization is SO FAR BEHIND in electronic communications.”

# What Scares You?

## **3. Lack of Staff Time for Communications**

Nonprofits are perpetually understaffed, and with the variety of communications options available now, many nonprofit leaders and staff feel overwhelmed.

“I’m an operation of one and there’s SO, SO much to do.”

“There is never enough time to do everything we need to, much less what we’d like to.”

“We are spread so thin already and our workload is increasing.”

“Feeling overwhelmed with all the possibilities and different things we could be putting energy into.”

“There are so many channels to consider, evaluate, and decide to pursue (or not) – it is overwhelming.”



# 3 Approaches for 2011

## Now what?

I suggest three approaches for nonprofit communicators in 2011:

- **Be Your Own Media Mogul.** Take control of the content you produce and how it's distributed to your supporters rather than relying on others (like the mainstream media) to do it for you. You are the publisher, the broadcaster, the media mogul for your good cause.
- **Connect the Dots for Your Supporters.** With so much information available in so many places, it's often difficult for your supporters to really understand what's happening on your issues and with your organization. Make connecting those disjointed and scattered dots of information for your supporters a priority.
- **Wear Your Personality and Values.** One of the easiest ways for your nonprofit to stand out is to stop acting like a monolithic organization and start acting like a band of passionate people working toward a mutual goal. Let your supporters see who you are and what you stand for (in marketing speak, we call that your brand.)

Say you are building your strategy around “integrated content marketing” if you really want to sound like you know what you are doing. 😊

# Be Your Own Media Mogul

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Put all the stuff you create and all the ways you share it on one editorial calendar. **Focus both on creating new content and on curating (sorting and redistributing) good content** from others.

Content creation and curation helps you in many ways, in many places:

- **On Your Website:** Regularly adding good, fresh content will improve your search engine optimization (SEO).
- **In Your Email:** It makes your e-mail much more interesting, so supporters stay engaged and will be more likely to open your email messages.
- **In Social Media:** It gives you something to start conversations with on your own profiles and to add substance to conversations you have on other people's pages.
- **In Direct Mail:** It gets you in the habit of collecting eye-catching photos and inspiring stories that you can use in your print communications and fundraising appeals.

- **Media Relations:** You'll have plenty of different angles on your work to pitch to reporters.

Nonprofits can produce all kinds of different content. Here are a few of my favorite categories:

- Original research or thinking
- Expert research you feature
- Case studies, stories, profiles
- Testimonials, reviews, opinion
- Q & A, discussion

And you can put it in all kinds of different places (your communications channels):

- Your website (which may include a blog)
- Email
- Videos
- Social media profiles
- Direct mail
- Media relations (i.e. press releases and pitches)

**While writing is an essential skill, learning to be a good editor and producer will be just as important to your success as a nonprofit media mogul.**

# Connect the Dots for Your Supporters



We all suffer from information overload. Your job in communicating with supporters is not to add to the confusion, but to help clear it up. Instead of just throwing more messaging out there, work hard to connect the dots for people, both within your own communications and with the world at large.

## **Think Merged Messaging**

As you create and distribute your messages in various places, try to ensure that what you put in various channels works if it stays in its own lane, but also if it merges with your other messaging, as well as today's news. Avoid the boring background, but do try to provide some larger context, so your supporters can more easily see how what you are saying fits in with what they already know and what else they hearing now.

## **Smooth Out the Paths in Between**

Direct mail donors are going online, and online donors read their snail mail. People are complex and so are the ways they get and respond to information. Make it very easy for your supporters to travel from one touch point to another.

Ensure that everything is connected (e.g. your Facebook page directs people to your website, as does your direct mail appeal letter).

## **Refocus on Your Website**

Your website is the one place online that you have complete control over (or should . . . don't leave control in the hands of consultants or volunteers who can disappear on you.) Make your website a place that brings it all together for your supporters in a cohesive way. Focus on the visitor's experience on the site, not just on the information you are providing there. Focus more on the impact that you and your supporters make together and less on your program and service descriptions.

## **Accept the Mobile Reality**

By 2013, mobile phones will take over PCs as the most common web access device (Gartner Research). Today, 41% of mobile Internet time is spent on email (NielsenWire). As you connect the dots for your supporters, remember that many of them are reading your emails and looking at your website and Facebook page on their smart phones.

# Wear Your Personality and Values

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Competition for your supporters' attention, time, and money comes from all sides, including from other nonprofits. You can stand out by wearing your personality and values so the rest of us can easily see who you are and what you stand for.

## The Most Important Question You Should Answer for Your Supporters

Your supporters, including financial donors, have many questions about you and your good cause: What do they do, how do they do it, whom do they help? But all of these questions really boil down to something much more personal, a question that is always more about them than about you:

### Do I fit in here?

Your supporters have an infinite number of choices, and if you want to be the one they select, you need to make them feel like supporting you is the most natural choice in the world.

You need to describe the problems you are trying to solve and the needs you are trying to address in ways that make sense to them.

You need to talk about your solutions and approaches so they see how your work is consistent with their own values. It needs to all feel right.

**You gain their support by proving that you are for real.**

How?

**Don't be afraid to take a stand.** Point out what and who is right and what and who is wrong (or at least heading in the right or wrong direction, if you need to be more diplomatic about it).

**Share some of the downs along with the ups.** Sure, you should focus on successes more than failures, but it's those downs that often reveal the most about our character and values.

**Speak as passionate leaders, not as a 501(c)(whatevers).** "Communities" are about living organisms, not structures. We get "engaged" to other people, not institutions. As you build your community of supporters and focus on engagement with them, always be, sound, and look human.

# About Us

At Nonprofit Marketing Guide, we give small nonprofits and communications departments of one the tips and training they need to do smart, savvy marketing, communications, and fundraising for their good causes.

Get your free membership to our Learning Center at [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/members](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/members)

Keep up with the latest news, resources, and advice on Kivi's Nonprofit Communications Blog at [NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/blog](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/blog)

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