THE Anatomy of a Successful Fundraiser

DONATE
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INTRODUCTION

A good example is a powerful learning tool. To understand an idea or learn a new skill, we often need someone to demonstrate it. Here at Classy, we’re always trying to stay on top of the most effective fundraising and development techniques, and we learn a ton from the outstanding nonprofits using our platform. To help you take advantage of some of these great strategies, we have looked into ten of the most successful campaigns we have seen in the past year and gathered some great lessons for you.

In each example, we will tell you a little about the organization and its work. Then we will walk you through the best practices that helped them create these powerhouse campaigns. At the end of each section, we will highlight some simple takeaways to consider when planning your next campaign.

Let’s get started!
Lesson: Using Email Nurturing to Improve Fundraising Results

WHO THEY ARE. LiNK is a humanitarian organization working to support the rights and freedom of the people of North Korea. Founded in 2004, the nonprofit spread through colleges and high schools and they are now a worldwide organization with offices in Los Angeles and Seoul, South Korea. So far they have rescued 265 refugees and in recent years they have shifted their focus to supporting and publicizing the North Korean people, rather than the international politics at play.

SUCCESS! LiNK has created a wildly successful peer-to-peer campaign, raising more than $230,000 in just two months. They have helped busy students and young people become determined, informed fundraisers.

HOW’D THEY DO IT? A key to LiNK’s success in recent campaigns has been their diligent pursuit of email excellence. With help from email marketing service MailChimp, they have designed a wide variety of emails to motivate and appeal to fundraisers at every stage of the campaign. We got the scoop from Justin Wheeler, LiNK’s Vice President, on their approach to email onboarding.

The first step to an effective email is getting fundraisers to open them. Wheeler explained how much thought needs to go into a subject line.

“Before sending an email, write out 20 subject lines. Send it around to your staff and take a vote …The subject line should take you longer to write than the email itself. When we started going through this practice we saw both our open and click rates skyrocket.”

It doesn’t matter how good your email is if it never gets opened.
And LiNK has similarly high standards for the content of their emails. With the average subscriber receiving more than 400 emails per day, creating an email that stands out is an increasingly difficult mission. But LiNK doesn’t just want their email to stand out, “It NEEDS to be the best e-mail [our subscribers] receive on that day.”

While LiNK’s emails often employ images and references to popular culture, the organization also emphasizes the right balance of urgency and amusement. They keep the messages short and sweet with the intention of getting the subscriber to click through to their fundraising page or LiNK’s website. Keeping the text and design minimal allows calls to action to stand out on the page.

They further personalize the email by sending different messages based on the subscribers’ fundraising activities. They congratulate people when they are halfway to their goal and offer help to inactive fundraisers.

LiNK wrote more than 30 emails for their campaign so that every message a supporter received was relevant and engaging. They used MailChimp to segment and distribute timely emails showing supporters they were needed and appreciated. Nonprofits had been using email long before this campaign, but LiNK showed how reinvesting in continuing communications with fundraisers can turbocharge a campaign.

BOTTOM LINE.

- Email nurturing can motivate fundraisers and keep them engaged over the course of a campaign

- Create great subject lines, clear and to-the-point CTAs, and make it the best email your subscribers get that day

- Segment subscribers to celebrate success, kick start new supporters, and offer help to inactive fundraisers
Lesson: Motivating Millennials to Engage with your Causes

**WHO THEY ARE.** buildOn is an international nonprofit that runs after-school programs for urban American youth and promotes literacy and education in developing countries. The organization began in 1991 as Building with Books and adopted their new name in 2009. Along with performing community service, American students form teams and fundraise to build schools in Haiti, Nicaragua, Senegal, and other countries.

**SUCCESS!** In the first two weeks of May 2014, buildOn raised $102,183, fully covering the cost of building three schools. And the at-risk youth who do the fundraising? 95% of them graduate high school and go on to college. So far they have broken ground on 600 schools and begin another one every three days.

**HOW’D THEY DO IT?** So how do you get high school students, many of whom face poverty and community violence, to not only stay in school and serve their community, but also fundraise tens of thousands of dollars to help people they’ve never met?

buildOn believes that through helping others, at home and abroad, urban youth learn to see themselves as the solution, not the problem. buildOn empowers children and teens through fundraising – proving that they could give a school to an impoverished community. The organization motivates Millennials by setting the high goal of $30,000 (the cost to build one school), but also by offering the incentive of traveling overseas to participate in the construction of schools.

There are several qualities in this system that appeal directly to the Millennial generation, the youth of today and the philanthropists of tomorrow. The first is the concrete nature of the fundraising goal.
Fundraising teams are set the tall order of raising $30,000 for the explicit purpose of building a school. While buildOn also battles abstract problems like illiteracy, building a school is a goal that the students can grasp and take ownership of. The mission challenges kids but makes success an attainable, defined possibility. The goal is collective but each teen creates their own online fundraising page.

This system of peer-to-peer fundraising is also a great fit for Millennials. buildOn used Classy to host their online fundraising, which is mobile-friendly and allowed the kids to easily share their pages on the social networks they already frequented. Online fundraising meshes well with social networks like Facebook and Twitter, so students could update their friends and family on how close they were to their fundraising goal. Finally, buildOn creates even more enthusiasm by offering high school students the chance to travel to Nepal, Mali, Haiti, or wherever their efforts are funding a school.

**BOTTOM LINE.**

- To appeal to Millennials, give them a concrete, challenging goal
- Fundraise where your community already spends their time (Facebook, Twitter)
- Motivate fundraisers to reach big goals by offering big incentives
Lesson: Using Creativity to Drive a Fundraising Campaign

WHO THEY ARE. Founded in 1988, Broadway Care/Equity Fights AIDS channels the talents of the theatre community to fight HIV/AIDS and support those affected by it. They have raised more than $250 million for AIDS-related programs and services. The Broadway Bares event is an annual campaign that fundraises through a series of dance and burlesque shows. It all began in 1992 with seven dancers performing in a Manhattan bar. In 2014, more than 170 dancers took over the historic Hammerstein Ballroom.

SUCCESS! The 2014 Broadway Bares campaign raised $1,386,105. Revenue comes from sales of tickets to the performances, but dancers also create their own online fundraising pages. The Broadway Bares campaign has been going strong for more than two decades and has dramatically scaled since its humble beginnings.

HOW’D THEY DO IT? Part of what sets Broadway Bares apart is that it challenges its fundraisers to be creative and contribute to the event itself. Through costumes, choreography, and music, these Broadway performers can make the show truly their own. Nonprofits are always looking for creative new fundraising ideas, but Broadway Bares is able to keep an annual event fresh and exciting by pooling the talents of an artistic community.

Performances and entertainment events can be a lucrative fundraising approach, with concerts like Farm Aid raising millions. These fundraisers not only garner natural excitement from the attendees, but allow performers to turn their passion into a force for good. Many young dancers, musicians, and artists are eager to have their work seen and may be happy to volunteer their time.
Broadway Bares also asks performers to create personal fundraising pages and reach out to family and friends, enabling the campaign to garner support beyond New York City and the theater community. The combination of ticket sales and peer-to-peer fundraising has helped Broadway Bares raise millions.

**BOTTOM LINE.**

- Fundraising through entertainment events creates multiple avenues of revenue
- Appeal to the tastes and interests of your supporters
- Call on your fundraisers to be creative in their work for your organization
FLATWATER FOUNDATION: TYLER’S DAM THAT CANCER

Lesson: The Importance of Challenging Fundraisers

WHO THEY ARE. The Flatwater Foundation knows that cancer has a ripple effect. A diagnosis doesn’t just turn life upside down for a patient, it also dramatically affects their family and friends. This organization’s mission is to provide mental health services to all people affected by cancer, through traditional counseling and wellness programs, including yoga, meditation, and exercise. The fifth annual Tyler’s Dam That Cancer event, a 21 mile paddleboard outing for fundraisers and culminates with a closing celebration, took place on June 9, 2014.

SUCCESS! This year’s Dam That Cancer raised $234,055 for the Flatwater Foundation. 75 paddleboarders raised at least $2,000 each through peer-to-peer fundraising, with a number of fundraisers doubling or tripling that goal. On the heels of that accomplishment, participants then completed an eight-hour, 21-mile paddleboard route in the Texas summer heat.

HOW'D THEY DO IT? Dam That Cancer is not a commitment for the faint of heart. It asks supporters not only to fundraise at least $2,000, but to take on a grueling physical challenge. And the challenging nature of the event is part of what makes it so successful.

Psychologists have found that people tend to give more to a fundraiser when they know it will require pain or significant effort,2 perhaps because people think of challenging events as more meaningful.

An athletic commitment like this one also requires physical training in the weeks and months leading up to it, which can remind participants to continue working toward their fundraising

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goal. Dam That Cancer is also limited to 75 paddleboarders, bringing an element of scarcity and exclusivity to it.

The paddleboarders each created their own online fundraising pages and ask for donations from close friends and family. This peer-to-peer system aligns with The Flatwater Foundation’s mission to serve the social network surrounding every cancer diagnosis.

The limited number of spots and high fundraising minimum parallel the trend of runners fundraising in exchange for admission to in-demand road races. These events appeal to recreational athletes, giving them a great opportunity to do what they love while doing some good. The 21-mile trek also honors the determination and tenacity of those affected by cancer and mental illness.

BOTTOM LINE.

- Challenge your fundraisers with a significant physical task, people give more to painful or effortful events (the Martyrdom Effect)
- Set a sizable fundraising goal for participants - many will surpass it
SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK SANTA CLARA: STAND UP FOR KIDS

Lesson: Creating a Relatable Narrative

WHO THEY ARE. You may not think of Santa Clara, in the heart of Silicon Valley, as a place with hunger issues, but one in ten people in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties have received assistance from Second Harvest Food Bank. Along with the 52 million pounds of food they distributed last year, Second Harvest also offers a multilingual hotline, nutrition classes, and help for families applying for food stamps.

SUCCESS! Although Second Harvest collects and distributes food every day, their Stand Up For Kids campaign focused on raising funds to implement and expand the food bank’s programming. Over the course of March, April, and May of 2014, they raised $4,583,445, surpassing their goal by half a million dollars.

HOW’D THEY DO IT? It is hard to get people fired up about broad topics like hunger or poverty. You need a story, a hero, or in the case of Stand Up for Kids, a villain.

Surveys have found that as many as 90%\(^4\) of children have experienced bullying. And those kids become adults and donors. Bullying is a hot topic that impacts people of all races, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

By casting hunger as a bully, Second Harvest can appeal to the emotions and memories of people who may have never relied on a food bank. By comparing the distress of hunger to the effects of bullying, they help people of all backgrounds sympathize with the 100,000 local children in need of support.

**Give Fundraisers Resources for Success**

Another asset that fueled Stand Up For Kids’ success was the resources Second Harvest provided for their fundraisers (http://www.shfb.org/fundraiserresources). While development professionals spend every day in pursuit of funding, a peer-to-peer campaign depends on your supporters fundraising on your behalf. To maximize the results, nonprofits should offer fundraisers information and assistance in setting goals, reaching out to donors, and publicizing their campaign. Second Harvest even provided fundraisers with marketing assets, like downloadable, customizable flyers and posters. They made it easier for their supporters to become advocates and promote their campaigns.

**BOTTOM LINE.**

- Use a story, hero, or villain to galvanize your community
- Appeal to a common experience
- Provide resources to help your fundraisers succeed

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ACTION AGAINST HUNGER – #TEAM45

Lesson: Recruiting Fundraisers to Become Part of Your Team

WHO THEY ARE. This international organization is fighting hunger and malnutrition in 40 countries. With programs including emergency nutrition, well-drilling and hand-pump installation, and micro-grants for small farmers, they serve 5 million people each year. In 2013, Action Against Hunger began promoting #Team45, a fundraising campaign to end deadly hunger among malnourished children. The number 45 refers to the course of nutritional therapy that can save a child’s life, which costs $45 for 45 days of treatment.

SUCCESS! So far, the #Team45 campaign has raised $51,265. That’s enough money to give life-saving nutrition to more than 1,100 malnourished children. And Action Against Hunger is seeking to add more fundraisers to the 253 people currently on #Team45.

HOW’D THEY DO IT? By now, many nonprofits have calls to action on their website, which usually say “Donate” or “Fundraise.” To create team spirit and a unity of purpose, Action Against Hunger wants you to “Join #Team45.” They don’t just want you to fundraise for the organization, they want you to be part of a life-saving team.

The campaign’s name serves the dual purpose of presenting the mission as a team effort and also reminding the audience of the simple 45-day course of treatment that costs only $45. Every time the fundraiser sees the name, they are reminded of their ultimate goal.

To further promote this campaign as a team, the #Team45 webpage highlights their top fundraisers. These are the teammates you will be working with. Acknowledging some
outstanding fundraisers not only shows Action Against Hunger’s gratitude, but it also provides an example for people who are just getting started.

Again, awesome resources for fundraisers show up in successful campaigns! The #Team45 page provides fundraisers a full guide on how to help choose a theme and goal, create their own page, and promote the cause to their friends and family. If you join the team, Action Against Hunger will provide the coaching you need to be an successful fundraiser!

**BOTTOM LINE.**

- Present fundraisers for your organization as part of a team or special group
- Make the mission of the campaign clear and memorable
- Provide instructions to get fundraisers started
PENCILS OF PROMISE – THE NEXT 100

Lesson: Focusing on Fundraisers in Marketing Your Campaign

WHO THEY ARE. Founded in 2008, Pencils of Promise is a global nonprofit organization that believes every child should have the opportunity to receive a quality education. The organization fundraises to provide scholarships to students at risk of dropping out and to train teachers. But perhaps what they are best known for is the more than 200 schools they have built in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. PoP partners with communities for construction and provides learning materials and workshops for teachers. In 2014, they are asking donors to help build The Next 100.

SUCCESS! With more than 33,000 people having fundraised for the organizations, PoP has set off on this new venture that aims to build 100 new schools in 2014. They break ground on a new school every 90 hours.

HOW’D THEY DO IT? The Next 100 isn’t asking you to give, donate, or fundraise. It asks you to build a school. This request is audacious enough to grab a person’s attention. Rather than focusing on all the intermediary steps between creating a fundraising page and completing construction, PoP emphasizes that regular people like you got involved and built a school. Even the call to action uses the word “build” instead of fundraise.

To promote The Next 100, PoP created a video featuring people involved in the building of the first 200 schools. We meet Adam Braun,
Pencils of Promise’s founder, who built the first school. He tells us about a college DJ who sold his CDs to build a school and a young woman who built a school by asking for donations in lieu of birthday presents. Although the goal is to provide education in places where it is lacking, The Next 100 campaign emphasizes how donors directly impact the organization’s mission.

**Nonprofits have to balance serving their constituents and satisfying their donors, but in appeals to the donor, they usually tell the constituent's story. This can be very effective, but it also pays off to shine a spotlight on donors and fundraisers.**

This actually works somewhat like an advertisement. A company (organization) introduces a relatable character (the fundraiser) who buys their product (fundraises for the org) and shows how happy, cool, and accomplished they are. Advertisement viewers see the person like them who uses a product and is happier because of it and they want to reap these benefits too.

PoP supporters see people just like them who have built schools and they want to make a difference too – they want to feel empowered, happy and accomplished. The PoP video shows how fundraisers used their personal interests like music and athletics to raise money for schools. By telling the fundraiser’s story, The Next 100 appeals directly to PoP’s audience and demonstrates that anyone can build a school - and that they can accomplish it while doing something they love!

**BOTTOM LINE.**

- Motivate fundraisers and donors by focusing on their experience, interests and accomplishments
- Emphasize the end goal (a school) rather than the ongoing effort of fundraising
FEEDING AMERICA SAN DIEGO – FOOD FROM THE BAR

Lesson: Motivating Fundraisers through Competition

WHO THEY ARE. This nonprofit is working towards realizing a hunger-free San Diego. Through education, advocacy, and food banks, Feeding America San Diego serves more than 70,000 San Diegans every week. Along with traditional food bank services, FASD has a mobile pantry that delivers food to high-poverty rural and urban neighborhoods. In May 2014 they held their Food from the Bar campaign, which called on law-related organizations to compete against each other to provide funds, food, and volunteer hours.

SUCCESS! Sixteen firms competed in the Food from the Bar campaign, raising $41,539, collecting 2,265 pounds of food, and volunteering 492 hours. Feeding America San Diego estimates that participants provided 249,000 meals for those in need.

HOW’D THEY DO IT? People love to compete. People pay money so they can compete in recreational sports leagues; people compete in online video games; people love watching others compete. Tapping into this competitive drive can be a great way to motivate fundraisers, especially when they are working as a team. Although donors and fundraisers are certainly motivated by altruism, the addition of team competition provides that extra drive. Fundraisers don’t want to let their teammates down or lose to other competitors.

The Food from the Bar campaign also targets a very specific community - law-related firms and organizations. Because they work in the same industry, teams may already be familiar with other competitors and that, too, can increase competitive energy.

http://feedingamericasd.org/
Although Food from the Bar calls on a specific group of fundraisers, it offers more flexibility in how they can contribute to the campaign. By asking teams to collect food, raise funds, and volunteer, Feeding America gives participants the option of choosing how to help. People not able to donate cash can volunteer, and those with little free time can give food or funds. Food from the Bar has created a campaign that not only raised tens of thousands of dollars, but provides a fun, gratifying outlet for a high-stress industry.

**BOTTOM LINE.**

- Use team competition to motivate fundraisers. They are bound by a desire to win and a desire to help their team.

- Be receptive to what any donor or fundraiser can provide, be it volunteer time, money, or in-kind donations.
National Geographic’s Big Cats Initiative – Build a Boma

Lesson: Using Tangible Projects to Engage Your Audience

Who They Are. Because of habitat loss and hunting by humans, many of the world’s most loved big cats are in danger of extinction. The National Geographic Big Cats Initiative funds innovative projects to protect lions and other species through conservation and education. In Kenya and Tanzania, many lions are killed by local communities when the cats attack their livestock. Build a Boma is a campaign by The Big Cats Initiative to build simple livestock enclosures (called bomas). The community’s livestock is protected from predatory big cats, removing the catalyst to many retaliatory killings.

Success! The Build a Boma campaign has funded the construction of more than 100 livestock enclosures. Amy Dickman, a grantee of the program said, “We’ve seen an 80 percent reduction in lion killings in the areas where they’re being used.”

How’d They Do It? The beauty of Build a Boma lies in its simplicity. They take the cause of conservation and endangered species and break it down to a simple narrative. The Big Cats Initiative is “committed to saving lions, tigers, cheetahs, leopards, jaguars, and other big cats in the wild.” This is already a concise and to-the-point mission, but to achieve this mission, they identify one part of the problem and propose a solution.
It begins with a problem:

*Lions, tigers, cheetahs, jaguars, and other big cats are in danger of extinction*

And focuses on one specific threat on one species

*Lions face retaliation killings from livestock owners*

And gives a simple, yet effective solution

*Build bomas to protect livestock and prevent retaliatory killings*

Part of what makes this presentation so appealing is that donors feel that they fully understand the project. They know their money will be used to build a livestock enclosure, which will prevent conflict between livestock owners and lions. National Geographic employees straightforward messaging and supporting visual content to increase transparency and demonstrate exactly how a donor’s money will impact the solution to the problem.
Finally, Build a Boma emphasizes the affordability of this solution. The protective livestock enclosures cost only $500 to construct and $25 annually to maintain. This makes the phrase “Build a Boma” an achievable goal for a fundraiser or even an individual donor.

**BOTTOM LINE.**

- Create campaigns to support specific impact projects
- Present the problem and solution in a way donors can understand (HINT: try using visual content)
- Present a simple narrative to explain your solution
WHO THEY ARE. Love146 is an international human rights organization that envisions a world free from human trafficking and exploitation. When the co-founders went with undercover investigators to a brothel, they saw one little girl staring back at them. She and the other exploited children wore numbers; hers was 146. To help children like her, the founders created Love146, which provides shelter and care for formerly trafficked children along with offering preventive education and help to connect grassroots abolition movements. Tread on Trafficking has been an annual fundraising campaign for Love146 for the past five years. It challenges fundraisers to choose a physical activity or event and ask their friends and family to sponsor them.

SUCCESS! Since 2010, the Tread on Trafficking campaign raised more than $300,000. Due to the campaign’s success and the requests of supporters, Love146 is now making Tread on Trafficking a year-round campaign.

HOW’D THEY DO IT? Love146 isn’t content to rest on their laurels. In March 2014, YouTube celebrity Michelle Phan posted a short video on the origins of Love146, which received more than 1.8 million views. The nonprofit built on the attention, hosting their Red Gala soon after.

6 http://donate.love146.org/events/tread-trafficking-2014/e31645
Ryan Day, Communication Strategist for Love146, explained how they timed these events to bring lasting attention to the cause,

“There is always a spike of buzz when you first launch a campaign. So when that spike started to go down, we held the Red Gala. Over the past 2 1/2 months, we have had this sort of rolling momentum. Once things have started to slow down, we have launched another campaign that counteracts that.”

Classy’s online fundraising platform makes it easy for fundraisers to create their own Tread on Trafficking page, but Love146 also provides a step-by-step guide on how to fundraise individually, as a team, or launch a fundraising event.

Love146 sends weekly emails to fundraisers with tips and inspirational messages. Participants have access to sample social media posts and are challenged to call five potential sponsors. Love146 provides lots of additional resources to help them reach their fundraising goals.

Love146 knows that it is not enough to get supporters to create fundraising pages, they have to set fundraisers up to succeed. With this kind of training in place, the nonprofit is already prepared to help peer-to-peer fundraisers year round.

BOTTOM LINE.

• Build momentum by launching events and campaigns as the previous one winds down
• Offer advice, instructions, and inspiration to fundraisers to help them succeed.
• There is demand for individual peer-to-peer options. Consider making this a year-round part of your development plan.
CONCLUSION

We are constantly impressed by the ingenuity and passion of the nonprofits we partner with. We continue to learn from them and we hope you have learned from the examples we’ve featured in this guide. You can adapt almost any of these strategies to the needs of your organization, whether you want to polish your email onboarding for fundraisers or create a narrative that speaks to a large audience. When planning a new campaign or reworking an old classic, you can refer to this guide for tips and inspiration.

If you want to know more about peer-to-peer or online fundraising, give Classy a call. We’re happy to help!
Say hello to nonprofit reporting (just the way you like it).

Classy

From the start we promised to never stop learning. Join the thousands of nonprofits partnering with Classy to empower the next generation of philanthropy.

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