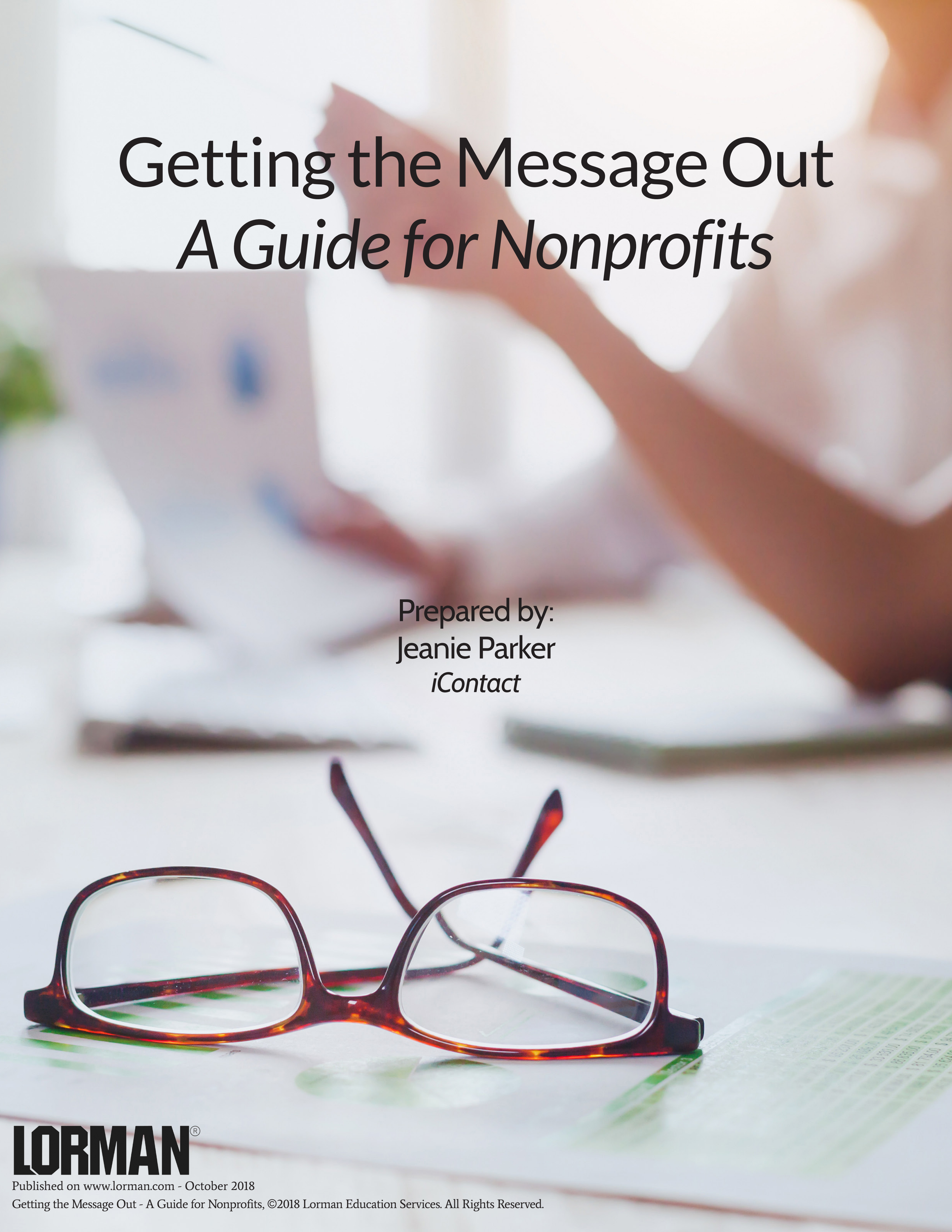

Getting the Message Out
A Guide for Nonprofits

Prepared by:
Jeanie Parker
iContact

LORMAN®
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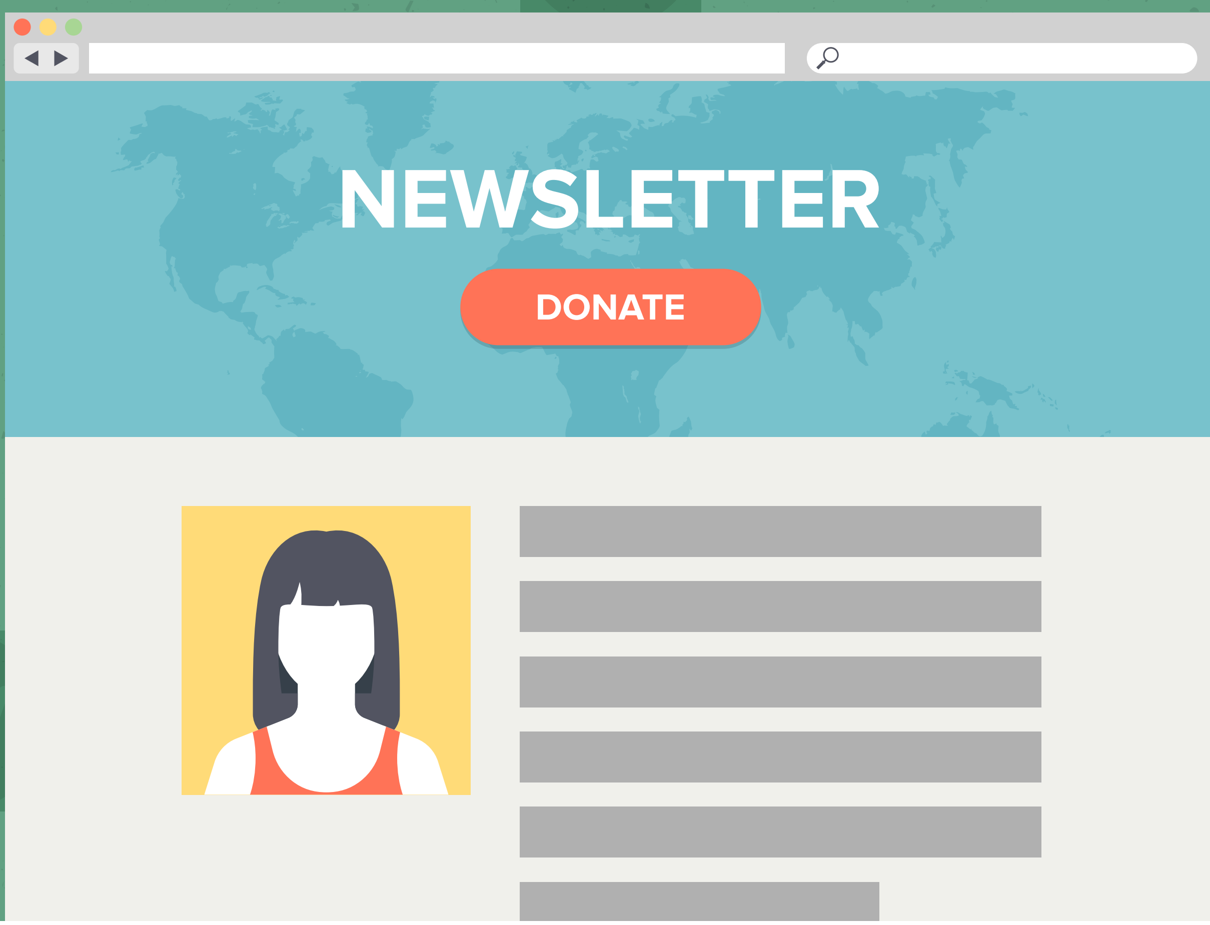
GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

A GUIDE FOR NONPROFITS



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For a nonprofit organization, email marketing is one of the most effective ways to spread the word about a cause, promote a call to action, and inspire philanthropy. It can be a key factor in staying connected with volunteers, donors, and even staff.

Since our start-up days, iContact has maintained a strong commitment to working with the nonprofit community, not only offering organizational discounts, but providing the kind of personal support that can make a big difference in creating a successful email campaign.

iContact values community service, and **we provide free iContact accounts to North Carolina–based nonprofit organizations. We also offer a 20% discount to all nonprofit organizations outside of North Carolina**.

At iContact, we are proud to help many nonprofit organizations successfully share their message through email and social media marketing. Yet, many nonprofits are hesitant about email marketing or anything digital. They are comfortable with the 'old' ways of doing things and as a result, may not take advantage of new technologies that help them reach their constituents at the right time or in the right way. At iContact we are committed to working closely with an organization to help it deliver a message that is engaging, on target and effective.

While pretty much all email marketing best practices apply for profit and nonprofit organizations alike, nonprofit organizations face some unique challenges — but you also benefit from unique opportunities.

We've put together this short guide with tips and strategies to help nonprofits get their important message out and optimize their email marketing strategies.

SECTION ONE:
BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING - YOUR LIST

Whether you're a for-profit company or a nonprofit, it's essential to constantly keep growing your subscriber list so your emails are reaching as many of the right people as possible.

The foundation of any successful email marketing campaign is the list it is built upon. Like any building project, the more solid your foundation, the stronger your end result will be.

If you already have a list of supporters who have granted you permission to email them, it is easy to import them into your iContact account. Our tutorial will show you how.

Charities and nonprofits need to take every opportunity to grow their email marketing lists by asking everyone involved with their organization to join their lists. If people donate time, money, goods, or services to your organization, you should be asking for their email details. While you might want to take a less aggressive approach when compared to your corporate colleagues, the rules of list growth are pretty much the same.

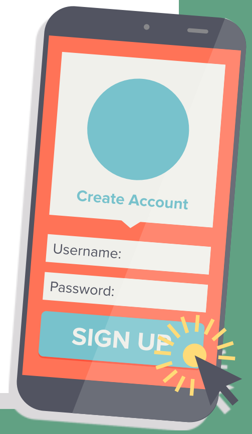
But what if you don't have a list? Well, it's time to get building from the ground up.

USING A SIGN-UP FORM

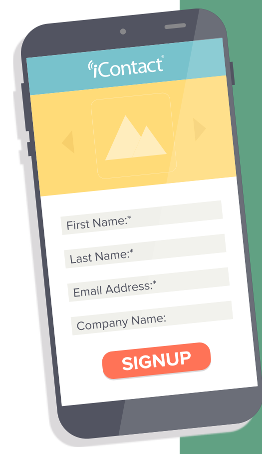
One of the most common ways to grow your email list is by including email sign-ups on both your website and social media accounts.

- MAKE IT EASY TO SIGN-UP AND DONATE -

Shorter and less complex forms result in better conversions. Keep the amount of information that users need to provide to a minimum. People generally tend to feel less pressured when they are asked to give only information that is needed to send an email.



Your general rule for creating a sign-up form should be this: If you aren't going to use it, lose it.



What we mean by this is that if you're not going to use the person's address for anything email-related, then don't put it on the form. In most cases, all that is really needed is the person's email address and complete name.

Also, don't forget that a lot of people will be reading your emails on their mobile devices. So make sure your forms are mobile-friendly and contain small text entry fields, clear layouts, and large, easy-to-click buttons.

PRO TIP:

The more information that someone is asked to give, the more resistant they may be to signing up. When it comes to sign-up forms, less really is more.

- BE SURE YOUR SIGN-UP FORM IS EASY TO FIND -

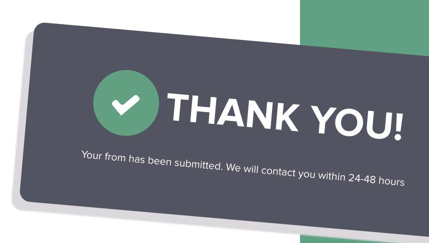
You shouldn't expect people interested in your cause to have to scramble to find a way to stay in touch. Make sure your sign-up form is on your high-traffic pages. If you want to make your form stand out, using slide-in forms and popups are options you can experiment with.

- MAKE SURE THE SIGN-UP FORM WORKS CORRECTLY -

"Hello? Can you hear me? Is anyone there?"

That's what it feels like to a subscriber who comes across a poorly configured or broken sign-up form.

Think about when you go shopping online – you expect to be presented with a "thank you" page for your order as well as receive an e-receipt in your inbox. It gives you confirmation and peace of mind that your order was received, the merchant has your correct email address, and you will soon receive a shipping notification to track the package through the mail.



Visitors to a nonprofit organization website will expect the same level of confidence and ease of use. To create a properly configured sign-up form on your site, follow these three easy steps.

1. INCLUDE A CONFIRMATION PAGE

Simply put, say “thank you!” Let the visitor to your website know that you have acknowledged their input and have recorded their email address.

2. CONNECT TO YOUR ICONTACT ACCOUNT

Why make more work for yourself? Use a sign-up form that is directly connected to your iContact account; this allows for real-time data capture and prevents you from having to continually upload sign-ups.

3. SEND A WELCOME MESSAGE

Don’t wait to say hello. Give your potential donors the welcome they deserve and let your subscribers know they matter, right from the get-go. As new subscribers are added to your list in iContact, an automated Welcome Message should be sent immediately, letting them know that you’re now connected. If you don’t greet them right away, they may forget why they wanted to sign-up in the first place.

PRO TIP:

By using iContact, creating a good sign-up form is very easy for you to accomplish. Our tools allow you to build an attractive sign-up form that is automatically connected to your iContact lists. Then, using our intuitive email Message Builder, you can easily create a Welcome Message that is delivered to every new subscriber added to your list.

OTHER WAYS TO BUILD YOUR LIST

Your website form is just one important check-in point and source of potential supporters. There are other methods you can take advantage of to grow a mailing list:

- EVENT SIGN-UPS -

If you are sponsoring or co-sponsoring an event, or if you host an information table at a community event or gathering, build your list the old-fashioned way: Be sure to have some volunteers on hand to physically collect names and email addresses with a sign-up sheet. If folks are interested enough to attend your event or stop by your information booth, they are probably interested enough to want to stay in touch. After an event, get these contacts uploaded as soon as possible and send them a Welcome Message.

- YOUR SUPPORTERS -

You have a network of supporters; they, in turn, have a network of contacts — friends, family, and colleagues who might be interested in your cause. Encourage your supporters to share your social media accounts and posts with their network. Make sure you have a share button in every newsletter you send to your supporters. Make it easy for them to help you spread the word.

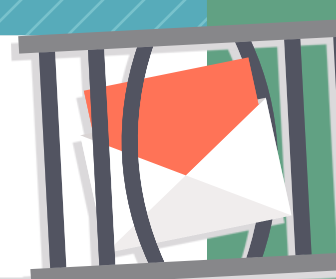
- SOCIAL MEDIA -

If you are not on social media already, you need to be. Maintaining some level of social media presence is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. That said, make sure your Facebook page includes a sign-up form for your newsletter or updates. Periodically add a reminder on Twitter posts to sign-up for more information or to keep in touch. Post to LinkedIn and include a link to your website or a sign-up landing page.

PRO TIP:

Building a good list takes time — and consistent effort. Don’t rely on just one way to build your email list — use every available option.

STAY OUT OF LIST JAIL



You know now that great email marketing begins with a great subscriber list. There are no shortcuts to building the perfect list, and some “strategies” are just plain wrong. Here are some **DON’TS** to avoid:

- BUYING LISTS -

Email marketing's success is built on your relationship with your subscribers and the permission they have given you to contact them with relevant and timely information. When you buy a list, there is no relationship, and this permission does not exist. Buying lists is as good as spam. It will not work. The use of purchased lists is against most reputable email marketing service providers' terms and conditions, including iContact's.

- ACQUIRING LISTS -

So you've recently brought on a new volunteer or staff member who wants to be helpful and arrives with a memory stick full of contacts from another group they may have been involved with. Uploading these contacts to your subscriber lists is not only bad form, it may even be criminal – and again, because there is no permission, any campaigns sent to these contacts are essentially spam. Thank them for their good intentions, but say, "no, thanks" to any acquired lists.

- PLAYING THE WAITING GAME -

New contacts should be added promptly to your email marketing list. The average email address has a life span of approximately 18 months. The sooner you connect with interested subscribers, the better your chances of creating a successful relationship. Remember, even if you only have 10 names, these are people interested in your organization and mission. Don't delay in making them part of the family.

- DEHUMANIZING YOUR DATA -

Remember, your subscriber list is made up of real people, not just data. Get to know them and learn what messages resonate with them. No one wants to be asked for money all of the time. Tell them a story. Your subscribers will be interested in the impacts their support will have. They will want to know about interesting events in a timely fashion, not a couple of days before. Remember, the more targeted your campaigns, the more fruitful your relationships will be in the long term.

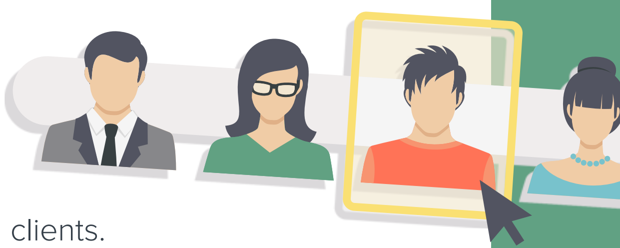
- SHOWING NO RESPECT -

Email marketing laws state that subscribers must be able to unsubscribe from your lists at any time. When you use a reputable email marketing service like iContact, all your campaigns come with an unsubscribe link at the bottom of every email, allowing your subscribers to manage their relationships with you.

Nonprofit and for-profit organizations alike must respect a subscriber's right to remove themselves if they are no longer interested. If you are using spreadsheets and standard email tools like Microsoft Outlook or Gmail to manage your email marketing campaigns, it's too easy to lose track of your subscribers' subscription preferences and continue to send unwanted communications.

PRO TIP:
People support organizations they like and trust – so never attempt to start your email marketing relationships on the wrong foot.

SEGMENT YOUR LIST



Lists should be carefully segmented to ensure the right people get the right message at the right time.

A good starting point would be to create separate lists of corporate supporters, individual supporters, volunteers, and clients. Your iContact Customer Resource Manager or Strategic Advisor can help you get started with list segmentation. Our video tutorial will also teach you how to create a segment of your contacts.

MAINTAIN YOUR LIST HYGIENE

It's always good to understand why list hygiene is important in the first place. Unlike a fine wine, an email marketing list doesn't get better with age. Continually sending messages to old or outdated email addresses can severely hurt your campaigns and negatively affect your overall email marketing strategy. Worse, it can lead you into the dreaded spam trap and seriously impact your brand's reputation.

Regular maintenance of your mailing list is mandatory to keep it fresh and filled with monitored inboxes. Create a schedule where you or another team member reviews every address, checks their status, and updates information as needed. Performing this list cleaning on a rotating six-month basis is enough to keep your list current, but you should always conduct a refresher before any new campaign launches. Performing this maintenance ensures you have the freshest list possible. This video tutorial can help you learn more about maintaining your list hygiene.

PRO TIP:

Keeping a mailing list as current as possible takes dedication and careful attention to detail. Continuing to send messages to dead or unattended inboxes can throw up costly red flags, which can damage the success of future mailing campaigns.

SECTION TWO:
EMAIL MARKETING BEST PRACTICES FOR NONPROFITS

You've got a list and you probably have some great ideas about what you want to put in your emails. You want to tell your supporters what you've been doing and encourage them to dig deep and help you achieve even more. So where do you go from there?

In this section, we'll talk about some email best practices to help your messages stand out in the inbox.

PROVIDE VALUE TO YOUR SUBSCRIBERS

You've probably got a pretty good idea of what you want from your subscribers or donors. But what's in it for them? Relationships are a two-way street. If your emails don't add value to your subscribers, they're unlikely to even get opened, let alone inspire donations.

You can make sure your emails convey a strong message by keeping the following key questions in mind as you create your communications:

1. How will this email make our supporters feel?
2. How will this message inspire interest in our mission or cause?
3. Are we doing a good job telling a story and not just asking for money?
4. Does this communication show my supporters how important they are to our organization?
5. Does this email celebrate our organization, its successes, and the part our supporters played?

As a nonprofit, you want to move people. You want your subscribers to recognize the problems in the world and your efforts to fix them. You want your supporters to understand they play an integral part in what you do. Your emails should communicate all these initiatives. Above all, your emails should give subscribers a warm, fuzzy fix which keeps them opening your emails and opening their hearts to contribute. Success stories, behind-the-scenes articles, and event announcements about how your subscribers can help are all effective components of nonprofit marketing emails.

You needn't try to guess what your subscribers want either. Try including a survey asking your subscribers what they want to see in your newsletters. Keep your surveys short and focused, and offer an incentive if possible to boost completion rates. Use the information you get to make your emails even better.

- TAKE A PERSONAL TONE -

Nonprofit organizations are very different from the big businesses that use email marketing. You're driven by doing good in the world. Your motivation makes you much more likable than many other companies, and your email marketing should capitalize on that likeability and make you appear even more attractive to your supporters.

Keep your copy warm, friendly, and approachable. You needn't try to be objective, because your subscribers are drawn to you for a very subjective reason. Your supporters want to feel your passion because that passion inspires them. Don't be afraid of personal pronouns such as I, we, and you.

PRO TIP:

People are the cornerstone of any nonprofit, so feature them heavily in your newsletter. Tell stories about the people (or places, or animals!) you've helped and spotlight the people working for your organization, including the ones who write your email newsletter articles. A byline and friendly photo of each writer can make your email feel much more personal.

- END WITH THE NEXT STEP -

Write every email with an end goal in mind. You never want your subscribers to simply read your emails, then hit delete. Instead, you want to spur your subscribers into action. Decide what you want your subscribers to do, then encourage them to do it with a clear call to action at the end of your email.

Asking for donations all the time can be uncomfortable, so try to vary your call to actions. You might ask your subscribers to volunteer with your organization, or to tell a friend about what you do, or share your stories on social media, or write an email to a local council member. This approach ensures that people with a variety of incomes feel they can help your nonprofit. If you're not asking for money all the time, those who can afford to give will also be more likely to listen to your call when you do ask.

- TEST -

Testing your subject lines, your body text, and your calls to action (CTAs) should be done regularly. It's disappointing how many charities and nonprofits still insist on sending emails with subject lines like "June Newsletter" – and they wonder why so few people open them. Charities seeking donations might want to test alternatives to the "Donate Now" CTA. A suggested donation of $5, $10, $20, $50, or $100 may yield better results. The only way to find out is to test. It's also worth remembering that if you don't ask, you don't get – so don't be shy about giving your CTA greater prominence.

PRO TIP:

Email provides a great opportunity to react quickly to events and influence public opinion. Don't sit on ideas because "traditionally" you only send one newsletter per month at 11am on the second Tuesday. Remember, very few people will be waiting for your newsletter to drop at a specific time. The sooner you get your message out there, the sooner you'll start to see successful engagement.

SECTION THREE:
BLOGGING FOR A CAUSE

The great thing about most charities and nonprofit organizations is they rarely lack excellent content to share.

But many organizations make the mistake of thinking that blogging is not for them — it's something "extra" they have no time for; they are too busy trying to raise funds.

But, your identity is more than what you do day to day. Sure, your audience needs to know about your funding needs, but if you want to keep the conversation going, you can't talk donations to them 24/7. Deeper concepts that relate to your mission or expertise — for instance, relevant news and educational content — are also interesting to your prospects. Variety keeps the relationship interesting.

Don't sell yourself short by thinking that your brand has nothing interesting to say. Not only could starting a blog give people deeper insight into your mission and organizational identity, but it can also gain you additional benefits.

– BLOGGING FOR SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION –

Let's get practical for a second. Assuming that you honestly and truly think no one will go out of his or her way to read your nonprofit blog, you still have one group of avid fans: Google's indexing spider bots. These crawlers regularly go through and read new and updated pages, adding the information to Google's massive search index. The page URL as well as statistics on the appearance of certain keywords all go back into the index. And that means they are ripe for search results.

With a blog, you give the indexing bots for Google, Bing, and Yahoo something new to look at on a regular basis. Making smart use of keywords that relate to your organization increases the odds that someone searching for information about a cause could find it on your site.

- BLOGGING GIVES YOUR CHANNELS SOMETHING TO SAY -

Starting a blog can greatly multiply your presence across the multi-channel online ecosystem.

Sometimes an organization is not quite sure what to put on its social media or find itself at a loss for what to include in an email campaign to subscribers. Blog posts can be evergreen and amplified across many channels. Sending a newsletter with a selection of great content from your blog and links back to your website will help drive online traffic your way. Cross-posting blog content on social media and including a link to a landing page for those who want more information can help you build your email marketing list.

It's important to keep your posts timely and relevant. Talk about your area of expertise or what you have a legitimate interest in. If your content addresses a specific need of your audience – whether that's education, information, entertainment, or simply a little humor – you stand a better chance of rising above the digital noise and being heard.

Maintaining an excellent blog also contributes to making you a thought leader in your area of expertise and helps you stand out. You could identify some key members of your organization to be the "face" of your blog and speak with authority on certain topics, or invite an outside expert to write a guest post for your blog.

Finally, don't forget that a blog can be used to capture new email subscribers to add to your list. Make sure that your blog features a highly visible email subscription form with a prominent call to action (CTA).

Many bloggers find success in building their email lists by utilizing Lightboxes (pop-up subscription forms). While some blog visitors might find this approach obtrusive, the benefits of quickly and efficiently adding new names to your list (in my opinion) outweigh any negatives. iContact has a number of integrations that allow you to maximize subscriptions via these (and other similar) highly actionable forms.

PRO TIP:

If you consistently produce blog content that is thoughtful and useful for your audience, you begin to rise above the noise. When you are identified as an organization that is a valuable part of the online conversation, you become an organization that is not easy to forget.

SECTION FOUR:
WHY MOBILE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU

With more than half of all emails now being opened on a mobile device and Americans averaging 4.7 hours a day on their smartphones, making sure your email campaigns are optimized for mobile and desktop is very important.

With the mobile revolution in mind, here are some tips to improve the mobile experience for your subscribers:

1. THE FIRST STEP: THINK SMALL.

By small, we don't mean small text and images, but the size of a smartphone screen. While larger than ever before, mobile screens are still very small compared to a desktop or laptop computer.

2. OPTIMIZE YOUR SUBJECT LINE.

You only get so many characters, generally around 30, before your subject line is cut off on a smartphone. Make sure you get your point across quickly, and entice subscribers to open the email.

3. CONSIDER YOUR PREVIEW TEXT.

This is the text that shows up on the inbox preview below the subject of your email. The first line of text in your email automatically becomes the preview text and it plays a crucial role in determining whether that email is going to be opened or not. Make sure your preview text grabs a reader's attention right up front.

4. KEEP IT SIMPLE.

On mobile, the fewer images there are to load, the better. Don't use too many columns or complicated templates that render awkwardly on a small screen. Keep your content concise and easy to consume at a glance.

5. BE SMART USING FONTS AND IMAGES.

Don't use tiny fonts or images that are impossible to read on a small screen — but also stay away from too-large fonts or images that require a lot of scrolling and strain a reader's patience.

6. INCLUDE A CLEAR CALL TO ACTION.

Or course, this applies to any email, whether it's read on a mobile device or not. It should always be easy for a recipient to know what to do next, whether that's going to your website, filling out a form, accepting an offer, or going to a landing page. The Call to Action should be clear and direct and the button should be large enough to easily touch with a finger. And just as importantly, keep in mind that wherever you are sending the recipient next, it also needs to be mobile-friendly! That means your website, landing pages, etc., need to be optimized for mobile as well.

PRO TIP:

The smartphone has become an important aspect of our lives — it's often the very first thing we think of in the morning and the last thing at night. There is no cut-off point. This means there is never a bad time to send your email campaigns because your supporters are ready to accept them and engage with them anytime, anyplace, anywhere.

SECTION FIVE:

USING SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PARTNER FOR EMAIL MARKETING

Just as it has for for-profit organizations, social media has become essential for nonprofits as a method of spreading awareness about a cause, connecting with a target audience, and ultimately, raising funds.

If you're new to social media, here are six useful tips that can help your nonprofit stay front and center on social media channels.

WHAT ARE YOU AIMING FOR?

The first thing to consider when initiating a social media campaign is to determining a goal. Do you want to raise awareness for your cause? Do you want to inspire others? Do you want to raise money or have people attend or volunteer for a charity event?

Knowing the purpose of your campaign will guide you to create the right type of content and connect with the people who will engage with your organization's mission.

SHARE RELEVANT CONTENT

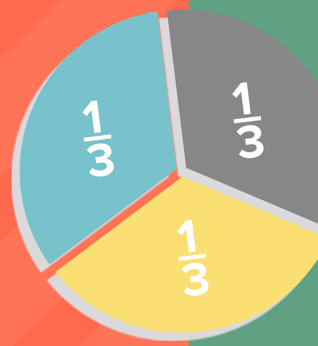
Social media marketing should always be a mix of original content (like announcing events or sharing your blog posts and other marketing content) and shared content from sources that connect with your audience. For example, if you ran a local pet shelter, you could share content from other nonprofit organizations like the ASPCA or tips from influencers like the Dog Whisperer, Cesar Millan.

Kevan Lee from Buffer suggests you keep the rule of thirds in mind when mixing up your content. This means that ⅓ of posts are about you, ⅓ are curated content, and ⅓ are conversations.

PRO TIP:

Use the **"THREE A's"** in your content creation. These include:

- **APPRECIATION:** 1/3 of your social updates should give a shout-out to your donors, supporters, volunteers, and employees.
- **ADVOCACY:** 1/3 of your content should engage, along with share, the content of other relevant groups or nonprofits.
- **APPEALS:** 1/3 should solicit donations or help from your audience.



GET VISUAL

People love visual content, especially on social media. Whether it's an inspiring photo, an eye-catching infographic, or a donate button on a YouTube video, the more visual content you have, the more likely it will be shared and resonate with your target audience.

Take the time to begin building a good image library if you don't already have one. Great images can be an important part of telling your story, sometimes a lot more effectively than text alone can.

USE THE RIGHT SOCIAL CHANNELS

If you've done your homework in advance, you know the channels where your specific audience prefers to spend most of its time. Or you can follow the lead of other nonprofits — **98% to be exact** — and be active on Facebook. Other popular channels used by nonprofits are Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Besides using those channels, don't be afraid to be innovative and try newer social channels. For example, only 15% of nonprofits use Instagram. That could be a good opportunity to tap into a market that is overlooked by nonprofits.

COMBINE SOCIAL WITH EMAIL MARKETING

Nonprofits rely on the support of others to succeed. When you partner your social campaigns with email marketing, you amplify your message to reach the right people and communicate the right message without denting already small budgets.

When thinking about your email marketing campaign, make sure you focus on:

1. Growing your lists by asking everyone on your social platforms to subscribe to your blog or newsletters.
2. Segmenting your lists so you send targeted messages to the right individuals.
3. Launching a mobile-friendly campaign.
4. Testing your subject lines to see which ones inspire higher open rates.
5. Creating a content-led strategy fueled by the power of your email, social media, and blogging activities.
6. Sending out your newsletters on a regular schedule that your audience can depend upon.

TELL THE STORY ABOUT PEOPLE

"We need to stop talking about me, me, me, and start talking about them, the donors," Mark Horvath from Invisible People told Hootsuite.

By telling the story of your donors and not just the nonprofit, you're proving they are valuable members of the community and their efforts are a major part of your organization's story.

GO BEYOND THE NUMBERS

How will you determine the success of your social media campaign? In most cases, brands examine engagement analytics such as shares, comments, or likes. Nonprofits, however, prefer to look at the amount of donations they have received after launching a campaign. In fact, studies have found this is the case with around half of nonprofits.

Yet, numbers don't tell the whole story. You also want to look at the broader impact of your social media activities. Do you remember the ice bucket challenge? The popular campaign generated a ton of participation on social media and raised more than $200 million; the viral campaign ultimately led to the breakthrough discovery of a new gene associated with the disease. The money raised from the campaign was able to fund research projects, such as Project MinE, which identified the new gene.

"It's very exciting because it shows everyone who contributed to the ice bucket challenge that their donation had an impact on the research," said Brian Frederick, executive vice president of communications and development at the ALS Association. "The work that Project MinE is doing is really important, and the discovery of this new gene will help us better understand ALS."

The numbers are important, but the overall impact is also a big piece of your success

PRO TIP:

Be sure to include a social share button in every newsletter or update you send to your subscribers. Make it easy for them to help you spread the word.

SECTION SIX:
USING A CRM

Let's start by defining CRM, which is an abbreviation for "customer relationship management." It's a software system that tracks an organization's interactions with current and future customers — or, in the case of a nonprofit organization, your donors, volunteers, and event participants.

There are many nonprofit organizations and worthy causes in the world. Organizations that meet or exceed their giving goals year after year are the ones that treat their donors like people, not bank accounts. You want your organization to be among the brands that your donors trust.

It's crucial that your not-for-profit organization know its constituency to build trust. CRM software, like iContact for Salesforce, stores the names and contact information of people who donated time or money, and logs phone calls or emails, so you have a complete record of every interaction with each contact.

Valuable information, such as which of your donors responded to a specific email or completed a transaction, is tracked and the CRM can organize that information in different ways. With CRM software, you can even track who made a large, one-time donation or multiple smaller contributions.

Tracking the time of year people made their donations is simple with a CRM, and eliminates the need to do the same research over and over on your donors because you already have it at your fingertips. Having the ability to easily reference interactions and contributions will make your volunteers and donors feel especially appreciated.

With this valuable data from your CRM, you can create tailored email marketing campaigns that target specific donors (such as repeat or high-dollar contributors), and generate greater results, like more donations, for instance, during the holiday season. The greatest benefit of a CRM is that it allows you to personalize messages because of logged data, and send relevant content that caters to the personal preferences of your audience.

A CRM tool helps you know your donors, and knowing your donors makes your nonprofit stronger. It gives you the information you need to talk with your donors on an individual level, which will help you spread your message much more effectively.

SECTION SEVEN: UNDERSTANDING THE METRICS THAT MATTER

You've got a great list, your sign-up forms are in top shape, and you're are blogging and using social media to the fullest. Aside from tallying monetary donations, how can you decide determining your email marketing efforts are paying off?

The first step is to determine the benchmarks you will use to measure the performance of all your digital campaigns. Here are a few to consider:

ONLINE METRICS

- CONVERSION RATE -

This is perhaps the most important metric and it is defined by the goal of your campaign. Think of your Call to Action in your email or landing page – what is the purpose? Do you want people to download a white paper, sign-up for an event, volunteer to work, or become a new follower on social media? Taking action on any of those Calls to Action is considered a conversion. You need to be able to show that your campaigns are delivering results. Here's how to calculate your email conversion rate:

(# OF PEOPLE WHO CONVERTED ÷ TOTAL # EMAILS DELIVERED) × 100

Landing page conversion is calculated a bit differently:

(# OF PEOPLE WHO CONVERTED ÷ # OF UNIQUE PAGE VISITORS) × 100

- SOCIAL MEDIA REACH -

Use the free internal tools within the various social media platforms, or in your email service provider (if they offer that feature), to measure how your posts perform. Before the holiday season begins, establish what is most important to you — is it clicks, shares, likes, engagement, follower growth, event responses, conversions? It's important to keep an eye on these numbers for each campaign you run on social media so you can determine what resonates best with your audience.

Paid advertising on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn will yield very granular reports for any campaign you run. If you have Google Analytics enabled, you can see referrals, sessions, and conversions for more in-depth knowledge.

- WEB TRAFFIC -

The main datasets to watch on your website fall into one of two categories: sessions or channel. Get a baseline for your regular traffic before you start your holiday marketing campaigns, so you'll have an accurate idea of how seasonal traffic affects your web metrics.

- SESSIONS -

Track the total number of sessions, and within that, how many visitors are new, how long the visitor stays on your website, and their bounce rate (the percentage of people who land on one of your web pages, but then leave without clicking anywhere else on your website).

- CHANNEL -

Track where your new visitors originate. Is it organic search? Paid? Social media? Do you work with affiliates? This information indicates where you should allocate more (or less) money based on how each channel wins new traffic and customers.

-LIST GROWTH -

Before starting a new email marketing campaign, calculate your monthly list growth so you have a baseline of average gain. Then, as you ramp up your campaigns, use this metric as a way to see whether you are producing content interesting enough to increase the rate at which you are growing your list. Here's how to calculate your list growth rate:

(# OF NEW SUBSCRIBERS) − (# UNSUBSCRIBES + SPAM COMPLAINTS)
÷ (TOTAL # OF EMAIL ADDRESSES ON YOUR LIST) × 100

- NON-OPENERS -

As a metric, this group is often overlooked, even though they present great opportunity. Non-openers are the low-hanging fruit of the email marketing world. Simply select an email, segment out the non-openers, and then resend the same email (with a different subject line). We find that resending emails can deliver open rates of up to 50%.

- ADVANCED EMAIL OPENS & CLICKS -

Email opens and clicks do not exist in a vacuum; they work together and with other metrics. Think of them as a way to measure your email success as a whole. High opens mean you have a recognizable "From" address and an interesting subject line. But what if you have high opens and low clicks? That can indicate that there's disconnect between your subject line and message content, or the message content isn't engaging or persuasive enough.

- UNSUBSCRIBES -

Unsubscribes are worth mentioning on this list because contrary to popular belief, they are a GOOD thing. Decreasing the number of uninterested people on your list allows for higher engagement and an overall healthier list. Additionally, this is a good metric to keep your eye on if you begin a new campaign. Low unsubscribes mean your topics interest your audience; high unsubscribes mean that maybe that topic doesn't fit the expectations of your supporters. Use this formula to calculate your unsubscribe rate:

(# UNSUBSCRIBED ÷ TOTAL # EMAILS DELIVERED) × 100

PRO TIP:

While data and metrics aren't the most glamorous part of digital marketing, they are a true measure of campaign performance and return on investment. With this information, you can make data-driven decisions about which strategies work best, which may need improving, and which techniques are just not delivering for you.

SECTION EIGHT:
USING MARKETING AUTOMATION

Marketing automation is one of those loaded terms that means different things to different people. The reality is that marketing automation is a simple idea that can be executed in a number of ways. It isn't complicated, but it is high impact.

WHAT IS MARKETING AUTOMATION?

Marketing automation is about using software to automate the process of communicating with your subscribers, donors, and those who may be interested in your cause or mission. This powerful software can drive subscribers automatically along the path to buying whatever it is that an organization sells —whether that's a product, a service, or, in the case of nonprofits, a cause.

Just as every for-profit business, nonprofits are looking for excellent ROI on their marketing efforts. In fact, this may be even more critical for a nonprofit faced with limited people or financial resources to devote to marketing. Without an investment in marketing, a nonprofit's mission cannot be fulfilled — donations dry up, volunteerism declines, and your cause or mission does not receive attention.

By offering advanced tools such as workflow automation, landing pages, engagement tracking, lead scoring, and social media management, marketing automation facilitates the creation of a lasting connection with your audience through email marketing and other digital arenas. In effect, it can put much of your marketing on autopilot, allowing you to do more with less, and freeing up valuable time and staff resources for serving the needs of your constituencies.

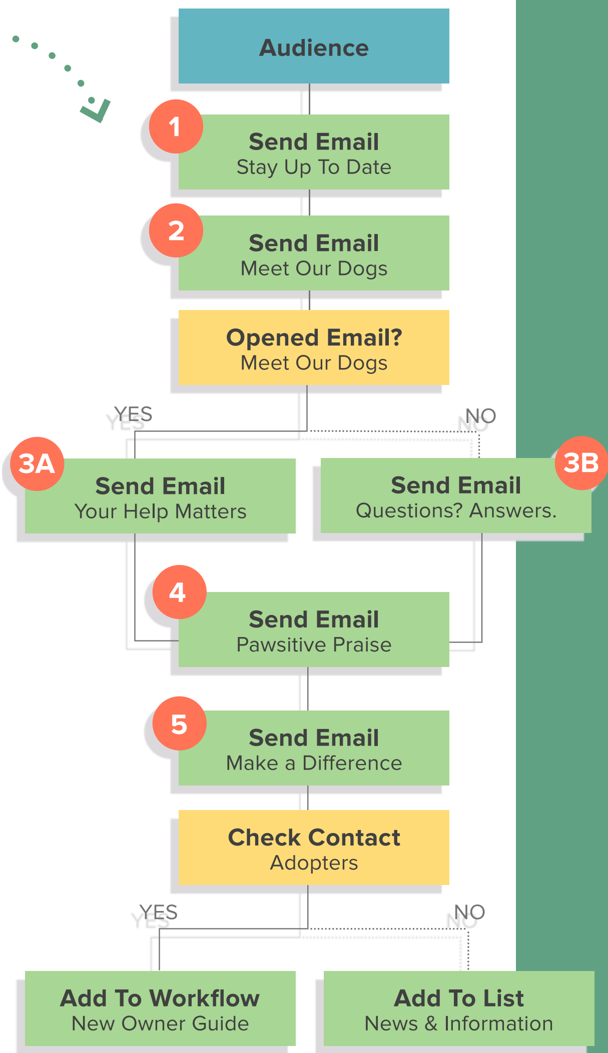
Marketing automation can take your organization a huge step forward. While these platforms are a little more expensive than basic email marketing, the payoff — in terms of increasing memberships and boosting donations — can more than make up your investment in the product.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Automation sounds great, but how does it work on a practical level? For instance, let's take a look at this scenario of an animal rescue nonprofit. This organization collects subscriber information at adoption events and on their website. Their goal is to build up local knowledge of their existence to help find homes for dogs, create a solid volunteer base, and increase all-important donations.

To do this, the organization decides to run a nurture campaign, a series of emails to familiarize new contacts with their organization and provide helpful information along the way.

With an automated email marketing workflow, their campaign would look something like this



Looking at the diagram, you might think this requires a lot of extra work and time. In fact, it's just the opposite. Once the series of emails is created and the basic workflow is set up, all these communications are put on autopilot. Set it up, and forget it.

Of course all this can be done manually, but it would require a lot more tedious work and a substantial amount of staff time, especially if your organization has a large and steady number of leads coming into your database.

This is just one example of how a nonprofit can use the powerful tools of marketing automation to grow their audience and increase visibility for their cause.

To learn more about automation, download our marketing guide: [What is Marketing Automation?]

You can learn more about our marketing automation product, iContact Pro, [here].

A MARKETING AUTOMATION CHECKLIST

How do you know if your nonprofit organization is ready for marketing automation?
Use this checklist to help you decide.

My organization has a large number of names pouring into our database.

To benefit from marketing automation, you must have a good-sized and growing email list.

My organization needs to segment our lists according to audience behavior or interest.

For instance, you don't want to send a high-level donor email to someone who is just demonstrating an early interest in your mission or cause. Similarly, you don't want to send a getting-to-know-us email to donors who have contributed regularly.

Marketing automation allows you to segment these lists so you are sending personalized messages, targeted to the interests or behavior of a specific subscriber.

My organization produces different types of content that we can use to nurture various segments of our audience.

High level donors might want to know details about specific campaigns they helped to fund. New subscribers might want to know about specific programs and services you offer. Potential volunteers would want to hear about the various opportunities for serving with your group. You need to have or be able to create content that addresses all these interests.

My organization is using several digital marketing channels.

Nonprofits often have to justify tools and allotments in budget. With marketing automation, you can track all digital channels – social, email, and web – all in one place. Instead of having to pull that data in from platforms for each channel, with marketing automation it's easy to see your reach for each campaign.

I’m not able to tell how likely a person is to donate or sponsor my cause.

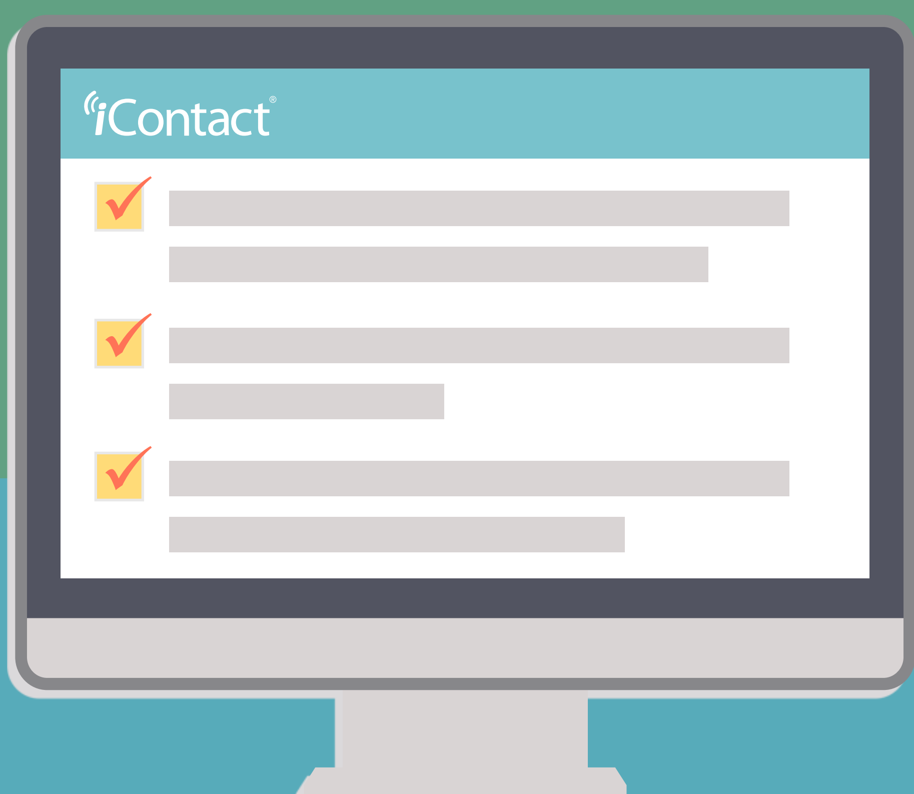
With lead scoring, you don’t have to guess the magic moment a subscriber is ready to convert. Use lead scoring to assign numeric grades to each contact. The more (or less) they interact with you will indicate how likely they are to donate. For example, if they follow you on social media, are on your email list, and donated in the past, that might indicate that they could contribute at a higher level, for instance, for a sponsorship. If they just follow you on social media or have visited your website that’s an indication that they are not quite ready. In that case, send them messaging to encourage their first donation. You can learn more about lead scoring in our guide, What is Lead Scoring?

If you can check most of the boxes, it might be time to start having a serious look at how marketing automation can help your organization grow and more effectively reach the supporters you need.

Even if you feel that your organization is not quite ready for marketing automation, it’s a good thing to stay informed and be ready to seize on the opportunity when it’s the right time for you.

PRO TIP:

The Autism Society of North Carolina uses marketing automation to provide information and support to enhance the lives of families living with autism. You can read their story here.



SECTION NINE:
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The iContact website Resources section is a great source of information about all aspects of email marketing. There, you will find guides, webinars, and video tutorials on everything from the basics for email beginners to detailed information on using more advanced features of our iContact Pro marketing automation platform.

The iContact Blog publishes daily information on all aspects of email, social media marketing, marketing strategy, and email marketing best practices. Be sure to check out the blog for helpful information.

The Blog also shines a spotlight on some of our great nonprofit customers; you can learn a lot from their experiences using email marketing:

1. The Green Chair Project, Raleigh, NC
2. The Vermont Foodbank, Barre, VT
3. The Open Space Council for the St. Louis Region, St. Louis, MO
4. The Council for Entrepreneurial Development, Durham, NC

When you join iContact, you are assigned a Customer Success Manager for the life of your account; the CSM will get you up and running with your new iContact account and help you make the most of every feature in our platform. If you are an iContact Premier Services customer, your Strategic Advisor is there to help you with every aspect of the email marketing journey.

iContact has hundreds of templates to choose from to create professional looking, eye-catching email campaigns, including some designed specifically for nonprofits. But if you need custom design work, our Design Services team is on hand to help you out with designs customized to fit your message, your goals, and your organization's brand.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE.

www.iContact.com

All qualifying **NC-based nonprofits are eligible for a free account**, and a **20% discount is granted to nonprofits outside of North Carolina**. Send your 501(c)(3) to billing@icontact.com to confirm your status.