



Fundraising During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Danielle Keats Berkowitz

I work with my sisters. Believe it or not, we still like each other. So, when one of us was in quarantine with her family as a result of a recent trip to Madrid, we went to see her (we stayed the requisite space away, and of course brought Coronas to try to keep the troubling situation light.)

Any time we get together, the conversation inevitably turns to business, and over Coronas we discussed how the coronavirus would affect our clients – nonprofits in Israel and abroad. Would we make our fundraising goals? How would we effectively fundraiser if we had to cancel upcoming fundraising engagements, meetings, and events in the US for the foreseeable future?

As the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention and within the confines of these restrictions came innovative ideas: like text bubbles in a comic strip, they popped in my mind – focus locally... utilize living in the digital age... online campaigns... social media revamps... [Zoom](#) and [Skype](#) meetings – PIVOT!

Since many of us are in the same boat, I'm happy to share my thoughts based on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and 25 years in the field working with nonprofits and businesses both big and small, local and international...

1. Don't travel. Postpone the trip and keep the option open for a later date. In the meantime there is much that you can still do to further the mission and goals of your organization.
2. Have a good long think – who are your current donors? Where do they live? What are their demographics? Are they tech savvy? How do they like to be contacted? Make lists, divide and conquer.
 1. If it is a younger population – they are already on social media therefore they are used to consuming information and receiving communication this way. Consider a special information sharing campaign which culminates in a crowdfunding campaign.
 2. Are they an older population? A snail mail campaign might just be perfect? Many organizations have stopped doing these over the years and now might be the time to rethink that.

3. Are business execs and industry leaders your target? Then they are well used to Zoom/skype meetings and might appreciate a more direct 20 minute virtual meeting rather than an hour solicitation meeting in person anyway.
4. Now is the time to try new things. Make that video you always wanted to but never had the time to dedicate to it. Learn a new social media platform. Test out those ideas you were not sure of in the past and see if they would work now.
3. Talk with your Board of Directors and active donors/volunteers. They know/understand their counterparts and will have insights as to how they would like to be engaged during this time. The lay/staff relationship is a dance – sometimes the layman is in the lead and sometimes the staff person is. Now is THE time to take your cue from your lay leaders as to their personal preferences. Share your ideas and let them lead.
4. Be aware that people are reacting differently during this time. Some are in quarantine, some are scared, and some are going about their lives as normal. You do not know what they are thinking so be astute and respectful. Is your fundraising need really an emergency, or are you just keeping in touch and stewarding your donor relationship? The messaging and method should meet your need.
5. Think things through with other fundraising professionals. Now is not the time to get territorial. We are all searching for ways to effectively reach our target audience and continue to engage our donor base. Sharing ideas will bring forth the creation of more ideas and only help each other. There are many in need, and many more opportunities for people to help.

If we are wise, we can use these new conditions to break free of our “same old” fundraising practices and even increase our success – donors appreciate innovation and will likely appreciate the change of pace.

Best of luck to us all – and wishing you all continued health.

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