

Response To Fundraising Texts Surpass Email Appeals

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Text messaging your supporters and donors can be more personal than an email and more private than a social media post and more casual than a phone call. But it's not free and list building can take time because SMS marketing is relatively new, according to Ellen Pascale, manager, mobile marketing, at Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

Pascale was part of a panel session, "Can You Really Raise Money Through Text Messages?" at the recent annual Nonprofit Technology Conference in New Orleans, La.

HSUS started using SMS in 2007, with the program offering constituents with mobile savvy ways to get involved with its mission. The organization texts about advocacy opportunities, event invites, breaking animal news, and polls and trivia — and even sometimes donation appeals. HSUS averages about eight fundraising broadcasts in a year — that's an average of every six to seven weeks — and roughly half of those are urgent rescue asks, according to Pascale.

At HSUS, fundraising texts last year averaged a click-through rate 20 times greater than the average nonprofit fundraising email and a response rate 10 times higher. Dollars raised per 1,000 fundraising messages sent for HSUS text messages reached \$272 last year, compared with \$36 for the average nonprofit email (based on the M+R Benchmarks Study). Last year, HSUS received 149 donations sourced to SMS replies.

Online donors to HSUS seem to be getting more comfortable giving on a mobile device, with mobile growing from 18 percent to 38 percent of online donations in the past two years. At the same time, desktop donations have dipped from 74 percent to 52 percent of its online donations. About 54 percent of online donors are 55 and older but only about 20 percent of overall mobile traffic is over the age of 55. HSUS uses digital channels, including SMS, to reach current donors and find new donors.

Pascale offered a few things to think about when it comes to timing SMS messages:

- Send at off times, like 10:25, 11:05, 1:35, etc.;
- Avoid sending during rush hour or at dinner time;
- Adjust for time zones;
- Suppress locations with major news or extreme weather; and,
- Coordinate with other digital marketing channels on timing.

Almost all of the organization's SMS fundraising broadcasts include at least one test, such as personalization, time of day, image versus GIF, wide shot versus close, etc. Make sure results are statistically significant and repeat tests as your audience grows.