



The Guide to Nonprofit Email

Essential Strategies, Practices, and Resources

Michael C. Gilbert

Author and Editor

Contributing Authors:

Samantha Moscheck

Michael Soper

Bruce McKenzie

David Greiner

Michael Stein

**The Gilbert Center
& Nonprofit Online News**

The Guide to Nonprofit Email

Essential Strategies, Practices, and Resources

By Michael C. Gilbert



The Gilbert Center
Seattle, WA, USA

The Guide to Nonprofit Email: Essential Strategies, Practices, and Resources.
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In continuous publication since 1997, *Nonprofit Online News* is a leading source of news, resources, and editorial opinion for the sector. Adopting the fast moving weblog publishing style years before it became popular, *Nonprofit Online News* has often been equally far ahead in identifying and articulating emerging issues. It is widely referenced and remarkably influential.

We hope you find this report informative. Please feel free to contact us if you would like more information about us or our publications.

The Gilbert Center
400 Harvard Ave. E., Ste. 211
Seattle, WA 98102
<http://www.gilbert.org>
<http://www.nonprofitnews.org>

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Acknowledgements

So much has happened in the last five years in the field of nonprofit email. The field has advanced enormously and there are hundreds, if not thousands, of professionals who have contributed to the practices which you will find in this volume. For every person who is named in these page, there are entire sectors of people who have been contributing to the everyday questions that made all this work possible. They deserved to be thanked up front.

This year, Nonprofit Online News will be nine years old. Together, my readers and sources are the most amazing resource I have ever had at my disposal. When I have stumbled elsewhere in my work, the continuing process of connecting people and ideas has been an inspirational engine of learning to me. Thank you all so much for that.

My colleague Christine Dragonwyck oversees the production of our publications. We produced one new PDF publication in 2003, five in 2004, and 14 in 2005. We would never have gotten to scale without Christine's operational insight and skills. Thank you.

Finally, of course, I would like to thank our contributors. Thank you, Michael Stein for helping me put the last few years into context. Thank you, Samantha Moscheck, for turning advice about spam into a visionary call to action. Thank you, Michael Soper, for challenging nonprofits to be full partners in the relationships with their stakeholders. Thank you, Bruce MacKenzie, for helping people understand how to visualize the richness of conversations. And thank you, David Greiner, for grounding us in the realities of how people actually read email, rather than how we image they do. And thank you to the hundred or so authors whose work I have recommended. You're the ones who have made all this happen.

-- Michael Gilbert

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Contributing Authors



Michael Gilbert

is the author of *The Basics of Nonprofit Email* and *The Campaign Cookbook*. He is the Publisher and Editor of *Nonprofit Online News*, which he started in 1997 as a means to keep himself and his colleagues informed and which has since become a premier newsletter of the field. He is often credited with helping ignite a revolution in nonprofit communication with his *Email Manifesto* and he is well known for his provocative and incisive commentary.

More information: <http://www.nonprofitnews.org/contributors#mcg>



Samantha Moscheck

Samantha has spent the past eight years working to build the technology capacity of social justice organizations, and has worked closely with more than fifty organizations throughout the Pacific Northwest in the past four years. She focuses on strategic technology planning, staff and leader development, and web/database planning and development. She is a technologist, a historian, and an activist raised in the southern US and currently living in Seattle.

More information: <http://www.nonprofitnews.org/contributors#sm>



Michael B. Soper

Michael Soper is a former Senior Vice President of Development for Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), where he provided marketing assistance to more than 300 PBS-member stations nationwide. Later he created *TeamSoper.Com*, an independent consultant firm.

More information: <http://www.teamsoper.com/aboutus.html>



Bruce McKenzie

Bruce McKenzie is the Managing Director of Systemic Development Associates Pty Ltd (SDA) a Research and Consultancy organisation, in New South Wales, Australia, that seeks to apply a learning approach to change and its management in communities, businesses and NGO's.

More information: <http://www.systemics.com.au/intro.html>



David Greiner

David Greiner is the co-founder of *Campaign Monitor*, a popular email newsletter tool used by more than 6,000 companies worldwide to manage their email marketing. He also founded *Switch I.T.*, a web development and online marketing consultancy in Sydney Australia.

More information: <http://www.campaignmonitor.com/about/>



Michael Stein

Michael Stein is an Internet strategist who specializes in technology use by nonprofits and social enterprises, and the author of three books and numerous articles about the online medium. He can be contacted at mstein@getactive.com.

More information: <http://michaelstein.typepad.com/about>

Introduction

Dear Readers,

Soon it will have been five years since the publication of the Email Manifesto. More than anything else, this Guide to Nonprofit Email is a sign of how far we have come. Five years ago, the topic of nonprofit email basically didn't exist. Five years ago, nonprofits were wasting their money on splash pages. And even with all that effort going into web sites, it was pretty hard to determine what the practical objectives of those sites were. Things have changed.

In many ways, the Email Manifesto and the work that followed was a rare example of good timing on my part. There was a critical mass of other communication consultants who were thinking the same thing. You will find many of their names in this publication.

I recommend that you use the Guide to Nonprofit Email the same way you would use a guide to a foreign country, once you were already there. The fact is that you are probably already using email in some interesting ways. This guide is dense. It's not padded with examples and it's not meant to be read like a report. It's meant to be read with a notebook or computer at hand and with colleagues who can collaborate on testing the applicability of the enormous amount of valuable advice that you'll find within. The Guide is meant to be applied, not consumed.

That said, you can really start anywhere. And when you do get started, I ask you to write to me. Tell me what works and what doesn't. And tell me why.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Gilbert", with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

-- Michael Gilbert

Strategy

The Gilbert Email Manifesto 12

Email is more important than the web. That was the assertion of the Email Manifesto that struck a chord in the nonprofit sector. Its three Rules of Email are still as valid today as they were five years ago: Resources invested in email yield higher returns than those invested in the web. A web site built around an email strategy is a web site that works. And email oriented thinking encourages strategic thinking about communication overall. Rule Two is explained by the Quicksheet devoted to A Web Site Built Around an Email Strategy (Page 42) and connects that rule explicitly to the Email Newsletter Marketing Model.

The Enduring Power of “The Gilbert Email Manifesto” 15

Four years after the Manifesto, Michael Stein interviewed Michael Gilbert to explore the reasons why the article continues to circulate among nonprofits and influence their practices. The interview concludes with an appeal to email service providers to support and disseminate good research, to document their workflows and processes, and to encourage their clients to publish their RFPs and requirement documents.

The Email Savvy Organization 18

Research involving nearly a thousand nonprofit organizations indicates that there are five core practices involved in using email strategically: ubiquitous email address collection, email newsletters, the use of surveys and preferences, calls to action (including fundraising appeals), and a strategic vision. The Email Savvy Workflow Quicksheet (Page 77) updates this insight and provides details about implementation.

The Email Newsletter Marketing Model 22

This model describes the inbound and outbound communication involved in building a successful communication program around an email newsletter. It describes the precise components of direct marketing, indirect marketing, calls to action, and email newsletters themselves, and provides a rigorous basis for evaluation and metrics. The Email Newsletter Quicksheet (Page 40) and the Flow of Choices Quicksheet (Page 41) develop some of these ideas further.

Twelve Ways To Fail at Email 28

Sometimes it's more effective to focus on what we shouldn't be doing rather than what we should. From not collecting email addresses to showing more concern for content than for relationships, these 12 ingredients for email failure will serve as a powerful reality check for most organizations.

Conversation Mapping 35

Email lends itself to conversation. As a result, it is often the preferred medium for most collaboration, even when it's not quite the right tool for tracking changes to common work or seeing the big picture. Being able to map and model a conversation is one way to be able to extract as much value from the power of email as possible.

The Gilbert Email Manifesto (GEM)

By Michael C. Gilbert

I can't stand it any more. I've listened to too many four-hour workshops about online fundraising in which it's all about web sites, web sites, web sites. I've been to too many technical assistance sites that have class after class on web design. I've heard too many nonprofits obsess about their web sites.

Repeat after me:

“Email is more important than my web site!”

I ask leaders of nonprofit organizations if they have an email strategy and their usual response is something on the order of “huh?”. They are spending enormous amounts of money and staff time on their web sites and it's the rare exception that the organization even has enough of an email strategy to have a newsletter.

They are wasting their money. I'm serious.

Why is this happening? Is it because web sites are sexy and email is mostly boring? Is it because people love graphic design? Is it because this is the approach that is pushed by the consulting firms? Or is it perhaps because thinking about email is a little more difficult, as it is a constantly moving target?

I don't know the reasons for sure, but I do know that something can be done.

I have been recommending “Three Rules of Email” to help nonprofit organizations develop a genuine Internet strategy and avoid being seduced by their own web presence:

Rule #1: Resources spent on email strategies are more valuable than the same resources spent on web strategies.

Rule #2: A web site built around an email strategy is more valuable than a web site that is built around itself.

Rule #3: Email oriented thinking will yield better strategic thinking overall.

Nonprofits that truly embrace these three rules will reach a genuine breakthrough in their online presence. They will seize the initiative from technologists and guide their own technology on their terms.

The Enduring Power of “The Gilbert Email Manifesto”

A conversation between
Michael Gilbert and Michael Stein

Consultants and others are still having to persuade nonprofits to invest in email, and they need all the help they can get.

Michael Stein: In 2001 you published an article entitled “The Gilbert Email Manifesto,” which postulated that “email is more important than your website.” You laid out “Three Rules of Email” to help nonprofit organizations develop a genuine Internet strategy. The rules are: (1) Resources spent on email strategies are more valuable than the same resources spent on web strategies, (2) A website built around an email strategy is more valuable than a website that is built around itself, and (3) Email-oriented thinking will yield better strategic thinking overall. At the time you originally wrote the piece, what you were saying was practically sacrilege. The year 2001 was a time of extreme hype about the emergence of the web, and you raised some provocative issues about the role of email. I consider this document to be one of the most important thought pieces to have influenced nonprofit use of the Internet. Why do you think “The Gilbert Email Manifesto” is still in circulation four years later, and what about it resonates with nonprofits?

Michael Gilbert: I would guess that it’s still popular because: (1) Consultants and others are still having to persuade nonprofits to invest in email, and they need all the help they can get. (2) It’s simple and easy to remember. (3) It’s not too far ahead of the learning curve. And (4), the three rules have deep implications that have not yet been fully tapped out. That’s the best part.

Michael Stein: Do you think that the three rules you laid out in 2001 are still applicable today?

Michael Gilbert: Yes. The Internet has not changed in any way that fundamentally undermines those rules. You still get a higher return on investment on money invested in email. You still get better websites when you design them around your email strategies. And the better you are at thinking about email, the better you become at thinking about relationship management strategies in general.

Michael Stein: What you’re saying makes a lot of sense to me, too. Certainly the last few years have seen some important demonstrations of how “email is more important than your website.” I’m thinking of groups like MoveOn.org, or the presidential campaigns in 2004, or even some national advocacy groups like NARAL ProChoice America, Planned Parenthood, or Earthjustice that are so good at sending well-crafted email messages to their constituents. Human Rights Campaign comes to mind for their work in 2004 on their “Stop the Federal Marriage Amendment” campaign. They excelled at choosing the right time to send email to their supporters, and timing their messages with events in Massachusetts and California.

The Email Savvy Organization

By Michael C. Gilbert

There is such a thing as the 'Email Savvy Organization' and it's possible to identify the systems and practices that characterize it.

Following the publication of the Email Manifesto in the Spring, the dam seems to have broken on the subject of nonprofit use of email. Dozens of online publishers with nonprofit readers are now carrying information about the subject.

At the Gilbert Center, we are continuing to push this conversation forward. We just released *Disconnected: the First Nonprofit Email Survey*, which studies the email practices of over 900 nonprofit organizations. In its wake, we launched the Nonprofit Email Study, a large scale numerical evaluation of nonprofit email practice, partnering dozens of nonprofits and consultants.

The survey identified five online practices related to email that were highly correlated. In other words, if one of these is present in an organization, it is more likely that the others are as well. It is this cluster of practices that characterizes the Email Savvy Organization.

The Email Savvy Organization

- Collects email addresses on their web site, often on the front page.
- Publishes one or more email newsletters to its stakeholders.
- Can survey its stakeholders online and capture that information.
- Can raise money through email.
- Has an email strategy.

What roles do these five practices play? How do they fit together? How are they put to use by the Email Savvy Organization?

The Email Newsletter Marketing Model

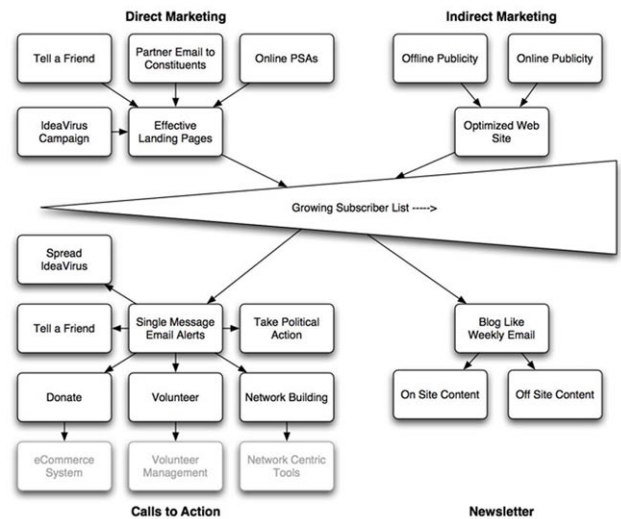
By Michael C. Gilbert

I recently had the privilege of developing an online marketing strategy for [Talk to US](#), an innovative international public education campaign. As part of that work, they agreed to let me share my description of that approach with my readers. The following article has been edited so as to be more generically applicable to any nonprofit organization.

Many nonprofit organizations are now using an email newsletter as the backbone of their online campaigns. The key reason for this is that without a person's email address and permission to correspond with them, we are in a much more difficult position to ask them to do anything - make donations, take action, volunteer, forward information to friends, and so forth. I recommended this classic, email-centric approach to [Talk to US](#).

The flow of communication can be represented roughly in two dimensions. In the accompanying diagram, the horizontal dimension is used only to represent the increasing number of supporters, as captured by the number of newsletter subscribers. The vertical dimension represents the flow of users from a variety of first contacts at the top, to the newsletter relationship in the center, to various actions taken at the bottom.

Without a person's email address and permission to correspond with them, we are in a much more difficult position to ask them to do anything - make donations, take action, volunteer, forward information to friends, and so forth.



(See page 46 for full size diagram)

Twelve Ways To Fail at Email

By Michael C. Gilbert

When I speak or consult about nonprofit communication, there are certain key issues that arise again and again with every organization that is struggling toward a workable strategy. In this article I summarize the twelve most common of these issues. They are interrelated, of course, but some will resonate more with you than others.

My recommendation on how to use this list is to rank them according to two criteria: Which ones are having the most damaging impact on your current online communication? And which ones, if you were to tackle them, would meet with the least resistance? I would then take a maximum of six weeks to address the overlapping issues. Then pause for six weeks and evaluate. The momentum for that reform should give you the ability to deal with all the remaining issues and to truly refine your online strategies.

Not collecting email addresses is like not answering the phone when a potential supporter calls.

1. Not Collecting Email Addresses

The offer of an email address by a stakeholder is the first and most important level of engagement they can have with your organization. It represents their willingness to be contacted by you and is a gesture of trust, in your mission, your programs, and in your skills in managing an online relationship with them. Without this first level of engagement, no genuine relationship between them and your organization is possible.

In the Nonprofit Email Survey, 64% of organizations did not collect email addresses on their web site. Not collecting email addresses is like not answering the phone when a potential supporter calls. Not collecting email addresses is turning people away from engagement.

You should collect email addresses on the front page of your site, on any page that might motivate people to get more involved, and, probably, on every single page of your site. Indeed, the very purpose of many pages of your web site should be to motivate people to offer their email address to you.

In addition to your web site, every form -- whether online, on the phone or on paper, whether filled out by a stakeholder, a volunteer, or a staff member -- should collect their email address.

You should continue to keep addresses up to date, mostly through sufficiently frequent and relevant communication. Otherwise, your email address collecting is for naught.

Conversation Mapping

By Bruce McKenzie

Generating probes to explore complex adaptive systems through critically systemic discourse.

Introduction to Technique

One of the factors that can make a situation complex is the multiple perspectives held by different people about the situation. The banking system for example is attributed with different boundaries, different purposes and perhaps even different properties when described by a banker; a fraud investigator; a customer; a competitor; or a regulator.

The resulting ambiguity is confusing and makes the task of improving the system very problematic.

A systems practitioners way of approaching the complexity (mess to coin Ackoff's label) generated by different perspectives is to generate a model or diagram that captures the perceived parts of the system and their relationship to enhance an understanding of a particular perspective.

There are several approaches to modelling used by different schools of thought within the general intellectual activity known as systems thinking. The style of computer modelling popularised in the early 1970's by Meadows, Rander and Behrens in their best seller "Limits of Growth" is known as systems dynamics: this is a generalised method of modelling the identified concrete parts and their movement at any level of abstraction. (This is systems thinking approach listed by Snowden as a method relevant to the Knowable domain in the Cynefin 'sense making framework': it is a relatively small part of systems methodology today.)

The modelling technique outlined here is more akin to what Checkland (Soft Systems Method) calls a Rich Picture. However, the technique goes further than Checkland's perspective as it is generated by bringing many different perspective of the problematic issue into the same model (called a map). The goal is to enable a 'reframing' (after Schon and Rein) of the problematic through observing the emergent properties when the different perspectives interact, revealing the depth of knowledge and energy they contain.

The technique for creating this model of a messy situation is known as Conversation Mapping. A Conversation Map is generated through engaging people with different perspectives of a nominated situation to have a conversation about a salient aspect of the situation (called the trigger) but instead of just talking they record the essence of their contribution for others to reflect on and if appropriate to subsequently respond to with a written comment. This conversation which can have as few as four (depends on diversity for

A Conversation Map is generated through engaging people with different perspectives of a nominated situation to have a conversation about a salient aspect of the situation (called the trigger) but instead of just talking they record the essence of their contribution...

Preventing the Nonprofit Spam Epidemic

By Michael C. Gilbert

As nonprofit organizations begin to embrace the enormous promise of email marketing, they are on the verge of making a very big mistake that will damage their organizational reputation and the reputation of the sector. They are on the verge of becoming spammers.

Years ago, when I was teaching fundraising to nonprofits, I frequently found myself in front of the board of directors. I would be telling them to assess how much each of them had given, to make a list of people who respect their opinion, and to make appointments to ask them to give as well. In other words, I was teaching them what every good fundraiser knows, that raising money is about relationships. They would squirm in their seats. Eventually, someone would ask the question:

“Can’t we just buy a list and send people a mailing asking for a contribution?”

In other words, in Internet parlance, can’t we just spam someone?

The Mail Abuse Prevention System defines spam as follows: “An electronic message is spam IF: (1) the recipient’s personal identity and context are irrelevant because the message is equally applicable to many other potential recipients; AND (2) the recipient has not verifiably granted deliberate, explicit, and still-revocable permission for it to be sent; AND (3) the transmission and reception of the message appears to the recipient to give a disproportionate benefit to the sender.”

As nonprofit organizations begin to embrace the enormous promise of email marketing, they are on the verge of making a very big mistake that will damage their organizational reputation and the reputation of the sector. They are on the verge of becoming spammers.

Since I’m not afraid to name names, here is an example, from one of my staff:

It seems the World Wildlife Fund bought a mailing list of people who were signed up with Columbia House Music Club, possibly through a broker. Suddenly they started sending all these people a newsletter, with the following disingenuous language: “As a member of our online community, we wanted to let you know about three great ways to get more involved with WWF and its important work...”

What? They buy your name from a list and suddenly you’re a member of their online community? This sort of language just makes spamming even worse. They compounded it even further by not replying to a request for information about where they had acquired the email address.

The incredible irony here is that my colleague might actually have been interested in the information they were putting out, but was discouraged by the way they handled it.

The World Wildlife Fund is not alone. The Gilbert Center has been working with a number of nonprofit organizations to conduct a groundbreaking study of

Chaperoning: The Alternative to List Rental and Spam

By Michael C. Gilbert

In my recent article about nonprofit spam, I briefly described an alternative to selling or renting email lists between organizations. I called it Chaperoning and I described it like this:

Instead of the World Wildlife Fund buying Columbia House's list and spamming it, they could ask Columbia House itself, which already has a relationship with its members, to send them a piece of email in which they suggest that they consider signing up for the WWF newsletter. If it seems unlikely that Columbia House would do this, then it's because they probably believe that their relationship with their members would suffer. Chaperoning enforces integrity on both parties.

I presented this concept in a little more detail at the recent NTEN conference, at a panel about Online Fundraising. I was impressed with the thinking in the room and at the tremendous interest in the concept. This article is a response to that interest.

I presented this concept in a little more detail at the recent NTEN conference, at a panel about Online Fundraising. I was impressed with the thinking in the room and at the tremendous interest in the concept.

A Fictional Example of Chaperoning

Dear Michael,

We're very thankful for your support of KCTS and of public broadcasting and we value our relationship with you very highly. Because of this, we do not share your name or contact information with other organizations, no matter how much we want you to know about them.

There is an organization I want to introduce you to, but I want to put that decision in your hands. A few weeks ago, after a special broadcast on the subject, you expressed interest in more information about electronic privacy. There is an organization that we admire, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, that is doing some great work on the subject.

You can sign up to get EPIC's free email newsletter here:
<http://thisurlclicksthroughtoanEPICsubscriptionform>

I hope you'll take the time to learn more about them. We know they respect your privacy as much as we do, so you'll be able to unsubscribe at any time.

Sincerely,

Karen Aboutu
KCTS Television

To Be Heard Above the Din: Communication, Nonprofits, and Spam

By Samantha Moscheck

Spammers have no legal obligation to subsidize the costs incurred by nonprofit organizations, internet service providers, and innocent internet users. Rather, we subsidize them by providing the bandwidth and resources they require to do their dirty work.

The popularity of the internet has opened a world of possibility to nonprofits and the communities they serve. Email is a key tool for communication, public education, mobilization, and dialogue. Yet these types of messages are often buried in spam.

Spam is unsolicited email... of any type. Put simply, the recipient never asked for the email message. Instead, someone signed them up without their knowledge or consent. Or perhaps the recipient did not read the small print buried in the privacy policy of some website.

Most spam is designed to sell something. Eighty percent of the spam in the US has been traced back to 200 companies that pose as legitimate email marketers, selling their services to companies hoping to increase their online sales. Most use deceptive, illegitimate, illegal, or unethical means to circumvent spam filters and trick people into reading them.

This, in turn, gives rise to new technologies that filter and block the junk, and organizations that track spammers and inform spam-blocking programs of their whereabouts, such as [Spamhaus](#) and [UXN Spam Combat](#).

Spammers have no legal obligation to subsidize the costs incurred by nonprofit organizations, internet service providers, and innocent internet users. Rather, we subsidize them by providing the bandwidth and resources they require to do their dirty work. We will eventually purchase faster computers, new software, and more bandwidth from our ISPs so we can use the new spam filters, spyware protectors, and pop-up blockers. But this is only a small part of the answer. There are some deeper issues at play.

How Does Spam Threaten Nonprofit Organizations?

Getting trapped in the filter: Many organizations are frustrated to learn that 20% to 50% of their bulk email messages are getting caught in spam filters. It is an expensive, time-consuming and overwhelming problem.

Getting to the reader: Email messages that get past the junk filter are still likely to be deleted by their readers. As people grow weary, they are likely to be frustrated by all unsolicited mail (yes, even yours!). And even if they did sign up for your newsletter, they still might feel too overwhelmed by their inbox to scan your email before deleting it.

Understanding E-Relationships

By Michael B. Soper

Like many readers of Nonprofit Online News, I'm passionate about the potential of email and the web for nonprofit organizations. While hard copies and snail mail will remain essential in the years ahead, email and personal landing pages are powerful new tools in building and maintaining relationships with an institution's constituents: volunteers, supporters, service providers, political contacts, the press, staff and more.

Plenty has been written about email and web communication, and much of it is good. The challenge, it seems to me, is gaining an understanding of "the relationship" from the other side.

Gaining a better understanding of e-Relationships is tougher than many initially think. Sure, there are a blinding number of web measurements, but you'd never try to describe your relationship with your "best friend" using clicks, page-hits, nor any of the other currently available metrics.

Research gives us insight into self-described attitudes. Analysis provides glimpses into collective or individual recipient's behavior. Both of these measures reflect the specifics of a given situation. Neither addresses what is possible. Neither addresses what changes, large or small, in overall industry practices might help us get the most from each and every relationship we enter.

Great friendships aren't born; they're developed at a speed that reflects the shared interests, personal values, and available time committed by the individuals involved. So, a "relationship metric" would need to gauge each of those areas and compare them with how you would describe your organization were it an individual. That is to say, you can't reflect the quality and depth of a relationship without knowing your organization and measuring how others' interests and values match up.

Typical "mass" emails to our constituents provide a single, nuclear option, in the form of "unsubscribe." All of us committed to reducing spam are committed to making it easy to unsubscribe, counting on the fact that our content is so good people won't do it.

That's logical, but not human. People have good days and bad. More than likely, those people with whom you seek to strengthen relationships receive a lot of email. There are days where their inbox is overflowing to the point of being unmanageable. This depends on many factors outside your control, and likely beyond the control of your recipient.

What an individual reader may perceive as a valuable newsletter on one day is simply deleted, or marked as junk, or unsubscribed from the next. But, just as you wouldn't end a friendship because of a bad day, it's past time that we give recipients more options than just to unsubscribe.

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Everyday Software:

Email Tools

By Michael C. Gilbert

Like so many others, my life understanding of the world is mediated through the software that I use.

In this and subsequent articles, I want to paint a picture of the software environment in which I live and conduct my work. Like so many others, my life understanding of the world is mediated through the software that I use. This is not meant to be a comparative survey of all the available software options in any category. No doubt many of you will have plenty of great alternatives.

In presenting a mindful discussion of the software I use, I hope to do two things: I want to demonstrate some ways of examining the tools we use, in order to help us be more aware of how they shape our world. And, because I am by far and away not a typical computer user, I want to take advantage of that fact to introduce you to some tools with which you may not be familiar. I suspect this will be a series of articles.

Because I have made a reputation for myself on the subject of email, I will start with that. And because email is a server centric function, most of this piece will be devoted to software that runs on a server.

Relationship Management System (RMS)

My communication routines are dominated by email. In a typical week, tens of thousands of email messages will have been sent out from our office. In the mornings, my colleague Christine checks to see if large mailings that we queued up the night before have completed. She also forwards me any email responses that require my direct attention. All our large scale outbound and inbound email communication is conducted in RMS (<http://www.socialecology.com/products/dl/>), the platform developed by our (now closed) company, Social Ecology.

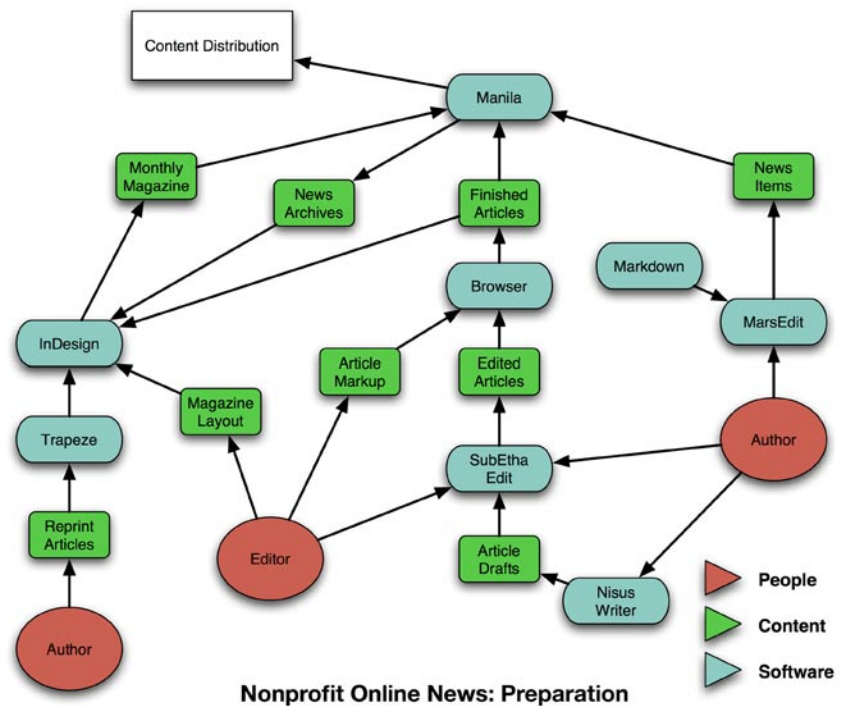
The key advantages of RMS (and the reasons we haven't switched to a high end alternative) are: (1) We have a license and access to the source code, which allows us to make fixes and improvements as we need them. (2) It's a platform that allows staff with no web development experience to develop new online forms, automatic events, and complete online workflows. (3) It integrates the web and email in rich, interesting, and very useful ways.

Everyday Software: Nonprofit Online News Publishing

By Michael C. Gilbert

For years now, I have wanted to describe the software and procedures that I use to produce Nonprofit Online News. But since it's only recently that nonprofits have displayed much interest in blogging (the core of our publishing model), I've only recently felt like this might be more than just another overly esoteric article from a "lovable curmudgeon and professional contrarian". (Thank you to Deborah Elizabeth Finn for that description.) So, today I will embark on telling you how this all works.

In order to keep this to a reasonable length, I am only going to describe the publishing process. For simplicity's sake, I have divided that process into two parts: content preparation and content distribution. I will tackle them in that order, describing the software and the workflow in each part.



Email Design Guidelines for 2006

By David Greiner

As 2005 draws to a close, I thought I'd take the opportunity to outline what I think are some of the key email design trends and guidelines that we should all be paying attention to now and into the new year.

This certainly isn't an exhaustive list, but to me these are the key issues that seem to be overlooked in most of the emails I receive and a great deal that are sent through Campaign Monitor.

We're all busy people, so here's a summary of what you should be doing to meet each of the guidelines.

- Never use images for important content like headlines, links and any calls to action.
- Use alt text for all images for a better experience in Gmail and always add the height and width to the image to ensure that the blank placeholder image doesn't throw your design out.
- Add a text-based link to a web version of your design at the top of your email.
- Ensure your most compelling content is at the top (and preferably to the left).
- Test your design in a preview pane, full screen and with images turned on and off before you send it.
- Ask your subscriber to add your From address to their address book at every opportunity.

If you're interested in the reasons behind these tips and learning just how important they are, read on.

Guideline 1) Design For Images Being Turned Off

Here's something you might not know. Today, anyone using AOL, Gmail, Outlook 2003, Outlook Express and the latest versions of many ISPs email software will never see images in any emails you send them by default.

Now read that again so it really sinks in. For many of you, that can add up to more than half of everyone you ever send email to. But don't take my word for it. Here's a quick rundown of which major ISPs and email clients block your images:

Today, anyone using AOL, Gmail, Outlook 2003, Outlook Express and the latest versions of many ISPs email software will never see images in any emails you send them by default.

Resources

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