

Five Keys to Pulling Out of the Economic Nosedive

It's ugly out there, and if you're the pilot of your fundraising endeavors, you're getting pretty sick of the turbulence. Many of us are rendered nauseous by the sight of the goals on our development dashboards. Some nonprofits are in a fiscal nosedive. And as any financial pundit worth his market metaphors will tell you, falling is no fun, especially without a golden parachute.

In situations like this, some people panic. Others get inventive. Let's all pledge here and now to stay in the latter category. As a wise man once said, "Worrying is not thinking and complaining is not action."

Here are five keys to pulling yourself and your message together to survive 2009. They are all variations on an important theme: give donors what they want during tough times.

1. **Give donors what they want: to feel good.**

That's right. Donors want to feel good, especially right now. They want a helper's high. They want to have an impact, make a difference and attain an emotional ROI. You don't give that to them with a desperate, doom and gloom message about your dire need. Even if you're feeling negative, there is no need to share that emotion unless there is a happy windup to your appeal. Who can the donor save? What can they make possible? How can they be a superhuman life-changer for a small sum? Tell them that. It's good stuff. It's motivating stuff. It works. **DO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THIS.** Times are tough and if you can make people feel good about themselves and what they've done, that's worth a lot to them. (Check out more tips for [recession-proof fundraising and messaging](#).)

2. **Give donors what they want: to hear from people they know.**

Now's a good time to change up the messenger. People are going to be in a kind of mental fetal position this year, clinging to their nearest and dearest in this scary world. So if you put your cause in the mouths of their friends and family, you're going to get much further than you would messaging alone. Ask your supporters to spread the word about you. The messenger will be key this year, and it's best if it's not you. (Here are [more tips](#) for bringing your message to your audience.)

3. **Give donors what they want: tangibility.**

People are pinching pennies and seeking value this year, whether in the aisles of Wal-Mart or when giving money. You need to show you're going to be a very trustworthy, efficient and effective steward of their money, and there's no better way to do that than to be very concrete. Where will the money go? What dollars buy what change? What good is going to result from a gift? Answer these questions many times: when a donor gives, after they give, and next time you contact them for help. (Improving tangibility is just one way to [improve your call to action](#).)

4. **Give donors what they want: flexibility.**

Not everyone can give as they have in more prosperous times. So recognize that fact and give them flexibility in how they support you. How can they volunteer their times or talents? How can they assist you in spreading the word? How about monthly giving – modest amounts deducted from their credit cards? One option is to encourage that they [become small-gift, recurring donors](#). Make it easy for people to help, no matter how hard the times.

5. **Give donors what they want: personalization.**

Last, don't forget to do everything you can to personalize your messages. Donors are going to be hit up for money left and right by desperate parties this year. If you show you see them as a person and not a walking wallet, you stand a better chance of standing out. Ask them about their interests so you can cater to them.

I'll also add a bonus sixth point:

6. **If these things aren't working at all, that tells you something.** One explanation is hard times, but that's not the whole story. If you can't prove your relevance to donors or supporters, you have more than the recession to blame. You need to call up a few folks and find out why you're failing to connect. Or ask yourself if you are targeting the wrong audience. Or question if you need to join forces with an organization better positioned for outreach. Keep looking till you know why you're failing – and then have the courage to fix the underlying problem. The more you think instead of panic, the greater your chances of pulling out of your nosedive and taking flight.