Most large national nonprofits are succeeding online. And why shouldn’t they? These organizations often have the brand awareness, staff, expertise, and financial resources to build robust online programs resulting in large email files capable of raising hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. What about nonprofits where resources are scarcer, and online fundraising has been modest? Where are the results for the rest of us?

Convio created the Go!™ Program in 2008 to help answer this question and to help small and resource-strapped organizations achieve success online quickly. Convio Go! is a one-year, structured program designed to remove the mystery from online fundraising and get you up and running with a software toolbox and a team of experts to guide you through your first online campaigns.

Despite tight budgets & staffing, and little or no online fundraising experience, small but can-do fundraising teams have raised over $5.4 million online with Convio Go! How is this possible? Our proven program for building online development capacity for small and growing nonprofits is centered on the following five objectives.

1. **GROW YOUR EMAIL LIST**
2. **CULTIVATE NEW CONSTITUENTS**
3. **COMMUNICATE REGULARLY**
4. **MAXIMIZE FUNDRAISING**
5. **CONVERT DONORS TO SUSTAINERS**
Execute fully on these five steps, and you’re destined for online fundraising success. For instance, just look at the results these small nonprofits have achieved:

- **Ontario Association of Food Banks** – doubled their list size with one campaign, raised awareness in the community and increased fundraising 600% year-over-year
- **Sacramento SPCA** – more than doubled monthly gifts, added thousands of supporters to their house file and increased online revenue nearly five-fold
- **A Kid Again** – increased fundraising 75% and doubled the gift amount per subscriber

Even if you’ve got a tiny development staff, steep deadlines, no clear plan to recruit new donors, and have never even sent an email to your supporter base, the Convio Go! team will help you hit each of these objectives successfully—and train you to construct, deliver and analyze your own online communications and fundraising campaigns so that you can take over when you’re ready.

This guide follows the efforts and results of over 130 small and growing organizations that chose Convio Go! to help them jumpstart their online programs. If you’re looking for a way to see immediate results, use this aggregate data as a starting point. These organizations have made huge fundraising progress in the midst of a tight economy, heavy budget constraints and overburdened staff, and are proof positive of why small nonprofits can dream big and see real results.
REACH NEW DONORS WITH EMAIL LIST-BUILDING CAMPAIGNS

The cornerstone for any online marketing program is building and maintaining your email list. This is not an easy task. Every time you send an email, some constituents will unsubscribe from your list; others will have email addresses that become unusable. To offset this attrition and keep your list growing, you have to constantly be adding new email addresses.

Sounds simple enough. So what’s the best way to do it? While there are many paid services for acquiring new email addresses, the quality of these addresses varies significantly. Also, appending your donor list or sending chaperoned email messages via online partners are not usually repeatable or sustainable options for smaller and resource-limited organizations. Sooner or later, you will be challenged to steadily and consistently grow your list organically. That means engaging constituents in the way they prefer to be involved—asking them to take action on your behalf, or rewarding them with something that they appreciate—so that you can start building a relationship with them.

For quicker results, why not create a campaign that uses a pledge, petition, giveaway, or other incentive?

The Ontario Association of Food Banks found success with a petition asking constituents to support a tax incentive for farmers to donate surplus crops to their local food banks. This simple campaign (see page 7) doubled their initial email file.

Pledge and Petition Campaigns
A pledge or petition campaign asks current and potential constituents to show their support for your cause by signing and then forwarding information about the campaign to their family and friends to make the same pledge. Signing the pledge requires filling out a registration form online which provides your organization with the constituent’s contact information, including an email address, and the opportunity to continue the dialog with that new constituent in the future.

Here are some pledge and petition campaign examples created by small nonprofits with the help of Convio Go:

“So, check, lock, & dispose” – a pledge and awareness campaign to prevent the abuse of prescription medications. The Science and Management of Addictions Foundation (SAMA) asked all the supporters in their email list to pledge to lock away or dispose of any prescription medications they were no longer using, and to ask friends and family to take the pledge as well. The majority of the original recipients had first-hand knowledge of how substance abuse can impact families and friends, so the campaign earned their pledge both to restrict access to powerful medications and spread the word about serious dangers in the medicine cabinet.
“Be Great” – a pledge to take action as a leader and mentor in your community. The Boys & Girls Club of Metro Atlanta presented its supporters with an opportunity to BE GREAT—by pledging to mentor, tutor, volunteer, or otherwise lead the community in helping children. The organization then hung a poster with all the names of the pledgers in the club where the kids could see them and feel supported by their community to “BE GREAT” as well.

“Keep Music Alive” – a pledge to keep music alive in daily life. Economic realities have forced many schools to cut music programs to meet their budgets, limiting our ability to include music in our children’s lives. The Children’s Chorale of Colorado, which provides music education in disadvantaged schools, encouraged people to pledge to make music a part of their daily lives. Supporters could choose fun ideas like singing in the shower and serenading other cars at a red light. This campaign engaged their own community (including their board members!) and grew the Children’s Chorale’s list as well.

Incentive/Giveaway Campaigns
An incentive or giveaway campaign involves offering something related to your mission in exchange for a supporter’s contact information. Once again, completion of an online registration form that captures the constituent’s email address and other relevant information is required in order to be eligible for the incentive. In addition to initial registrations, the ability to track shared and forwarded messages promoting the campaign introduces a viral aspect to the campaign where entrants can “earn” additional incentives or giveaway entries by promoting the campaign to family and friends.

The best incentives or giveaways promote your brand and are related to your mission. The goal is to increase awareness about your organization and attract potential supporters who identify with the work you do.

Take a look at these branded, mission-related incentives and giveaways.

“geek…it’s the new chic” – Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (OMRF) launched a humorous, viral “geek pack” giveaway campaign (including protective goggles and personalized lab coat) to recruit fans of science, publicizing the campaign via email and social media to especially reach younger generations of potential donors. While building their email list, OMRF accomplished something else important – identification of pro-science people who were ready and willing to spread the word that “research is cool”.

“Wicked Gala Giveaway” – Gillette Children’s Hospital Foundation partnered with a local corporation to promote a gala charity event including the coveted last pair of tickets to a performance of Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz. Using the corporation’s email list, the Foundation broadened their outreach and was able to greatly increase their email list.
through people signing up for a chance to win the tickets and attend the hospital’s annual gala. Partnering with another organization or for-profit for a “chaperoned” email (one-time sharing of email lists) can significantly increase the effectiveness of your campaign by helping you reach more people, and just as importantly, helping you reach people outside your normal sphere of influence—people who might not otherwise have heard about your cause.

“Last Guide Giveaway” – Two nights lodging and meals at Algonquin Park with a guided day of fishing was given away to promote the Friends of Algonquin Park. The Friends reached out to anyone who had visited the park in the past, reminding them to come back and enjoy all the activities and amenities and asking them to forward the email to others who enjoy the great outdoors. Each time an entrant forwarded the email, their chances of winning increased—and if the forwarder entered, then the Friends of Algonquin Park was connected to another outdoorsy person.

These examples illustrate real campaigns created by real organizations in the Go! Program, and though each organization has its own distinct goals, implementing email file building campaigns like these has helped them raise millions for their mission.

“We doubled the size of our email list during our first email file-building campaign.”

– Tara Tassone, Development and Communications Coordinator,
Ontario Association of Food Banks
CASE IN POINT:
ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS

The Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) nurtures communities by providing food, funding, and solutions to reduce hunger through a network of 120 community food banks across the province. Managing the acquisition and distribution of over 7 million pounds of food annually, OAFB’s network of food banks serves 375,000 Ontario residents each month – 40% of whom are children.

In the fall of 2009, OAFB created an email file building campaign that encouraged individuals to show their support for a tax credit for farmers who donate their farm surplus to area food banks. This three-part campaign included an initial message asking people to sign the petition. A second message reiterated the need and included a second request to sign the petition for those who hadn’t already. Those who had already signed the petition received a different version of the message thanking them for their support and asking them to forward the information to their family and friends. A third follow-up message urged people to sign the petition if they hadn’t already, and to send an eCard directly to Parliament. The result was OAFB doubled their initial email list with the campaign, raised awareness in the community, and helped contribute to fundraising of over $200,000 online that year.
Successful fundraising depends on strong relationships with your donors and potential donors. Short of meeting your mission, those relationships are your #1 priority—your major supporters have been with you for years, no doubt—and you were working to build them before you ever sent your first appeal. But don’t underestimate the new guys. Remember, relationships start as soon as the constituent joins your email file, when they may have just become intrigued with the promise of your work. For your newer supporters, those first feelings of passion for a cause can be a very powerful thing, setting the stage for a lifetime of support.

Welcome Series
One way to engage new constituents immediately after they register is to create a Welcome Series. A Welcome Series is a sequence of automated email messages in addition to any registration or donation auto-responder that a constituent receives over the course of their first 2-4 weeks on your email list. A solid, professional Welcome Series consists of 2-3 simple messages that set the tone for the relationship, create an identifiable voice for your organization, and educate new constituents about your mission and the scope of your impact before they start getting appeals.

The first message is a personal greeting from the voice of your organization, often the Executive Director (or your CEO, your founder, a celebrity spokesperson, your volunteer coordinator or any other person you want your constituents to relate to on an ongoing basis). This message highlights the state of the organization with a focus on educating the constituent, especially about new & interesting approaches and results. The second message engages new constituents by highlighting ways they can get involved to support your mission.

As part of the multichannel fundraising strategy they launched in the Go! Program, the Sacramento SPCA sends two Welcome Series messages from their Executive Director that work to ensure that their constituents are highly engaged immediately after signing-up to get email updates from the organization. These messages are a “stickier” way to begin communications with their constituents, opening the door for regular online communications such as eNewsletters and email campaigns, and contributing to the dramatic increase (almost double) of monthly recurring gifts.

Open rates for these types of messages can be as much as twice the open rate for other email

▶ HOT TIP:
While opt-in email subscriptions are an essential best practice of today’s permission-based marketing environment, double-opt-in subscriptions—in which subscribers must sign up to receive the email and respond to a confirmation email by replying or following a link—are often overkill. These confirmation emails are often lost or mistakenly routed to junk mail folders, leaving an expectant constituent—and prospective donor—disappointed and un-engaged.
messages. Go! participants commonly see open rates in the 25-30% range with click-through rates averaging around 3%. Welcome Series messages also help keep your email list clean by verifying that the new constituent wants to receive online communications, so don’t be surprised to see unsubscribe rates higher than other communications that come later in the relationship with the constituent. On average, Go! participants have unsubscribe rates in the 1.00-1.75% range for their Welcome Series messages. But they also see a median 60% housefile increase after their 12 months in the program. According to a benchmark study released by Convio in March, organizations raise an average of $11 online per subscriber each year. So for an organization with 3,000 email addresses in their file, 60% file growth equates to 5,000 addresses and an average of $55,000 raised.

“The nature of the Go! Program was just right for us. We wanted a sophisticated system for online communications and fundraising, yet we couldn’t dedicate staff time to start from scratch and reinvent the wheel. Instead, the experienced Go! team guided and supported our existing PR and development staff, helping us raise, in just the first 12 months, nearly twice our investment in the program.”

- Director of Development, Sacramento SPCA
CASE IN POINT:
SACRAMENTO SPCA

The Sacramento Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) was established in 1894 and is dedicated to ensuring the humane treatment of all animals in the Sacramento area. When the economic recession impacted their region, the SSPCA saw a marked increase in animal intake. But, because of their decision to invest in capacity building, they found themselves ready and able to boost fundraising, too.

Observing the vast sums of money raised through small online contributions from individuals in the 2008 national election cycle, the Sacramento SPCA decided to embrace the online medium for its PR, marketing, and relationship-building strengths, in addition to its fundraising capacity. With limited staff resources, they chose Convio’s Go! Program for its expert guidance and precise focus on proven high-impact strategies. After all, they had a record number of animals to place in loving adoptive homes.
GET YOUR CLICKS – COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

You’ve undoubtedly heard that communication is the key to successful relationships. Nowhere is this truer than in the world of online fundraising. For instance, after the Go! team guided them through the launch of their new monthly eNewsletter, the small organization Friends of Algonquin Park saw remarkable email open and click-through rates. Here are some other ways to build on the dialog you started with the welcome series and create enduring constituent relationships.

**eNewsletters** can be monthly, bi-monthly, or even quarterly depending on your organizational resources and available content. The key here is not just to be regular, but to offer high-quality, engaging content. The eNewsletter consists of story excerpts that direct readers to the website for the full story.

**eBlast** is similar in format to the eNewsletter, but contains only a single topic or story excerpt.

**eLetter** is a personal letter from the voice of the organization. It is similar to an eBlast, but is written in the first person, normally by the Executive Director, and usually includes a picture of this person and their digital signature.

**eCard** has a single focus like an eBlast, but with an emphasis on visual design. eCards usually include simple, timely topics like a save the date, an announcement that your annual report is available online, or a Mother’s Day card.

Some of our Go! clients send communications like these once a week, and others send monthly or even bi-monthly with success. We generally recommend sending at least once a month, but your timing will depend most on when you have valuable content to share with your constituents. Expect average open and click-through rates in the 19% and 4% range respectively and unsubscribe rates of 0.41%. These
performance metrics tend to be lower than comparable metrics for your Welcome Series, but higher than eAppeals. Even constituents who are only loosely or casually connected to your organization should find your eNewsletter or eCard content compelling.

One of our Go! team’s specialties is helping you find the appropriate window for sending regular online communications, helping you to perfect your timing as well as develop a reliable internal publication process. By the time most clients have graduated from the Go! Program, they’ve sent between 6-12 eNewsletters, eBlasts, eLetters and eCards, and subsequent sends run like clockwork.

In addition to maintaining the relationship, these types of regular communications can also play an important part in growing your email list. Sending good content regularly creates opportunities for your constituents to share it with others, which in turn will drive further awareness of your organization, website visits and new constituents.

“The most effective method for spreading the word and providing support for The Friends and thus the Park, has been the communication tools and techniques associated with Convio’s Go! Program.”

- Kevin Clute, Special Projects Leader, Friends of Algonquin Park
CASE IN POINT:
FRIENDS OF ALGONQUIN PARK

The Friends of Algonquin Park was established in 1983 as a registered, non-profit organization with the activities of The Friends coordinated by a volunteer Board of Directors whose members come from throughout Ontario. The Friends operate as a cooperating association under an agreement with Ontario Parks to enhance the educational and interpretive programs in Algonquin Park.

In 2009, The Friends of Algonquin Park overhauled their marketing programs in an effort to communicate more effectively and broaden support for stewardship of the Park. While they had collected thousands of email addresses through membership and online product sales, they had previously communicated with these contacts only occasionally. So when they launched their new monthly eNewsletter program in January 2010, they had a lot to communicate.

The results from The Friends of Algonquin online communications speak for themselves – yielding a benchmark-setting 25% email open rate and 5% click-through rate.
4 MAXIMIZE FUNDRAISING WITH THE RIGHT TIMING AND STRUCTURE

Year End Giving Campaigns
Year-end giving, or giving in the last two months of the year, accounts for 35-70% of many organizations’ total annual online fundraising. As a result, the year-end campaign is not only the most important campaign, but also the most structured. There are firm dates between Thanksgiving and December 31st that affect the structure of this campaign. For example, A Kid Again ran a year-end campaign consisting of a three-part series that included a campaign launch in early December, followed by a holiday greeting eCard in mid-December segmented for donors vs. non-donors, and then a final year-end reminder on December 31st. Being part of an integrated campaign allows each message to complement the others and build up to the last day of the year. On average, organizations running this type of three-part year-end appeal series saw response rates of 0.44%.

Spring/Fall Campaigns
Absent the inherent urgency and timeliness of year-end fundraising, it’s even more important that a spring or fall campaign tell a story and drive constituents towards a specific, tangible goal. For example, the Yellowstone Park Foundation set the goal of raising enough funds to send a group of disadvantaged young people to the park during the summer. The Foundation conveyed the importance of this goal, the impact it would have, and their progress towards meeting it over a sequence of three messages. By the end of their spring campaign, the Foundation had raised enough funds to send 178 children to the park.

The structure of a good spring or fall fundraising campaign is similar to that of a year-end campaign: a three-part series, where the first message sets the goal your organization is trying to achieve. The next message is a status update and reminder that more help is needed. The final message is an update on what you have accomplished.

The average response rates and total amount fundraised are generally lower for seasonal fundraising campaigns than for year-end at 0.19% and $2,253 respectively. “Off-season” campaigns rarely deliver results of the same magnitude as end-of-year, due to the latter’s combination of holidays, gift giving, and the tax year-end. But building a spring and fall campaign into your calendar is worthwhile for two big reasons: a) new prospects identified just after your year-end campaign shouldn’t have to wait a year to make an impact, and b) most people give from discretionary income available in the week or month you ask, so asking twice means you have access to two separate pools of funds. Every little bit helps. The Go! cohort of seven organizations that started together in Q2 2009 raised an average of 66% of their total 12-month online revenue during the last quarter of 2009. But during the quarter that they ran their “off-season” fundraising campaign (Q1 2010), they raised 9.9% of their 12-month online revenue. For this group, that 9.9% represents nearly $60,000 that might never have been raised without an “off-season” campaign.
CASE IN POINT:
A KID AGAIN

"Online expertise has become a fundamental aspect of the modern development office. We are proof that today’s development professional can’t leave the online channel to marketing and IT alone."

- Miranda Zink, Development Director

A Kid Again strives to enrich the lives of children with life threatening illnesses and their families by providing healing times of respite through fun-filled group activities and destination events, which we call adventures.

Unlike previous years, A Kid Again created a year end campaign consisting of multiple messages systematically building up to December 31st. The three part campaign focused on sponsoring a child with life threatening illnesses to receive gifts, dinner with their families, and of course a visit from Santa Claus! The result was the total online fundraising increased from just under $20,000 to over $80,000 and the amount raised per subscriber doubled as well.

![Online Revenue Graph](image-url)
CONVERT DONORS TO SUSTAINERS

Of all fundraising campaigns, sustaining campaigns typically produce the least amount of short-term gain, but can have the greatest long-term value. Before Convio Go! client Presbyterian Children Homes and Services ran their first sustainer fundraising campaign online, they had only promoted monthly giving in limited ways. By making a concerted multichannel push to promote their sustained giving program, they were able to grow the program overall by 25%. (See page 13 for more details.)

Monthly donors tend to give smaller amounts each month (compared to one-time gifts), but often have a higher annual value because of the frequency of their gifts. The average sustaining gift for organizations in the Go! Program is $43, representing an annual donor value of $500 or more.

“We wanted to go from being passive to proactive with regards to raising money online, but we just didn’t have any idea where to start. When I heard about Go!, it sounded perfect - like online marketing in a box.”

- Jessica Forkner, Communications Coordinator, Presbyterian Children’s Homes
CASE IN POINT:

PRESBYTERIAN
CHILDREN’S HOMES & SERVICES

Presbyterian Children’s Homes & Services (PCHAS) – with a history going back to 1903 – provides a variety of Christ-centered services to children and families in need, regardless of race, gender, religion, national origin, or financial resources. Licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, they provide group homes and individual foster homes, offer adoption and in-home crisis intervention services, and give educational support to clients in Texas and Louisiana. PCHAS is a ministry of Presbyterian Church (USA) but receives no direct support from PC(USA).

PCHAS started the Convio Go! Program to strengthen their online marketing in October 2008. “We’d been using Constant Contact for really minimal email,” says Jessica Forkner, Communications Coordinator, “but we’d never appealed for financial support through email. Now we reinforce our offline efforts with email, linking back to the website to expand on our kids’ stories.” In addition, they found their online communications to be a major source of new donors for their “Partners in Ministry” monthly giving program. They began to promote the benefits of the Partners program both offline and online (for instance, including the opportunity in all eNewsletters), and have achieved 25% growth in the program in the past two years.

Getting positive results quickly has enhanced the development team's capacity and confidence. “The first time I hit send on an email going to our whole housefile, I was terrified,” says Ms. Forkner. “I had to leave the building and take a 10 minute walk.” says Jessica. “But if you are committed to growing your fundraising, you’ll try something new, especially with a 'safety net' like the Go! team to support you.”

Support Kids & Families - Give Now!
Your gift will help support our much-needed programs that offer hope and healing to children in need and their families. To make a tax-deductible donation right now, please fill out and submit the form below.

Our 100-year history of caring for children and families is your assurance that we will be faithful stewards of the gifts you share. Because Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Services receives no direct funding from the mission budgets of presbyteries, the Synod of the Sun or the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), every gift counts!

View our financial statement.

Enter a Gift Amount:
- $25.00
- $50.00
- $100.00
- $250.00
- $500.00
- $1,000.00

- Yes, automatically repeat this gift every month.

Support Kids & Families - Give Now!

2010 Budgeted Expenses
Total Budget: $13.5 Million
Programs: 78.5%
Administration: 13%
Fundraising: 8.5%

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CONCLUSION

The examples above illustrate the type of campaigns that can drive real results online. And for many Convio Go! clients, the strategies and tactics involved would have been a lot to tackle on their own, limiting their ability to prove their mission deserved such support. Whether your objectives include raising money, increasing website traffic, building an email file, driving responses to an advocacy appeal, or all of the above, Go! can deliver. After ten years of launching online initiatives for over 1,000 leading nonprofits, we’ve distilled the highest-impact best practices in online fundraising into the program, along with a software toolbox that can grow as you do, plus a team of experts to guide you through your first online campaigns.

Focused on the five best practices outlined in this guide, nonprofits of all sizes can leverage the Internet to achieve impressive results. With the Go! Program guiding you through each step of online fundraising for an entire year, you can get your programs up and running quickly, inexpensively, and successfully. So you can get back to dreaming big for your mission.

To find out how to get started with Go!, visit us online at www.convio.com/go, give us a call at 888.528.9501, or drop us a line at info@convio.com.

ABOUT CONVIO

Convio is the leading provider of on-demand constituent relationship management (CRM) software and services that give nonprofit organizations a better way to inspire and mobilize people to support their organization. Convio Online Marketing, the company’s online marketing suite, offers integrated software for fundraising, advocacy, events, email marketing and web content management, and its Convio Common Ground™ CRM system helps organizations efficiently track and manage all interactions with supporters. All Convio products are delivered through the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model and are backed by a portfolio of best-in-class consulting and support services and a network of partners who provide value added services and applications focused on the unique needs of nonprofit organizations. For more information, please visit www.convio.com.