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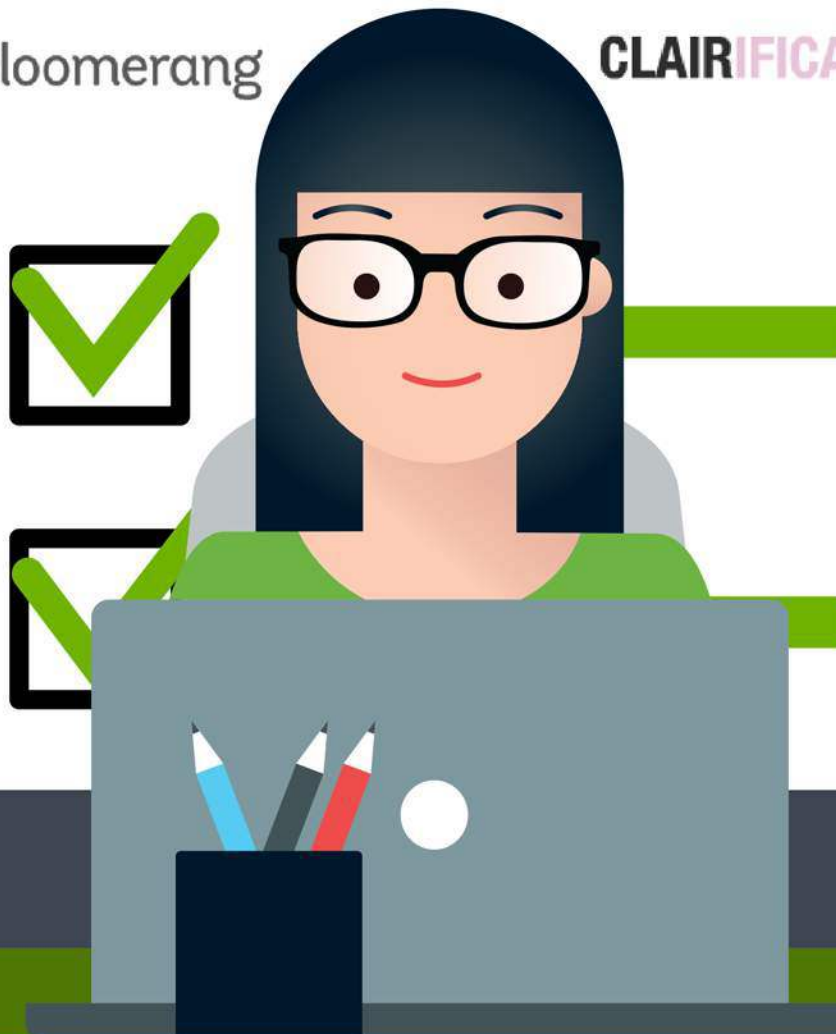
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# Donor-Centered Content Marketing Worksheet & Checklist

How to Integrate the Core Functions of Marketing and Fundraising: The Keys to Raising Awareness and Getting the Engagement and Investment Actions You Desire

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*“By creating content designed to address the problems and needs of your ideal customers, you attract qualified prospects and build trust and credibility for your business.”*

— HUBSPOT

*“The word content is a marketing abstraction, a mental model, meant to describe anything related to creating **stories that sell**. So content can be your website pages, your blog posts, your e-newsletter, your tweets – anything you use to communicate your value to the world.”*

— STANFORD SMITH



# Introduction

## CONTENT MARKETING IS ABOUT ENGAGEMENT.

It's been around forever, but only entered the common lexicon about a decade ago – coincidentally at the same time of the digital revolution. Why? Because suddenly content was everywhere. All the time. And folks needed to figure out a better way to manage it.

For our purposes, let's consider this definition of content marketing from [The Content Marketing Institute](#) (emphasis is mine):

*“The marketing and business process for creating and distributing **relevant and valuable** content to **attract, acquire, and engage** a clearly defined and **understood target audience** – with the objective of **driving** profitable customer **action**. A content marketing strategy can leverage all story channels (print, online, in-person, mobile, social, etc.), be employed at any and all stages of the buying process, from attention-oriented strategies to retention and loyalty strategies, and include multiple buying groups.”*

## THIS MEANS NOT JUST ANY CONTENT WILL DO.

It must be valuable to your target market(s). Enough so they'll be ...

Inspired to engage with you, and

Persuaded to do business with you.

To achieve those goals, your content must be closely aligned with your constituents' interests. Which means **creating and disseminating content simply for “top of mind awareness” is no longer sufficient.**

If you just brag about how great you are, or what you believe, it's unlikely your would-be supporters will see themselves in your story. Because you're making it all about *you*, not *them*. It's an old-school approach to marketing. Sometimes it's called **“outbound” or “push,”** as if it's you with a megaphone in your hand.





## THE NEW-SCHOOL CONTENT MARKETING APPROACH IS “FRIEND-OF-MIND AWARENESS.”

As part of this approach, you must ...

... engage enough with your potential supporters that you're able to discern their needs and longings.

... get inside their heads.

... empathize with their needs, desires and wants. Just as you would with a friend.

This is sometimes called “inbound” or “pull,” as you draw people towards you by offering content that's relevant, solicit feedback and welcome active engagement.

People won't engage with you just because you have needs to meet. They'll engage when you enable them to fulfill their own needs (i.e., for meaning and purpose) through you.



# Engagement is Everyone's Job

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Like Jay Baer of “Convince and Convert,” I strongly believe your future success depends on your ability to help people – not “sell” to them. It’s critical you integrate content marketing and fundraising if you’re to succeed at raising both awareness and money in the current zeitgeist.

The single biggest step you can take to increase traffic, connect with fans and acquire and retain more donors is also the hardest: **Be more interesting.**

You won’t be interesting unless you think from your audience’s perspective. Always ask these critical questions: **What’s in this for the reader or listener? Why would they care? What would get them to continue to care?**

Engaging, interesting content springs from your mission - the “why” of your existence. It should include the stories that demonstrate your successes in fulfilling that mission and reaching your ultimate vision - an end to cancer. No more war. The elimination of homelessness. Clean, drinkable water for all. And so forth.

**WITH THIS BACKGROUND IN MIND, TAKE SOME TIME TO GO THROUGH THE FOLLOWING WORKSHEET EXERCISE.**

Ideally, do it as a team. Bring all your stakeholders together, because it’s critical you all be on the same page. Neither marketing nor fundraising should be the province of a single individual, a department or a committee. Every non-profit leader is a fundraiser and a marketer. As Daniel Pink points out repeatedly in his book, To Sell Is Human, “We’re *all* in sales now.”

Think expansively about what you have to “sell.” This is your engaging content. Once you have a handle on this, prepare to disseminate this content in a manner folks perceive as relevant and helpful. Sales is not a *bad* thing – as long as when folks make a purchase they end up with something that aligns with their needs and values.

If I need a hole and you sell me a drill, that’s good for me. If I need a hole and you hammer me over the head with my need to give you money in exchange for a hammer, that’s not so good. Think of your donors’ needs, and what you have to offer them, in exactly the same way.



# Worksheet Exercise:

## Marketing and Fundraising Pre-Conditions

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Before committing to particular strategies - “how” you’ll get to where you’re going, begin with a strategic plan that will get you to your shared business goals: “why” you’re going there (*i.e.*, what you need in order to move your mission forward).

**Things you may need will vary. For example:**

More key program initiatives to address pressing or projected needs
More clients to create economies of scale
More students
More subscribers
More paying customers to provide earned revenue
More donors to provide contribution income
More staff
More board members
More volunteers to carry out the necessary work
More volunteer opportunities to engage folks
More infrastructure to facilitate the necessary work in a cost-effective and efficient manner
More seed funding
More diversification of revenue



**We need:**

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Develop a schedule for regularly meeting together as a marketing/fundraising team to determine key initiatives and plan content strategies and messaging mediums. Ask yourself: Who needs to be involved? (e.g., Executive Director, Associate E.D., Program Director(s), Development Director, other development staff, Marketing Director, other marketing staff, finance staff, etc.). Bring all key stakeholders' perspectives to the table.

### Who should be on the content marketing team?

1.	_____	How frequently should we meet?
	_____	_____
2.	_____	<i>(e.g., monthly, quarterly)</i>
	_____	
3.	_____	Who should call the meeting?
	_____	_____
4.	_____	Create the agenda?
	_____	_____
5.	_____	Make assignments?
	_____	_____
6.	_____	Write up a meeting memorandum?
	_____	_____
7.	_____	Hold people accountable?
	_____	_____

Before doing anything (no random acts of content creation or dissemination!) bring your marketing/fundraising team together to ask these questions:

**1. What are our bottom line goals as they relate to how marketing and fundraising can help to get us closer to those goals?**

A. What are our key initiatives (to promote and raise funds for)?

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B. What are our target markets (for outreach, engagement and investment)?

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## 2. What types of marketing/fundraising actions will get us closer to our goals?

What will grab the type of attention we need to survive and thrive?

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What will get people to *care*?

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What will get people to *share*?

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What will enlist new recruits to our army of volunteers/advocates?

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What will raise money so we can continue to fight the good fight?

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### 3. How will we measure whether the actions we encouraged actually took place?

Did people open our content?

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Did people click through to our links?

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Did people read our content? How long did they stay on the page?

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Did people share our content?

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Did we acquire new subscribers or members?

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Did we acquire new volunteers?

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Did we acquire new advocates?

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Did we acquire new donors?

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Did we acquire new customers?

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Did we receive valuable feedback?

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# Develop Content to Move Your Agenda Forward

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## BEFORE CREATING ANY CONTENT, ASK AND ANSWER THESE ESSENTIAL FIVE QUESTIONS:

1. What do you want the reader/listener/viewer to feel *now*?
  2. What do you want the reader/listener/viewer to do *next*?
  3. What do you want the reader/listener/viewer to do *ultimately* (e.g., within a defined timeframe)?
  4. How will you get readers/listeners/viewers to that desired outcome by *following up* with additional content?
  5. How will you assess this content *successfully* achieved its objective?
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## ASK THESE QUESTIONS FOR EVERY PIECE OF CONTENT:

1. What is the point? (e.g., we want them to feel so angry they send a message to their congressperson; we want them to feel so inspired they share this with their network; we want them to feel so intrigued they register to come to an event; we want them to feel so much empathy they are moved to donate, etc.)
2. What can we ask to get to this point? (e.g., please sign; please retweet; please share; please comment; please complete this survey; please register; please volunteer; please donate, etc.)
3. What will make someone care enough about this to act? (e.g., a compelling story; a video; a photo; a testimonial; a game they can play; a quiz they can take; a simple survey, etc.)



# Content to Include in an Effective Nonprofit Publication: A Checklist

## 1. Share an impact story.

All the best consumer brands today talk in stories. Why? Because it works. Human beings are wired for stories.

They are almost magical in capturing and holding attention. Told well, they naturally arouse curiosity and tap into empathy. The reader wants to find out how the protagonist will put their life into balance. They wonder how they would feel in a similar situation, and want to spare themselves that feeling. Once a connection is made that this story is about someone like them, they become personally invested. They want to jump in to provide a happy ending. Put all your content in a lovely storytelling box to make it a gift your reader won't be able to resist.

## 2. Comment on something in the news that relates to your mission.

If you align with what folks are already thinking about, you'll be one step ahead of the game in piquing their interest. Plus it's a great way to demonstrate your relevance.

## 3. Interview a donor.

I commonly include a "Why I Care, Why I Give" story. It accomplishes multiple purposes by:

- Showcasing your work
- Providing a testimonial of your effectiveness and trustworthiness
- Offering a pat on the back to a valued supporter
- Demonstrating a way forward to action on behalf of a cause in which your reader may also wish to participate



#### 4. Interview a volunteer.

This is similar to interviewing a donor, and accomplishes all the same things. In addition, it demonstrates another way to become engaged with you for folks not quite ready to make a financial investment.

#### 5. Interview an influencer.

**“Social proof”** is one of **Robert Cialdini's** 6 Principles of Influence. People are influenced by peers or authoritative figures. Donors see themselves as members of certain communities or tribes. To the extent they identify with your community, or someone within your community, this acts as a decision-making shortcut and helps them trust the choice they make without requirement of deliberation.

#### 6. Answer frequently asked questions.

Ask your receptionist what peoples' most frequently asked questions are. Ask your program directors. Ask your volunteers. What content do you see your constituents sharing on social media? Write content to answer those questions. It's smarter to base your content on what people tell you they want to know, than to offer up what you merely think or guess they want to know.

#### 7. Borrow from popular culture and trends.

Use what's trending to prop up your content. Folks will want to share whatever is “the latest” on a topic of mutual interest. And, heck, if you're an animal charity there's nothing wrong with sharing a cat video.

#### 8. Share curated content.

You live and breathe your cause, so are likely to come across and notice information related to your mission that may be of interest to your constituents. Don't be afraid to share, especially if it's something that may be helpful to your readers.



## **9. Share helpful content like “how to’s,” “lists,” and recommendations.**

Rather than lead with what you need, lead with what your donors need. No matter your cause, you undoubtedly have plenty of useful stuff to share. Examples include: *10 Ways to Keep Seniors Safe; Tips for Safely Bringing Home a Rescue Dog; How to Get the Most Out of Taking Your Child to the Symphony; 7 Study Tips for Busy Adult Learners; Steps to Take if You Think You’ve Been Discriminated Against; 10 Easy Ways to Go Green at Work, and Tips for Talking to Someone with Cancer.*

## **10. Share recent media coverage.**

Whenever someone else says something good about you, this acts as social proof (which we also covered in #5 above). Social proof is a terrible thing to waste. It often makes sense to write a synopsis; then include a link to the original coverage.

## **11. Invite guest articles, “op eds” or “letters to the editor.”**

This is a great way to include your community in your work. And it can take some of the content creation burden off of you. Be careful, however. Not all content is created equal, and you must avoid creating hurt feelings or carrying content that’s inconsistent with your brand and values.

## **12. Incorporate photos.**

A picture really is worth a 1,000 words. People today are strapped for time. They’ll look at a photo before they’ll read anything. If you add a caption to your photo, you can convey a story in two seconds or less. Splurge on some good photography that’s unique to your organization. It will be more compelling than a generic stock photo, and will truly tell your organization’s story.

## **13. Share something fun or funny.**

One of the most popular items in newsletters I’ve sent to donors are recipes. From clients, staff, board members... whatever makes sense for your organization. Cartoons and jokes are appreciated as well. Remember, this is just a nice, friendly “newsy-letter.” When I worked at a food bank, we included funny photos of misshapen veggies that had arrived in our warehouse. They were rejected by the grocery stores, but still perfectly nutritious. And they looked adorable when we added a hat and glasses!

## **14. Include a remit envelope.**

Don’t be shy about this. It’s a “soft ask” that’s well worth it as a good newsletter can raise a lot of money. The trick is to assure it’s filled with helpful, relevant, compelling emotional content. If so, your reader will be bursting to contribute. The envelope makes it easy.



# Content to Exclude from an Effective Nonprofit Publication: A Checklist

## 1. Bragging.

Anything self-congratulatory will be viewed with skepticism. *We're the biggest ... the best ... the oldest ... the most cutting-edge... the smartest... the newest ... the most trustworthy.* Don't tell people who you are. Show them!

## 2. Bad photos.

As truly wonderful as a compelling photo can be, there are a whole bunch of ways photos can hurt you more than help you. This is the case if they:

- Include more than three people. The best photos are one person, looking straight at the reader with big eyes, or two people engaging in a helping activity together.
- Show a donor giving you a big check. This is boring, and makes it appear you don't need more support.
- Are stock photos folks may see elsewhere (as in their Sears catalogue). This destroys your credibility because the photo is clearly not real.
- Are teeny tiny, so the quality can't be appreciated.

## 3. Articles about your process, not your impact.

Donors care about the problem and the solution. They don't so much care how you get from one to the other. They want to know people (or places or things) were helped.

## 4. Articles more about your staff than those they help.

I know you want to spotlight your staff. And the fact you have qualified, compassionate professionals helping to further your mission. It's OK, but not as compelling to your readers as you might imagine. Balance such stories with details about the work these folks perform and the outcomes that result.



## 5. Too much data.

A persistent myth holds that there are data people and there are story people.

Actually, not so much. [We're all story people](#). Melanie Green and Tom Brock have seriously studied persuasion and wrote about it in [Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives](#). Among their findings is the fact that when we enter into a story world, our thinking is altered. We're more receptive. We're not reading looking for faults. When we read factual accounts, we've got our guard up. As a result, as [Gottschall](#) neatly sums up, "fiction seems to be more effective at changing beliefs than writing that is specifically designed to persuade through argument and evidence."

## 6. Ego-centered attitude.

Too often, organizations speak more about themselves than they do about their donors. Go through your articles and take out all the "we," "our," "us," and "[XYZ organization]." Use more "you," "your," and "together, we." Focus not on what you did, but on what your donor did.

## 7. Stuff that's hard to read.

Make sure you use at least 14-point type. Otherwise, it's too hard for baby boomers to read, and many of them are your best supporters. Also, include plenty of white space to give readers' eyes a rest. I call it "oxygen," and it's necessary for life – and the life of your publication! Eschew long sentences and paragraphs in favor of shorter pieces that don't require a huge investment of your reader's time and concentration. And don't include too much data. It stops folks dead in their tracks as they ponder whether they believe it or not. There's something about facts and figures that makes us want to put up our dukes and fight. As opposed to stories, which we naturally want to enter into.



## 8. Stuff that's hard to comprehend.

Remember, your publication is not a homework assignment. Your constituents don't have to read them. To make it more likely that they do, make your writing as barrier-free as possible. Use the Flesh-Kincaid score (a [built-in tool](#) in MS Word) that calculates sentence length plus the number of three-syllable words to come up with a "grade level." Research shows you're best off at the 4th- to 7th-grade level. Don't work about "talking down" or infantilizing your readers. This is not about education, but ease of comprehension. Low grade level copy is a courtesy, like enunciating. It's copy that can be quickly read and comprehended by all adult readers. If you go much above that, it takes extra concentration and you're apt to lose folks along the way.

## 9. Jargon and buzzwords.

[Jargon is the opposite of constituent-centered writing.](#) It's stuff you may understand easily, but your reader doesn't. And it's insidious. It includes words like "underserved" and "clients" and "case-workers" and "managed care" and even "programs and services." [It's insider stuff, and it bugs people.](#) Jargon can make it take longer for folks to appreciate what you're trying to say. Not everyone will stop to do research in order to comprehend your intended meaning. Most, in fact, will

simply give up. Others may pretend to understand; then they won't act because they really had no clear idea what you were talking about. And all your efforts will have gone to waste.

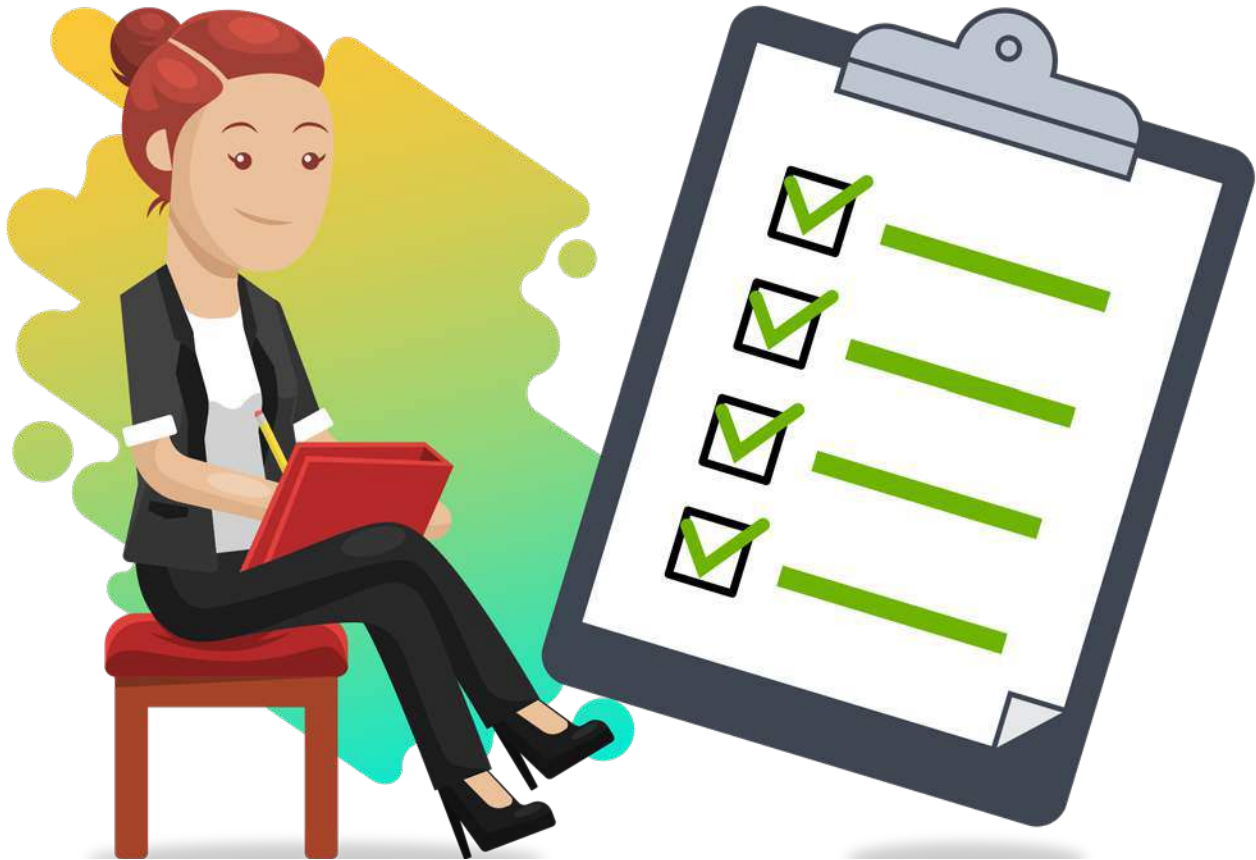
## 10. Headlines that don't sing.

Face it. Many folks will read only your headlines. And maybe your sub-heads. So they better include the most important information you have to convey. If you're lucky, that will draw folks in to read the rest. But even if they just skim, they'll get the critical information. So [master the art of headline writing!](#) "17 Tricks to Stop Eating Mindlessly" is much better than "Healthcare Corner." "Jimmy Went to Bed with a Full Tummy" is much better than "Our Food Pantry."

## 11. Self-mailers.

Okay, this isn't really content to exclude so much as it's what to put your content in. And research shows folks are more likely to open your newsletter if you put it inside an envelope. Include a teaser that lets folks know it's a newsletter, and not an appeal for money per se. But, if you do put it in an envelope, it will raise about 250% more than if you send it as a stand-alone. Don't believe me? [Listen to Tom Ahern.](#)





## Summary

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### **Remember: Out of sight is out of mind.**

If you want to create and sustain “friend of mind” awareness with your supporters, you need to communicate with them on a regular basis. Not too much. And not too little. Just right.

The best nonprofit content does two important things:

**1. It helps your reader.** Focus on how you can be helpful to your donor, not on how they can be helpful to you.

**2. It gives credit to your donor.** Focus on what your donor did, not on your role. And extend to them the courtesy of letting them know how much their support and friendship means to you.

**Donors need to know they matter.** It works in friendship, and it works in nonprofit marketing and fundraising!

### **TO YOUR SUCCESS!**

If you found this useful, please enroll in [\*\*Clairification School\*\*](#) to receive actionable action content and tips all year round.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Claire Axelrad, J.D., CFRE** is a fundraising visionary with 30 years of frontline development work helping organizations raise millions in support. Her award-winning blog showcases her practical approach, which earned her the AFP “Outstanding Fundraising Professional of the Year” award.

Claire, who teaches the CFRE course that certifies professional fundraisers, is a regular contributor to Guidestar, Nonprofit Pro, Network for Good and Maximize Social Business. Her passion is coaching nonprofits to address 21st century challenges and overcome barriers to sustainable funding.





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