

# FUNDRAISING FORUM™

## How to thrive when times are tough

Downes Murray International consultant, Sarah Scarth, is upbeat about the future of fundraising in South Africa. Here she explains why . . .

**R**ecession; the threat of a credit rating downgrade; drought; falling commodity prices; weak investor confidence . . . all pretty depressing right?

Sure there's a lot of negative sentiment out there but it's not all doom and gloom for fundraisers.

Why am I so positive? Because I (like CAF Southern Africa) believe South Africans are a 'nation of givers' and most of us are highly sensitised to the needs of others. Combine this with the fact that 'giving' is scientifically proven to make people happy, and it's a great time, as always, to be fundraising.

However as good as it is to be fundraising, there is no way to escape what Jeff Brooks of Future Fundraising Now describes as "the pain and hard work of fundraising". In a recent blog post titled *The sad news about magical fundraising*, he shares the following advice:

### No pain, no gain

*"How many fundraisers are looking for a way to escape the pain and hard work of raising funds, dreaming that some new social media site or ice bucket challenge or other flim-flam will cause funds to pour in?"*

*"Too many. And that's too bad, because there's no such thing as a no-work, no-pain path to fundraising success."*

*"As long as your organisation keeps looking for a magic way out, you won't be doing the real job of fundraising, which is paying close attention to donors and seeking ways to reach them."*

*"Fundraising is never easy. It always involves getting into the hearts and minds of donors and connecting with them on their terms. Sometimes lightning strikes and you connect with a lot of people in a deeper way than you're used to. That's great! But it only happens in the context of the hard work of paying attention to donors. No magic. No stardust. We raise money by paying attention and working hard."*

I couldn't agree more and if you need some tips on how to thrive during these tough times, here are a few:

- There are no short-cuts or quick fixes! Successful fundraising demands consistency, hard work and strategic investment in good people and systems.
- Donor stewardship is key. Finding new donors is important but even more so is nurturing and deepening relationships with those that you already have on your file. Attrition is to be expected but losing donors as a result of poor stewardship is avoidable. Start now by fixing that 'leaky bucket'!
- It's all about the donor experience – not about you! Talk less about what you as an organisation have done and focus on putting the donor at the heart of your communication. Make it personal and celebrate what your wonderful donor has done to make things possible.
- Diversify or die! Embrace a multi-channel communication approach to maximise results.
- Plan and track. Careful planning coupled with a diligent approach to analysing results will enable you to learn and grow.
- Educate your board and prioritise capacity development. Be persistent in this – building a strong fundraising programme managed by talented, committed and passionate people, which will generate sustainable income is an investment in your organisation's future and your board needs to be convinced of this!

### Focus on the constants

So in closing I share these wise words from Brady Josephson at re:charity:

*"If you want your organisation to be a strong, sustainable and successful one in 10 years, don't worry so much about what will change and stop trying to predict the future. Instead, focus on what will remain constant – knowing and caring for your supporters – and invest your time, energy and resources on that. Build systems, teams, and processes that make knowing them and caring for them as easy as asking and receiving them. And don't let anyone slip through the cracks. Good luck!"*

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# Maximising your donor relationships

Have you, and your non-profit team, thought about how well you are maximising your donor relationships? I'll bet the answer is "no". And that's ok – you've got a lot on your plate. But today, I want to suggest setting some time aside to think it through.

**H**ere's how I think about it: donor acquisition is hard. It takes time, energy, and often money to find and engage new donors. Because finding new donors is so time intensive, I have found that it is doubly important to leverage the relationships we create by maximising the value of each of your non-profit's donor connections.



personalise a relationship that would otherwise seem cold and distant.

## **Involve the donor in organisational life**

Another great way to maximise your donor relationships (and giving) is by involving your donors in the life of your organisation. While this won't be possible for every organisation, it can be relationship-changing for

non-profits that can do it.

You can involve your donors in your organisational life by offering volunteer opportunities, advisory councils, tours of your office or facility, or simply by including pictures of your staff and your work in your annual reports and update e-mails.

## **Seek advice from donors**

Nothing builds relationships faster than asking your donors for advice that is unrelated to fundraising. When donors are asked for advice and counsel, it proves that you see them as real people with real value to your organisation outside of what they are able to donate.

You can ask for advice either through personal means (such as picking up the phone and asking directly) or through mass communication (such as sending out a survey). Either way, you can pick and choose what (if any) of the advice you decide to use in your work.

Do you have a donor who is a management consultant? Have you ever asked him for his thoughts on how to streamline your operations? When was the last time you sent out a donor survey and asked about things other than fundraising?

## **Speak in terms of a lifetime relationship**

Finally, if you truly want to maximise your donor relationships, you should speak with your donors in terms of long-term (hopefully lifetime) relationships. This means that you should see them (and speak to them) as someone who will be with you for the long-haul, not just a prospect for your next event or fundraising campaign.

This means you should be casting big and bold visions for your donors, inviting them to join donor clubs and giving societies, and using language that reflects their ongoing value to your organisation.

*With acknowledgement to Joe Garecht.*

Visit [www.thefundraisingauthority.com](http://www.thefundraisingauthority.com)

Notice what I said . . .

Before we look at some ways you can better maximise your donor relationships, I want to point out those words . . . "maximising your donor relationships". Notice what I didn't say.

I didn't say, "maximising your donor revenue." The connection you build with your donors has to go beyond just money. It has to be a true relationship. The money will follow.

I didn't say, "getting the most out of each donor." Your job isn't to wring as much cash as you can out of your donors. Your job is to build a strong and sustainable non-profit that can help as many people as possible. The way to do that is to build lifetime donor relationships with two-way communication. The money will follow.

So, how can you and your non-profit maximise your donor relationships?

Interact with your donors individually – but create a system for doing so.

First and foremost, you need to treat your donors like the individuals they are. This means interacting with them as individuals, whenever possible.

Think about it – why do you think direct mail is less effective than face-to-face asks in terms of the percent of people making a gift? One of the primary reasons is because it's easy to throw a letter in the trash when you know that you are getting it simply because you are on a mailing list along with thousands of others, while the face-to-face meeting shows that the organisation knows you and wants to build a personal relationship with you.

Not every interaction with your donors can be on an individual, personal basis. But every donor can receive at least some personal attention, even if you are a one- (or no-) person development shop. How? By systematising your individual donor relations.

Things like thank-a-thons once per year, small group meetings with mid-level donors, and handwritten thank you notes can systematically

## MILESTONE THINKING

### On-target observations in brief

If you want to go quickly, according to an old African proverb, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

**African proverb**

Great storytelling captures people's attention and drives them to action. When facts and characters, logic and emotion, and cause and effect work together artfully, the resulting stories affect us in a deep way.

**philanthropy.com**

People don't give to you because you have needs; they give to you because you meet needs. Donors and prospects don't want to hear about the woes of the economy or your organisational struggles – no one wants to join a sinking ship. Instead, they want to know exactly where their donations will go, or have gone, and what impact your work is having on their community and the issues they care about.

**www.guidestar.org**

The charities that grow and raise more money for their beneficiaries are those with a long term view. They have a cohesive, coordinated and focused strategy.

**Sean Triner**

There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up.

**John Holmes**

At its heart, fundraising is helping others connect an existing passion directly to your cause. We don't convince donors. We help them realise that they already care.

**nonprofithub.org**

Developing a sturdy professional ego is good for your career health. You should take pride in your work, if you want to enjoy it. And if you want to get paid even more for it.

**Tom Ahern**

Transparency, honesty, kindness, good stewardship, even humor work in businesses at all times.

**John Gerzema**



## Working to protect our seabirds

**E**stablished in 1968, SANCCOB is a non-profit organisation whose primary objective is to reverse the decline of seabird populations through the rescue, rehabilitation and release of ill, injured, abandoned or oiled seabirds – especially endangered seabirds like the African penguin.

The organisation works closely with colony managers to identify birds in need of care in the wild and bring them to one of its two centres in South Africa: Cape Town (Western Cape) and Cape St. Francis (Eastern Cape).

In almost 50 years, SANCCOB has treated more than 95 000 seabirds and independent research confirms that SANCCOB's oil spill response actions alone have increased the African penguin population by 19%.

In a non-spill year, SANCCOB treats up to 2 500 seabirds, of which

approximately 1 500 are African penguins. Other seabirds treated by SANCCOB include various cormorant species (including the endangered Bank cormorant and Cape cormorant); various species of terns; pelagic birds such as albatrosses and petrels; and oystercatchers, gulls, pelicans and other coastal and seabirds that are found in the region. On average, SANCCOB admits 24 different seabird species for rehabilitation per year.

It is an internationally recognised leader in oiled wildlife response, rehabilitation and chick-rearing; contributes to research which benefits seabirds; trains people to care for the birds; and educates the public to develop behavioural patterns which benefit marine life and the environment it depends on.

Visit [www.sanccob.co.za](http://www.sanccob.co.za) for more information. ■

## FUNDRAISING FORUM™

**F**undraising Forum is a regular newsletter dedicated to the enhancement of management, fundraising techniques and the promotion of community service, welfare and not-for-profit organisations of all kinds.

It is published by Downes Murray International and circulated, free of charge, to anyone with an interest in the growth and improvement of the non-profit sector and those served by it. In addition to regular features written by Downes Murray International staff, there are extracts from international fundraising publications which are reprinted with acknowledgement to the publishers.

To download the current – and past – issues, visit [www.dmi.co.za](http://www.dmi.co.za)

# The four key fundraising roles of your board of directors

*Are you and your board members 'on the same page' when it comes to their role as fundraisers? Joe Garecht reports.*

**F**ar too many non-profit fundraisers approach board fundraising as if they have boards full of movers and shakers who know how to raise money, even when that's not the case.

These fundraisers and non-profit managers get annoyed and frustrated with their boards, which doesn't help anyone, including the organisation itself.

Acting like your board is something it is not doesn't help, and only leads to constant turnover and frustration.

Here's the real truth about boards: any non-profit board . . . including yours . . . can be immensely helpful with your fundraising efforts.

But, in order to be successful, your entire team needs to understand the proper role of the board in fundraising. I have found that there are four key fundraising roles your board members can play that will help your non-profit immensely:

## **1. The board as fundraising visionaries (leadership)**

One of the primary roles of your board when it comes to fundraising is as visionaries, providing leadership for your fundraising strategy and programme.

The board should be charting a path forward by deciding whether your organisation will be growing, shrinking, or maintaining the status quo in terms of programmes and services. This directly impacts your fundraising goals.

The board should also be setting broad fundraising goals for the organisation, in consultation with the staff, as well as making sure that there are firm deadlines behind your fundraising strategy.

And, one of the most important roles of the board as fundraising visionaries, is to make sure that the fundraising programme has the people, budget and other resources that it needs to meet the organisation's revenue goals.

## **2. The board as donors**

The second major role of the board when it comes to fundraising is as donors to the organisation.

You've heard this before, I'm sure, but it is important to remember that your goal as a non-profit should be to have 100% board giving. Every board member should be donating something to your

organisation every year.

100% board giving sets a good example and shows the staff, volunteers and other donors that the board is committed to the cause and to fundraising for the cause.

When board giving is less than 100%, it makes donors, including foundations and other institutional givers, wonder whether something might be wrong at the organisation that they don't know about.

## **3. The board as fundraising ambassadors**

The third and most important fundraising role of your non-profit's board is that each and every one of your board members should be serving as fundraising ambassadors for your organisation. Board members may run away when you tell them they need to fundraise, but almost every board member will agree to serve as an ambassador for your non-profit.

What does it mean to be an ambassador for your organisation? It means that your board members should help you make connections with people that you don't already know. Your job, as a fundraiser, is to then cultivate and communicate with these new people that you are introduced to, and slowly walk them down the path to becoming more involved with your non-profit, and ultimately to becoming a donor.

Your board can be a huge help in expanding your donor network and building new, lifelong donor relationships for your organisation – if you give them the tools, training, and motivation to do it the right way.

## **4. The board as fundraising support**

The fourth and final role for your board in terms of fundraising is to play a supporting role in your fundraising efforts. Board members often enjoy this role the most, as it allows them the chance to make a real impact on your organisation's fundraising without the pressure of making introductions or asks.

Your board members can serve as a great support to your fundraising team in lots of different ways, including going along on fundraising meetings, making thank you calls to donors, and attending events to meet other donors in person.

The best way to ensure that your organisation maximises the fundraising effectiveness of your board is to make sure that both your staff and your board understands these four key roles. Every single member of your board can and should be playing a vital role in your fundraising efforts.

*With acknowledgement to Joe Garecht.*

Visit [www.thefundraisingauthority.com](http://www.thefundraisingauthority.com)



# A bequest programme could boost your income by 50%

**“I’m glad you’re driving a small car.” Mr. Drummond welcomed me into his thatched cottage, in the Natal midlands. He’s been a generous supporter of the work of the Leprosy Mission for many years.**

I’ve called on him to thank him for his generosity. It’s also an opportunity for me to gauge his willingness to leave a bequest to the Leprosy Mission.

His life unfolds over a cup of coffee – his recovery from cancer, his volunteer work with a local school, his engineering career where trust and integrity were at the centre of multi-million Rand contracts, and the church where he and his wife worship.

Within minutes, two things are clear: he has a high regard for the Leprosy Mission and values like honesty and frugality are the glue that have held his life together for the past 75 years.

Issues like thrift are no surprise. During my visits to people who support the work of the Leprosy Mission, this is an overriding theme: people share daily newspapers with their neighbours, they recycle everything and waste nothing. Our supporters may have done well for themselves, but many have memories of tough childhoods and thriftiness is a key value for them. They see frugality as a way of enabling them to give more to their Church and charities.

### Substantial assets

Their prudent lifestyles mean that they have often accumulated substantial estates and they are thinking about those assets and how to use them to further the causes that are close to their hearts. This means that they are thinking about charitable bequests. Your task as a fundraiser is to get them thinking about your cause.

When I stepped out of my modest car onto Mr. Drummond’s lawn, he immediately sensed that his values were in harmony with those of the Leprosy Mission. He doesn’t want to support an organisation that wastes money on flashy trappings. *“Even if someone gave you an expensive car and you chose to keep it, I’d be put off,”* he confides in me.

If your organisation does not yet have a bequest programme, you are missing out on a great deal of income. Let me give you an idea of what bequest income has meant to the Leprosy Mission in recent years, as a percentage of our general income:

2010 – 30%; 2011 – 8%; 2012 – 30%;  
2013 – 55%; 2014 – 15%; 2015 – 40%.

Some years ago, we received a bequest equal to three years income.

There’s no need to be daunted by the idea of speaking to your supporters about bequests. They support your work because they identify

with your values.

In the case of the Leprosy Mission, I’ve already alluded to values like frugality and generosity. I believe that these values are common to people who support a wide range of work – certainly in the case of the Leprosy Mission, I know that people who support our cause often support as many as 10 other organisations.

We’re a Christian mission, so Biblical values play a big role with many of our supporters, as do issues of compassion. You’ll need to know what values are distinctive to your organisation – what makes you different and what it is that has your supporters reaching for their cheque books?

It’s important to speak to that heartfelt issue when you speak to them about bequests. For example, in some countries, societies that provide homes for pets consistently receive large bequests. Why is that? In those societies, as people grow older, their closest companions are their dogs and cats – they want those companions to be well-cared for when they die – a bequest to a home for dogs is seen as a way of paying back for the devotion that they’ve enjoyed from their furry friends.

### Start small

A bequest programme can start small. If you aren’t already doing so, pick up the phone and start talking to your largest supporters. Thank them for what they are doing and then listen to them. You will speedily be able to gauge whether they are interested in deepening their association with your organisation.

Many will welcome a visit from you. You’ll quickly know whether the person is in a position to leave a bequest and whether they will be considering your organisation when they do so. Remember to keep detailed records of these conversations.

In the case of Mr. Drummond, I’d be surprised if he left a bequest to the Leprosy Mission. It seemed clear from the tone of his conversation that he will do all he can to help us during his lifetime, but that he plans to leave his estate to his daughter and grandchild. That’s fine. I’ll keep in touch with him and visit him when I’m able as he clearly welcomes visits and enjoys hearing about what the Leprosy Mission is doing.

Circumstances change – who knows where our friendship will lead? Later that day, I visited Mr. van Tonder on the South Coast. I’ve got to know him well over the years and his interest in the Leprosy Mission has been growing. He’s been a generous supporter for over a decade. During this visit he said to me *“I’ve decided to double my annual donation to the Leprosy Mission – and by the way, I’ve left you a bequest.”* ■

*Peter Laubscher, executive director of the Leprosy Mission in South Africa, believes that having a bequest programme is an essential part of the fundraising mix. Here he explains why . . .*

*A potentially powerful communication device and fundraising tool – the newsletter is probably one of the most abused items in the fundraising mix.*

# Is your newsletter working?

**Every week I see embarrassing examples of newsletters from non-profit organisations which completely waste the opportunity for donor retention and relationship building which this essential component of your direct mail fundraising programme offers. So, let's begin with what a newsletter should be:**

First off – your newsletter should be a 'donor newsletter' – start by calling it that name and you'll already begin to hold the correct focus. The purpose of your newsletter is to:

1. Make donors feel really good about their support of your work;
2. Tell them about the people who are benefiting from their donations;
3. Grow their understanding of all aspects of your work and why their involvement is so important to you;
4. Provide those who cannot visit your projects with clear and moving pictures of what they are helping to make possible;
5. Inform them about new directions and new projects for which you may be seeking their support in the near future;
6. Give them examples of how bequests are another vital form of providing you with income to continue your good work;
7. And inspire them with quotations and examples of the wonders of philanthropy.

### **What to avoid**

Next, let's look at what your donor newsletter shouldn't be:

1. A vehicle for praising your board members and your staff or showing pictures of people at your latest black tie dinner;
2. A place to list the dozens or even hundreds of corporate or foundation donors from who you have received gifts;
3. The place to shout about your achievements or the fact that you've been in business for 25 years – unless the focus is on how your donors are the ones who have made it all possible;
4. A place to boast about how much money you've raised;
5. Or a vehicle for complex and dreadfully dull, financial reports.

Ideally, you should be producing at least two donor newsletters per year, and they should be timed to mail between your appeal mailings so that not every communication with donors is based on a specific and direct 'ask'.

The masthead (title) should be attractive and eye-catching and relevant to your work.

Use at least two colours (and nowadays, four-colour printing is about as inexpensive as two colours). Print the body copy in black (easily readable) and pictures in full colour.

For body copy use at least an 11 point Serif typeface (such as Times New Roman) – proven

by research to be more readable and readily comprehended.

By all means use a Sans-Serif typestyle for headlines – but keep the body copy in Serif.

Use two, or even three columns across the page (so as not to have long lines of copy that are difficult to read).

Avoid type reversed out of a solid background, and avoid 'watermark' designs behind body copy (destroys readability).

Remember that the average donor to a direct mail appeal is an older person who is often likely to have less-than-perfect eyesight – another reason to keep body copy at a size that can be easily read.

Intersperse your stories with inspirational quotations or snippets of useful information.

Always choose a striking article and strong headline for the front page to attract immediate attention and interest.

Make sure that your headlines (and body copy) are donor focused and feature words like 'you' rather than 'we' and 'our'.

Use good pictures showing people – and some close-ups so that you can see the eyes of the people in the photos.

Tell stories that provide feedback on the people and projects which you have featured in your recent appeal letters.

You don't need a heavy, glossy paper for your newsletter – this often gives older folks the impression of wasteful use of funds. An 80 gram Bond is quite sufficient, and even newsprint is often enough.

Always include a pre-addressed donation form (or 'deepflap' reply envelope) with a 'soft ask'. This can usually be used as the address piece when you mail your newsletter in a DL window outer envelope (thus avoiding ugly and impersonal address labels on the outer envelope and at the same time making it much easier for donors to respond).

### **How do you score?**

So there you have it – what amounts to a check list of donor newsletter 'dos and don'ts'. Perhaps you'd like to try scoring your newsletters against our recommendations to see how you stack up?

What I can promise you is that if you follow these simple guidelines, you will find that your newsletter:

- Always produces a handsome net income from donors;
- Brings your donors closer to your cause and grows their understanding and loyalty to your programmes; and
- Reduces attrition and helps to increase the average number of donations from each donor.

# Playing to lose

DIRECT MAIL

**I blinked. Yet the dreaded words didn't change. 'The internal team,' the email stated, 'has some concerns about the direct mail you wrote. We need to talk.'**

The internal team? Here we go again, said the frustrated little general in my brain.

Fact: I know the résumés of this particular 'internal team'. I know that no one on this 'internal team' has any training in direct mail. Not one iota. Which makes their opinions, *ipso facto*, professionally worthless.

Untrained staff and board cannot accurately judge professionally-crafted direct mail. It's impossible. Mailed appeals are a counter-intuitive enterprise, based on neuroscience, decades of testing, empiricism, and acquired skill sets of surprising depth and complexity.

The opinions of the untutored simply do NOT count in direct mail. Quite the opposite: acting on untutored opinions can only decrease or eliminate income. You either know what you're doing. Or you don't. And direct mail virgins guess wrong 110% of the time.

That doesn't mean an untrained internal review team is powerless. On the contrary: their silly, ignorant opinions can easily – often do – destroy any chance that a direct mail appeal will succeed. I see it all the time.

I'm talking to you, Mr. Boss. I'm talking to you, Ms. Board Chair. And I'm talking to you, carping colleague.

## Verbatim rule

Personally, I insist on the Verbatim Rule. New clients looking for a direct mail writer must promise me that they will send out what I create without changing one word.

It's the only sane policy.

And that's also why I strongly advise that development directors have sole and tyrannical control over all donor communications.

No colleague veto. No boss veto. No board-chair veto. Again, it's the only sane policy.

Let me repeat: ONLY the chief fundraiser gets to approve donor communications.

In a sane world . . . and then there's real life.

Remember the 'internal team'? They had three 'concerns' with my direct mail appeal.

First, the boss was concerned that the letter didn't sound like him. So he was reluctant to sign it. 'Could it be,' he ventured, 'written to sound more like me?'

If you think that this is a reasonable request, then you need to revisit a good how-to book like Mal Warwick's *How to Write Successful Fundraising Letters* or Jeff Brooks' groundbreaking new book on direct mail writing, published by Emerson & Church.

Direct mail doesn't 'sound like' people.

For one thing, the machinery of persuasion is always grinding away in the background of a direct mail appeal. A competent writer is focused on inserting all sorts of emotional triggers that can lead to 'yes'.

Also, there are loads of technical demands that must be met, for the appeal to raise the most it can: multiple asks on every page, for instance; and huge infusions of donor love.

## People don't talk this way

So, no, Mr. Boss, it cannot 'sound like you'. This is not ventriloquism. A direct mail appeal is not your hand puppet.

Second, the person in charge of this client's education reform effort – which was the subject of this particular appeal – was concerned about the tone.

He didn't like the heavy use of the word 'you' in the appeal. He wanted the charity's PR consultants to rewrite the letter . . . in a proper, elevated corporate tone: 'We did this great thing. We did that great thing.' Impersonal.

See, this is what I mean. This knucklehead's presumption about tone has been wrong since the beginning of fundraising – yet, he doesn't even suspect that truth.

Not only are people like this ignorant, because they don't know the subject at hand (how to properly talk to prospects and donors). People like this are also stupid, because they don't know that they don't know.

They are toxins. If they were suddenly gifted with self-awareness, they'd fire themselves for incompetence. Instead, they congratulate themselves for sagacity.

Finally, the new employee in production spoke up. He was concerned that the letter was too long. To lend weight to his opinion, he claimed to have direct mail experience.

Where, I have no idea.

This ninny offered to take all my one-sentence paragraphs and bullet lists and everything else that made the letter easy to skim . . . and pack it all down into tight, dense paragraphs, so the letter would fit on one page rather than two.

'And we'll save money on printing!'

I'll be blunt: what an idiot. And he's the new employee, so get used to it.

This is a big charity. It presents itself to its donors as a major change agent, a home for innovation and smarts.

And yet the 'internal team has concerns'.

*With acknowledgement to Tom Ahern.*

Visit [www.aherncomm.com](http://www.aherncomm.com)

*What happens when know-nothings are allowed to outvote the fundraiser? A sure-fire recipe for failure. Direct mail guru and agent provocateur, Tom Ahern, reports.*



# “Want to see me ride the mechanical bull?” he asked

**O**f course I do . . . (insert evil laugh here). That’s why I opened his email – even though I had no idea who he was or why he’d want to undertake such madness. So, the next time you send an e-appeal to your donors, remember these lessons, writes Marisol Gutierrez.

There I was, minding my own Inbox business, when a saucy little subject line caught my eye. The question posed by Tim Kachuriak, Chief Innovation and Optimisation Officer at NextAfter, was: ‘Want to see me ride the mechanical bull?’

If you’ve ever been on one of those wonders of modern engineering, you’ll know what a mechanical bull can do to your body – apart from breaking it.

It’s like a maniacal experiment to see if your spine can twist and turn enough to touch your brain while bypassing your bellybutton. (Actually, the choice to get on that thing in the first place was proof of a brain by-pass.)

But back to Tim’s provocative question . . . once I’d been lured into opening his email – thanks to his great subject line – I was hooked into reading his letter . . . which brings us to lesson two: the very first line of Tim’s letter delivered an irresistible opener: ‘This is going to be fun.’

No sales pitch, no history lesson, just a fine example of 1) good copywriting; and 2) well-executed strategy.

Tim’s letter turned out to be about an upcoming conference in the US, but he had pinned fun and a unique approach onto the coat tails of his offer (the two-day conference).

Since I’m here in Mzansi, I’m not up for it – but dozens of people are sure to be,

after reading his email.

So, here’s what we can take out of this to apply to online fundraising:

## Subject lines

These have one job: to get your email opened. They should be enticing and interesting, so give them as much attention as the rest of your communication. Even the most brilliant copy and compelling ask falls flat if the subject line doesn’t get your foot in the door.

## Salutation

Personalisation is first prize, of course. Ensure that the salutation matches the tone of your subject line and the message. For instance, Tim’s subject line was playful and informal, so it would have been bizarre to begin with a formal ‘Dear Miss Gutierrez’. In this case, ‘Hi Marisol’ was perfect.

Also be sure to remember demographics . . . if you’re targeting more mature donors, say 60 – 65+, it would be common sense to address them appropriately.

## Opening line

As any copywriter will know, the opening line is the throne . . . the rest of your copy sits at its feet, since the opener dictates whether the reader will be moved, inspired, outraged or interested enough to read on.

Tim’s opener, ‘This is going to be fun’ appealed to a universal need and was a good hook on which to draw the reader in.

Non-profits have an advantage in that their work is infinitely more interesting than any conference could be.

Brainstorm ways in which you can harness the power of the change you create and critically examine how you’re raising (or not) funds online. ■

**FUNDRAISING FORUM™** is edited by Richard Solomon and published by Downes Murray International. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher.

**DOWNES MURRAY**  
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FUNDRAISING THOUGHT LEADERS

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