Shoppers are shopping, carolers are caroling, partiers are partying, and givers are giving! It must be the most wonderful time of the year!

Nonprofit leaders understand the importance and potential of the Holiday Season. A study by Charity Navigator showed many organizations raise up to 50 percent of their total contributed income between Thanksgiving and January. According to Causes.com, online donations to nonprofits increase by 42 percent during November and December compared to other months throughout the remainder of the year.

As you prepare for the final fundraising push of the year, here are some DOs and DON’Ts to consider:

**DO...**

**Appeal to the heart**
Build mission-focused messages centered around one moving story rather than giving out mass data with no names or faces attached. If possible, show images of people who have been helped by your organization, and use a direct quote that expresses their gratitude.

**Use multiple platforms**
Traditional appeal letters are popular, and are still a very successful method of securing donations. But don’t forget to make good use of electronic methods, such as e-mail newsletters and social media.

**Make it professional**
All of your materials, whether printed or electronic, should be free of grammar mistakes and typos. Few things will hurt your credibility more than a letter with a glaring error. Proof all communications for tone, clarity, and content.

**Provide options**
Some donors are happy to send a check through the mail. Others prefer online giving and will not consider any other method. This means all communications should provide giving options, such as writing a check, using a credit card, dropping off a donation at your offices, or using your website. Websites must have clear donation buttons, obvious to viewers without working hard to find them.

**Make a clear ask**
It sounds so simple, but you might be surprised to know how many appeal letters never make a clear ask for a donation. Ask early and ask often.

**Segment your audience**
People who have loyalty supported your organization for years should not get the same letter as those who have attended only one fundraising event and have never given a penny to you. Create a variety of letters that reflect different levels of interest and involvement.

**DON’T...**

**Use the same old seasonal cliches**
Most of us get cards filled with the usual seasonal sayings. Develop creative words that are appropriate for your work and fit your donors.

**Describe your budget woes**
Donors give to your organization because they want to see situations improved. They are not compelled by the idea of moving your budget from “red” to “black.” Reserve discussions of the ledger and budget shortfalls for accountants and board members.

**Be vague about how the gifts are used**
It is up to you to explain how each gift — large or small — will have a positive impact on the cause.

**Avoid the “make a difference” phrase** — the most overused and ambiguous saying in the nonprofit industry. Be specific about how the donation will be used and, if possible, demonstrate how each dollar is allocated to provide food, supplies, or whatever it is you need.

**Skimp on quality**
Most donors appreciate frugality, but your materials must have a professional look. Shoddy quality may send the wrong signal to donors and may cause them to feel unsure about the organization’s level of professionalism.

**Forget to say “Thank You”**
Adequately recognizing donors is a cornerstone of fundraising.

“... if you don’t have time to thank your donors, you don’t have time for donors,” says Kim Klein, founder of the Grassroots Fundraising Journal.

**Be sure to thank donors, and thank them quickly. Expressing a heartfelt appreciation soon after the gift goes a long way in keeping supporters engaged in your work.**

**Be generic**
Generic form letters that are obviously sent in masse do not touch hearts. Those usually end up in the trash quickly.

**Personalize your communication with a name in the salutation.** Another great touch is to have your executive director or board president sign each letter. If possible, acknowledge the donor’s past giving history and how much it has helped.

**Use industry jargon**
Language in your letter should be clear to all readers, not just to those with a PhD. As Jeff Brooks writes in The Fundraisers Guide to Irresistible Communications: “It’s like enunciating clearly when you speak. Or using neat handwriting. Even the most intellectual will appreciate and respond to clear communication.”

**Remove the human touch**
Letters, emails, and social media all have value. But the most effective form of fundraising still comes from the personal ask.

Enlist your key leaders and board members to do personal phone calls and to make face-to-face visits with those in their network. Friends asking friends will help you reach more people quickly and will give you a better chance of achieving your organizational goals.