

10 Tips to Avoid Social Media Mistakes in Fundraising & Marketing– a Local Case Study

About 8:30 last night, I received a strange email from the Cincinnati Museum Center's email blast list with Exact Target and signed by their CEO, Doug McDonald. It didn't seem like spam, so I checked the headers and pretty much determined it was a legitimate appeal. I like to look at fundraiser appeal letters for content ideas for clients, so I usually do skim them when they come in. Once I saw the article in today's newspaper about the P&G social media experiment, ([P&G Tries Out Social Networks](#)) I knew this email was a result of that event, and that I had been made, unwittingly, into a social media / reality show guinea pig.

After I finished internally ranting and firing off a "remove me" email – and since I was madly prepping to coach an entrepreneur on using his Facebook Fan page for business the next day - I decided to look at "why" I felt this email blast was so wrong, why it stood out from the 100 other pieces of spam I received that day, and make it a teaching moment for myself and some other clients. So, first, judge for yourself and let me know your thoughts. The link to the actual Exact Target letter is [here](#) – the text follows below:



From: Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal

March 11, 2007

Dear :

Tonight I have been graciously (sic) included in a Procter and Gamble social media event. This event is teaching me new ways to promote our museum to others throughout our community and the country. It is exciting to be in this group, learning what they use all across the country.

I think there are things we can learn from our friends about communication (sic), media and reaching out to others.

This exercise (sic) tonight is a contest. Does that surprise us about P&G?

The contest is to sell Tide T-shirts. The Museum Centers periodically supports worthy charitable causes. As part of this effort, we have a unique charity event going on tonight till 9 pm.

If you would like to support disaster victims, please go to www.tide2.com and buy vintage Tide T-shirts. 100% of the proceeds go to charities supporting disaster victims. Buy 2 shirts or more and you get free shipping.

I hope you are tolerant of this slight intrusion of your "personal space." And, if you are into this social media thing.....and you want to follow me, go to www.twitter.com/Doug4Cincy

If you can buy in bulk, then it will really help!!!!

Please act immediately, as this charity event ends at 9 pm.

www.tide2.com

Sincerely, Doug McDonald President & CEO Cincinnati Museum Center

My takeaways....feel free to send me your own comments.....

1. **Don't spam and don't be intrusive.** I don't care how excited you are about what you are doing or what you are selling, Mr. McDonald and I are technically not colleagues. We're not "Facebook Friends" or even "Linked" or connected on Twitter. Don't demand in an email that your "distant" stakeholders do something after business hours – especially something this frivolous. If a tsunami was headed down the Ohio River, I might understand, or there was shooting in the streets of Newport and people were sending me tweets to "duck and cover" as they did in India, I would understand, but this did not warrant the evening urgency. This was spam from the public square, pure and simple.

2. **Always proofread.** Never, ever communicate with your stakeholders without careful planning and proofreading – the date was wrong on the letter (2007), there were three misspellings, and there was no programming of the salutation field in the Exact Target list manager. It was a misuse of his technology and he or his tech team probably did it huddled over the laptop without much review. Yes, we all make typos, but this was substandard correspondence.

3. **Always choose formality over informality.** I've never received correspondence before from this entity and was addressed as "Dear colon." Simply sloppy, hurried and unprofessional. If you are a nonprofit, do not send out correspondence this way – ever, for any reason, even due to technical ignorance in changing the salutation field in your list mailer or otherwise.

4. **Stick to YOUR cause, your mission, your vision.** The letter mentions "worthy" charitable disaster causes - what disaster causes – why? What is CMC's vision for the future for participating in this and how would that help CMC's mission? Even if his entire board is made up of P&G'ers, Mr. McDonald hasn't connected the dots for the rest of his community stakeholders. If he was just doing this because it sounded like a cool and trendy thing to do after a little networking dinner, he made an enormous error in communication judgment with his broader audience of potential stakeholders and potential donors.

5. **Make sure you really "need" what you are asking for.** Pushing me to do something for other "worthy" disaster charities yet to be named muddies why I might have been connected with CMC in the first place. I like to "know" who I'm going to be aligned with – some disaster charities are better than others. And if he can afford to push us to give to these other mysterious entities, than does he really need my pitiful donation later in the year?

6. **Think before you sell out.** Be careful picking the entities you will collaborate with in regard to your mailing list. The over-the-top deference to P&G within the letter was a transparent sell-out of his donor / email list and it showed in the tone of the message. I have on occasion done joint mailings with other orgs, but both orgs were clearly represented, it was a clear, gentle marketing approach where I knew all of us would benefit, and the reason we were doing it would be very clear and obvious of a community-oriented, public service benefit to the recipient. Mr. McDonald's apparent purpose was primarily mentioned as digital experimentation. The community benefit was suspect and secondary. Not my interest. He missed his target.

7. **Do your research.** When I "opted out" of his mailing list, I saw my contact info on the Exact Target profile page, it was name, email address. That's it. All of the other fields were blank. Mr. McDonald did not flesh out his prospect list, research his appeal list or do any polling of his constituents prior to sending this appeal....probably not even calling his board before pulling the trigger. If this was a way to draw in "Millennials" as donors or participants, he should have made sure that everyone he was email blasting or tweeting was indeed Gen Y. Did Mr. McDonald even realize I was female? Many females of modest means think Tide is overpriced in the market place, switched brands long ago, and that P&G is overexposed in Cincinnati. Frankly many of us are just not interested in more P&G PR, especially in our inboxes when we didn't opt in.

8. **Social media is social.** So be polite, invite everyone to the party. And yes, times have changed and it IS all about me. I do digital work and wasn't thought worthy to be invited to this digital soiree – not sour grapes, just reality. So how was this Executive Director / CEO prepared to connect to the "disenfranchised" – me? Using an email blast gloating about all the fun he was having at an event to which I wasn't invited, hitting me up for money for a Tide t-shirt and asking for apologies for intruding on my inbox was simply just not polite. And it wasn't about "Me" -- a marketing miscalculation.

9. **Social media does not let you take marketing shortcuts.** You still have to be relevant and authentic in all of your chosen marketing and fundraising mediums.

10. **Protect privacy.** Mailing lists are sacred and should be treated respectfully no matter the business application. Where did Mr. McDonald get my email address – what list am I on with CMC ? I think I attended a meeting there, paid for parking, but I've never donated directly. If they got my address from another entity (and I have my suspicions), they are going to have some 'splaining to do. And what have they done with my email address subsequently? Does P&G now have my addy and I'm going to get endless plugs for more Tide t-shirts?

Yes, we are all working 24/7 these days, but I'm not keen on getting 8:30pm appeal letters when I'm getting ready to unwind for the evening (its the same approach as telemarketers at dinner) – so to anyone out there wanting to replicate this social media fundraising approach, think carefully before you hit that “send” button or be prepared to send out an apology blast. You may be offending more stakeholders than you realize.

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