

# Eight Tips for Profitable Donor Newsletters



[Tom Ahern](#) is one of the foremost authorities in the field of nonprofit communications. We had an opportunity to talk with him about creating nonprofit donor newsletters that are effective communications and fundraising tools:

1. **Use “you” often and prominently.** “The word ‘you’ is more than a pronoun: it is a profound emotional trigger that helps keep the reader attached to the page,” shares Ahern. “Remember this rhyme: you is glue.” Every page of your newsletter should include many uses of the word you, and don’t just use it in the body of your articles. ‘You,’ like donors themselves, should be front and center. Make sure your headlines, sidebars, subheads and pull-quotes are peppered with “you,” too. “You is the most powerful word in marketing,” adds Ahern. “Your newsletter should give constant credit to the role that donors play in making your mission successful. This is a way of shifting the credit to the donors’ shoulders.
2. **Make your article titles memorable.** “Four out of five readers will only read your titles, not the articles,” says Ahern. Therefore, it is important that your title captures the one thing you want your readers to remember. Sure, you can make it catchy, but be sure it tells a story, and be sure it is the story you want it to tell. Ahern suggests this test of a good headline: “Cover the article with your hand, and tell me what the story is really about from what the headline tells you.” He also recommends checking each headline for conflict, tension, drama and interest. “Without those elements, it may look like a headline, but it’s not a headline.”
3. **Include pictures in your newsletter.** Along with headlines, pictures have the power to pull the reader into your world. They can extract emotional responses and connections that no article can compete with. Says Ahern, “Eyes that stare out from the printed page strongly draw the reader in.” He also notes that photos of children and animals raise money. “Humans are hardwired to respond emotionally to children and pets,” he explains. Captions should include two sentences. One sentence to tell the viewer what s/he is seeing in the picture and a second sentence to tell him/her why it is important.
4. **Fill prime real estate with pull quotes.** Pull quotes are another element that draws the reader in. Use them judiciously and make sure the quote is emotional, surprising and includes concrete details. Quotes, when they reflect the speaker’s real words and true emotions, help establish authenticity, and let the reader know exactly what the charity is accomplishing. Don’t waste prime real estate on your page with lackluster or meaningless quotes. If you are lacking interesting quotes, fill these areas with donor-centric “yous.” “We’re making progress, but there’s much more to accomplish. We can’t do it without you.”
5. **Testimonials grab readers by striking an emotional chord.** Ahern advises using testimonials that create a picture in the reader’s eye, so they can “visualize the organization and the people who are supported.”

6. **Link the reader to your organization.** Each page should include something that links the reader directly back to your organization. Maybe it is an offer for free information, perhaps directions to a portion of the website to read more, or an offer to sign up for a seminar. Whatever your offer, make it prominent, clear and compelling. Calls to action result in interaction, which is what will make your newsletter a fundraising success.
7. **Sidebars are a perfect place to share more on a related subject or to link the reader back via an offer.** “For instance,” says Ahern, “if your article mentions someone who gave a bequest, you have a great opportunity to include a sidebar that tells the reader more about bequests and specifically how they can name your organization in their will or trust.” And don’t forget the “you” test – “You can make a difference.”
8. **Your articles are the least important element.** Most readers will not read them, so don’t invest your time and effort here. Make your pictures, headlines, subheads, bullets, sidebars, pull quotes and testimonials shine. That is the formula for a winning, profitable newsletter. To the extent you do focus on the articles, make them entertaining, authentic, and “mercifully brief,” says Ahern. Break up long articles with subheads. Use short paragraphs, indents, bullet points and lists to break up text and make the information easy to skim, which, if you’re lucky, is what most readers will do.