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An E-motional Call to Action

United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley used video-embedded e-mails to better promote an event and cut costs in the process



United Way
of Massachusetts Bay
and Merrimack Valley

THE PROBLEM

For 14 years, Boston-based United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley has reached out to female executives and community leaders for its annual Women's Breakfast fundraising event. Traditionally, paper invitations and, in recent years e-mails, were sent, but last year United Way felt outreach would be more effective through a stronger e-mail-only initiative. "Most of our donors are on e-mail and it's

so much easier to get information out there fast [through e-mail] in a way people prefer to receive it," says the chapter's program director Alicia Canady. It also was hoping to pare the approximately \$10,000 spent on shipping in the past, Canady says.

But while United Way wanted to cut costs, it certainly didn't want to cut attendance numbers or donations. "In our particular region, women get invited to these breakfast and lunch events all the time," Canady says. "The question was how will United Way stand out this time around, especially in this economy where people are being strict about where they are spending?"

THE FIX

On the advice of an event co-chair familiar with its work, the United Way chapter commissioned Hopkinton, Mass.-based e-mail marketing agency Fлимп Media in mid-July to create a concise, branded call to action, including a two-paragraph description and links in the e-mail template listing event details, a bio for the keynote speaker and directions. Recipients also could click on a link to forward the e-mail invite to a friend. But the element that the chapter was most excited about was Fлимп's ability to embed video inside its e-mails.

"The emotional connection we could make with an audio-visual message versus a print message or a static message was very compelling [to United Way]," says Fлимп CEO Wayne Wall. Canady and a United Way copywriter put together a script for Angie Rodriguez, a once-troubled youth turned community leader slated to speak at the event, and Krissy Davis, a partner at the Boston office of financial services company Deloitte & Touche LLP, the primary corporate sponsor for the breakfast. Fлимп hired a videographer to direct.

Wall says that through similar campaigns, Fлимп determined that two minutes is too long and 30 seconds too short for a video to have the desired impact, so the United Way video ran a minute in length. Fлимп made sure that recipients could click on a link directing them to an invitation landing page if they were unable to view the video in the template. The typical cost of a similar campaign runs about \$2,000, but Fлимп executed United Way's partially pro-bono. The total cost in this case was \$1,000.

METRICS

United Way sent two e-mails to its e-mail database of 4,600 people, the first on Sept. 2 and the second on Oct. 1 for the Oct. 8 event. Through forwarding, the message reached about 6,000 people, Canady says. Approximately 63% of recipients who watched the video registered for the event, according to Fлимп. The United Way Women's Breakfast had 965 attendees, an increase of 28% from the prior year's event; \$409,826 was raised from attendees, a 97% percent improvement compared with 2008. Canady says other chapter colleagues are interested in learning more about Fлимп and using video integration in promoting events. **m**

ORGANIZATION	UNITED WAY OF MASSACHUSETTS BAY AND MERRIMACK VALLEY, BOSTON
APPROXIMATE ANNUAL FUNDRAISING INCOME	\$50 MILLION
CAMPAIGN BUDGET, 2008	\$10,000
CAMPAIGN BUDGET, 2009	\$1,000
BREAKFAST FUNDRAISING INCOME, 2008	\$208,043
BREAKFAST FUNDRAISING INCOME, 2009	\$409,826
ATTENDANCE	2008: 756 2009: 965
VIDEO E-MAIL VIEWERS WHO REGISTERED	63%
MARKETING STAFF	11 (7 AT UNITED WAY, 4 AT FLIMP MEDIA)

Sources: Alicia Canady, United Way; Wayne Wall, Fлимп Media

To see the video e-mail in action, go to MarketingPower.com/marketingnewsblog. And for more on e-mail best practices, check out "Five Email Sins to Avoid," a white paper from **AMA** content partner Blackbaud.

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