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Unicorns and Rainbows and Care Bears | Giving Tuesday with Ephraim Gopin - Transcript

[Speaker 1]

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Charity Therapy. And happy Thanksgiving to any of our US listeners who are tuning in on release day. Also, thank you.

We are entering the biggest giving days of the year. So today we're bringing back one of our all time favorite episodes with Ephraim Gopin, all about Giving Tuesday and year end fundraising. You're going to learn so much from this conversation, and I hope you enjoy.

Welcome to Charity Therapy, the podcast where we explore the ups and downs of the nonprofit sector and answer your burning questions. I'm your host, Jess Birken, owner of Birken Law Office, and I'm excited you're here. Imagine hanging out with me and my super smart, funny nonprofit expert pals.

You get to ask them anything about your nitty gritty nonprofit life and get their wisdom for free. Whether you're a seasoned pro or just strapping on your nonprofit boots, we're here to share stories and remind you, you're not alone on this journey. So get ready to join the conversation and bring me the tough questions.

I ain't scared. Ready to rock? Let's dive in.

Hello and welcome to this episode of Charity Therapy. I'm so happy to welcome Ephraim Gopin back to the podcast. Ephraim is the nonprofit fundraising and marketing expert behind agency 1832 Communications.

Thanks for being here, Ephraim.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, a pleasure. Thanks for having me, Jess.

[Speaker 1]

Now, okay, folks, if you know Ephraim on Twitter, which if you don't, you should totes be over there because we're tearing it up on Twitter all the time and it's super fun. But if you're over there, and you follow Ephraim, then you would already know that he hates Giving Tuesday with a passion. And that's what we're here to talk about today.

So first, I want to ask you, is your problem like specifically with Giving Tuesday? Or do you just really dislike all sort of like state or national statewide giving days?

[Speaker 2]

City and statewide giving days, two thumbs up. Giving Tuesday, two thumbs down. And that's everything in a nutshell.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, well, I'm sure we're going to expand on that. So before I like, I'm going to resist the urge to go down that rabbit hole. And let's just dig into our questions because I feel like this will be elucidated as we go through here.

So let's just dig right in with our first question. Here we go. I am the fundraising director at my nonprofit, and I've been trying to get my team to be more data driven about our strategies.

After reviewing all our 2021 campaigns, I'm not happy with how our Giving Tuesday campaign went. We had a really high goal, but we didn't meet it. We sent emails the week before and we sent letters to catch people in the giving mood around Thanksgiving.

So I'm not sure what else to do. What are we doing wrong?

[Speaker 2]

I'm going to start with who said you did anything wrong. I think you did something right. You tried something new.

You tried fundraising at a different time of year, maybe than usual. You set goals for a fundraising campaign, and you went out and you tried to meet them. I don't think you did anything wrong.

That's the first thing. So take Giving Tuesday out of the equation. You tried.

And to be perfectly honest, most nonprofits are not risk takers. They're not bold. They're not willing to test.

You were. So kudos to you. Kudos to you.

We'll start with that. Number two, I would give two pieces of advice. Number one, your assumption is that people are in a giving mood around Thanksgiving.

I'm not 100% sure that that's accurate. You have to remember that around Thanksgiving, people are in a giving mood, yes, for certain things, maybe for homeless shelters, food banks, and that type of thing, but not in the same way that they're in a giving mood in December at year's end. And we'll talk about that a little bit later.

The second thing is people around Thanksgiving are, there's family, it's the high season for flying, I believe it's the highest trafficked weekend of the entire year. You have to remember that there's also Black Friday, Cyber Monday is around that is around Thanksgiving. So people's minds and emails, certainly, their inboxes are filled, filled with deals for shopping for presents for the holidays.

And that's kind of where their minds might be. So are they in a giving mood around Thanksgiving? Yes.

Is it the same giving mood as around the December holidays? No, no, my opinion.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I love that you're pointing that out. Because I had never really taken the time to think about that. But that's dead on.

It's like if your mission is like, technology, literacy, or something like who cares? Nobody's thinking about you at Thanksgiving time. You're absolutely right there.

We're thinking about food, and it's cold out if you live somewhere where there's winter. I mean, you're thinking, I can't believe I never thought about this. Oh my god, I feel so dumb because that is absolutely genius.

No, but seriously, though, that is like, duh, of course. And the whole your inbox is completely flooded with all this other junk. And not to mention people are just like, let's be real, like the stress, the family stuff, the holidays, the like travel logistics, the hosting logistics that you know, if you're somewhere that celebrates Thanksgiving, which they are, that's obviously in the US.

So that's like a US bias. But like, yeah, like, no, I'm sorry, they're not thinking about your mission potentially.

[Speaker 2]

So fully to you. That is correct. The other thing I would consider is again, I'm going to start with the positive.

You set goals. A lot of nonprofits don't necessarily set goals for their campaigns. Raise as much as we can.

That's not right. You actually set goals. Now you didn't meet your goals.

You didn't fail. What you did was again, you tested something I want you to go back and review those goals. And I want you to see if those goals were smart goals.

Were they attainable? Were they achievable? Were there was it something you actually could do?

Or was it just a number you picked out of a hat? You you do you know, do you really know your donors? Do you know how your email fundraising and marketing works or how it should work or how it could work better?

Take all that into account. Review it and then you'll do much better next year. Because you will have reviewed all your goals.

And you'll know this works. This doesn't. That's a positive to me again.

So you set goals, review them and see where you could do better and what worked and then learn from that experience.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I love that too. Like don't just throw it all up mail throw your hands in there and be like, well, it didn't work. We failed.

Totally.

[Speaker 2]

No, no, no, no, we can learn we can learn from the successes. But I'm also a big fan of learning from the failures. And the more we learn, the better we are at our jobs.

[Speaker 1]

Right on. Let's move on. Question two, my new nonprofit applied for tax exemption this past June, we kind of like a lot of my nonprofits in these questions, which always just irritates me.

Okay, anyway, my new nonprofit applied for tax exemption this past June. And we there we go. We were hoping to get our c3 status by November.

The plan was to launch our fundraising plans. Okay, weird writing. The plan was to launch our fundraising with a giving Tuesday campaign.

When people are thinking about giving again, we have busted that myth. But we haven't gotten our status yet. I'm really worried about starting to ask for donations.

After this, since I know a lot of people do all their yearly giving around the holidays, help.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, let's take that apart one, right?

[Speaker 1]

I definitely have some views on this one, too.

[Speaker 2]

Yes, I'm going to take this from the fundraising and marketing side. Number one, from the data, we know that about a third of all giving happens in December, certainly in those last three weeks of the year. So you are correct in wanting to launch a campaign, not necessarily around giving Tuesday, but let's say in December, giving Tuesday usually falls out in November.

So I'll say December number two, 12% of all giving in the United States takes place in the last 72 hours of the year. Okay, so there's big bucks billions being given in that last month, let alone last three days of the year. So you are right in wanting to, let's say launch an appeal or a campaign during that time, that would be a good time.

Again, that's the law of averages that might not be good for your donors. Now, having said that, you're just starting out a nonprofit. So I don't know if you have a donor base.

Now, if you don't have a donor base, and nobody knows who you are, December is going to be a very tough time for you to launch a campaign. December is a time when you already the relationships you have, and you build on those and you're getting donations in, it's gonna be very hard time to launch something completely new. In fact, I would suggest, wait till you get the C3 status and launch in January or February when it's much quieter out there.

There's less news around giving and around nonprofits, you'll have more of an opportunity to get the word out and tell people and let them know about your mission, and who you're helping and how donors can solve a problem in their community. That's what I would do. So I'd wait until you have that status and then go away from giving Tuesday or end of year and launch

at a time when it's more convenient for the prospective supporter who would want to, oh, I didn't know about them.

I might be interested in them. That would be my advice.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, so a couple things here just from my take. We don't know about this questioner's nonprofit, but there's one of two things. 98% of the time when I'm working with somebody that's just getting their C3 status, ain't nobody know about you.

You know, once in a great while, I'll be working with somebody where they're like, kind of like, oh my god, we blew up, it went viral, whatever. We've like got all this support and like, we're backing into this now. But the overwhelming majority of the time, the only people that know about you are the people you know.

And so you're not, you don't, your first campaigns are not going to be like this whole thing where you magically get your C3 status and suddenly, the heavens open, money falls from the sky, as if some, you know, magical switch gets flipped that everyone just learns about you because you're a C3.

[Speaker 2]

Jess, isn't that how fundraising works? It's all unicorns and rainbows and care bearers, isn't it?

[Speaker 1]

Once you get that C3 status, money just comes. One time I had a guy tell me he wanted to get the C3 status for the nonprofit, so he could get one third of his money from the government,

because public charity meant that they like slid you an envelope or something. But I don't think like this person's putting the cart before the horse.

You're probably your early supporters are going to be all people you know anyway, and you're dead on like, don't worry about this. They're not trying to cram in their end of year giving. I want to circle back to that really quick because that statistic is insane.

Is there more? How much do we know about that statistic? Like what do we know what the size of the gifts are in those last three days?

Are these huge gifts? Are these people for tax reasons that are moving big amounts of money? What's the deal there?

[Speaker 2]

So actually, about a week ago, I went to look and I couldn't find I didn't find the information I wanted to be able to answer your question. So I don't know, big gifts, small gifts, midsize gifts, what's coming in, and necessarily from who. What I know is 12% of all giving is coming in, in those last three days.

It doesn't matter if it's small, large, midsize, it's all coming in. Now, could it be the tax incentives? It definitely plays into it.

Do the holiday season play this holiday season play into it? Yes. Is the fact that all nonprofits rushed to do their campaigns in December in those last three days play into it?

Yes. It's a what I consider to be an amalgamation of factors. But you're talking raising a ton of money during those last three days.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, that's fascinating. God, you know, you just kind of wish you could pull all of the data out of the system. But of course it doesn't work like that.

Okay, so here we go. Last question. Over my years working in fundraising, I've realized a lot of the big general giving days like Giving Tuesday are pretty overblown.

This year, I decided not to spend my time on any giving day campaigns and focus on things that have worked for us in the past. But I have a board member who seems to think I'm just being lazy. How can I convince her this is a good strategy for us?

[Speaker 2]

Oh boy, board members. They're fun. Okay, first of all, let's start with the positive.

Board members are giving their time, their experience, they're opening doors, they're volunteering. All good. Where I have a problem with board members might be in their bottom line demand that everything is about the almighty dollar.

Fundraising and marketing are about building relationships, not money, folks. When a board member comes to me and says you're being lazy because you didn't do a Giving Tuesday campaign, that says to me that board member is all about the dollar and that's it and nothing else. And so therefore, any day that people can give is a reason to go out there and give.

You didn't do it. You have backed up that we know what works and we can do better if we don't fundraise on Giving Tuesday. So that would be my answer to that board member.

Show them the data. A lot of times, at least in my experience, board members may not be privy to the data and your experience. All they see is a budget and they see how much was raised and what are expenses and hiring and firing.

Share with them. Go to that board member very kindly, nicely and say here's why we didn't. Show them what works better.

Show them that a campaign in March or a year-end campaign or a July campaign or an event, whenever it is, works better. Share that with them and show them you're not being lazy. You're actually doing what works.

Now, consider that I always also say one of my favorite hashtags is always be testing. So it could be you have data that backs up don't do anything on Giving Tuesday. You might want to consider doing something else on Giving Tuesday, which could work, such as Gratitude Tuesday, which is one of my favorite things about that day.

I don't like Giving Tuesday. Gratitude Tuesday is one of my favorite. Get on the phone.

Get your volunteers together. Do a phone-a-thon. Call every single donor and say thank you on that day.

All you're doing is saying thank you. That's it. Nothing else.

Now, I can add what you can, you know, once you have them on the phone and you're not making an ask, you can ask them, for example, for their origin story. How did you find out about our organization? What program do you like the most?

Why do you support us? What change would you like in the community? Make phone calls.

Call it Gratitude Tuesday because when you do your year end campaign, which follows right after Giving Tuesday, donors will remember the gratitude and they will give and they will give in big numbers. That's what you should be doing.

[Speaker 1]

Value bomb right there.

[Speaker 2]

Bingo. Yes. So that would be my answer.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. You shouldn't have even said that. That's such good advice.

That should just be like, everyone needs to send a FRYM \$5 right now. That's a great idea.

[Speaker 2]

We're going to do an AFRYM-a-thon. I like this.

[Speaker 1]

AFRYM-a-thon! Our call lines are now open. You can send AFRYM \$5 by texting.

[Speaker 2]

There you go. See? This could work.

I see a new business idea. But to the question, honestly, have a very open, honest, candid conversation with the board member and explain to them. Here's what works.

Here's what we know doesn't. Maybe you've done a Giving Tuesday campaign in the past and it bombed. Show them what you did.

Explain to them. Maybe they have ideas to make a campaign better. Maybe they have ideas for other things.

Have that conversation. Board members are there to help. I know that sometimes they're breathing down your back.

I know that sometimes there are pain in the backside. Yeah. But on the other hand, some of them are there.

They genuinely want to help. You have to help them help you. Give them the tools they need and they, in turn, will turn around and they will help you make you better at your job, get better results at the end of the day by partnering with your board members.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. So I've got a whole little list of takeaways here. My sort of last one here was just hammering it home one more time.

Fundraising is about building relationships. You can't just sign up for a Giving Day and expect dollars to come, right? And the sort of counterpart to that is it is okay to educate your board on why you do or don't do this and use your data to help you tell that story, right?

I also think a great takeaway is, yes, a ton of giving happens in the last quarter of the calendar year and 12% of it happens in the last three days of the year. So don't freak out about Giving Tuesday. It may not even be your day, right?

And because we already talked about, don't just assume that your mission is on the top of people's minds at the November, Giving Tuesday, Thanksgiving time of year. Think it through. It might not be on their radar, and that's why your campaign is going to suck.

So it may not just be for you, you know? And then I think finally and fundamentally, it's almost more important to set fundraising goals than it is to meet them. Like, have smart goals, put thought into the goals, and don't call yourself a failure just because you missed the mark, right?

It's important to have a plan and a process behind what you do and not just throw spaghetti at the wall and see what sticks.

[Speaker 2]

I will co-sign every single one of those. Please keep in mind, everyone, two hashtags. Always Be Learning, Always Be Testing.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, totally. Love those, especially the Always Be Learning. I've never done learning. Learning is the best. Super fun. If you don't like to learn, just go away. Oh, well, thanks so much for joining me today. If folks want to connect with you and get on your Twitter or learn about your services, where can we find you online, my dear?

[Speaker 2]

First of all, thank you, Jess, for having me on the podcast. Always a pleasure talking shop with you. If people want to learn more about my agency, 1832communications.com, and of course, I'm always happy for people to connect with me on Twitter and on LinkedIn. Find me by my name, Ephraim Gopin.

[Speaker 1]

There you go. Folks, if you enjoyed this episode, do me a huge favor. Share it with a friend. Rate, review, subscribe in your podcast app. It really does make a difference. And if you have a question or a story to share, I'd love to hear from you. So send me a note online at charitytherapy.show or leave me a voice memo by calling 612-208-9120. Thanks for listening. All right, folks, that's our show.

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About the Author



Hi, I'm Jess Birken.

I'm the owner of Birken Law Office, I help nonprofits solve problems so they can quit worrying and get back to what matters most – The Mission. I'm not like most attorneys, I actually have an outgoing personality, and – like you – I like to think outside the box. Most of my clients are passionate and have an entrepreneurial spirit. I'm like that too. My goal is to help you crush it. Getting bogged down in the minutia sucks the joy out of the important stuff. My clients want to do the work – not the paperwork.

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