

# Nonprofit Communications Trends

# 2014

#nptrends14



Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com

Download the Full Report at  
[npmg.us/2014](http://npmg.us/2014)

# Are we normal? Are we doing the right thing? Who's right in this disagreement?

Most of the questions we get at Nonprofit Marketing Guide from nonprofits are some version of “Are we normal?” or “Are we making good choices?” or “I’m having a disagreement with a colleague – who’s right?”

With this fourth annual edition of the **Nonprofit Communications Trends Report**, we put some real data behind our answers to those questions.

We can’t tell you if what you are doing is the *right* thing for your organization without talking to you, but we *can* tell you **what other nonprofits are doing**.

We can also use this survey data to highlight **potential sources of conflict** within your organization, so that you can be more aware, and perhaps question some of your own assumptions.

Watch for these boxes, which identify some of these potential sources of conflict that you might want to discuss within your organization.



If you need help responding to any of the trends you see in this report, we at Nonprofit Marketing Guide are here for you. **We provide training, practical advice, and coaching services to nonprofits** on communications, marketing, and fundraising. **You can learn more at [nonprofitmarketingguide.com](http://nonprofitmarketingguide.com).**

*Kivi*



Get this report and  
additional infographics at  
**[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2014](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2014)**  
or [npmg.us/2014](http://npmg.us/2014)

You can reach Kivi Leroux Miller, president of NonprofitMarketingGuide.com and author of this report, for interviews at (336) 870-0251, [kivi@ecoscribe.com](mailto:kivi@ecoscribe.com) or @kivilm.

# 2014 Highlights

Use the hashtag  
**#nptrends14**

Refer others to  
**[npmg.us/2014](http://npmg.us/2014)**

Here are some highlights from the report, each in a tweetable 140 characters or less:

## On Goals

Top nonprofit comm goals for 2014: acquiring new donors, engaging community, general brand awareness <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

Only 34% of nonprofit executive directors picked donor retention as a top comm goal for 2014. <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

Only 16% of nonprofit communications directors picked donor retention as a top comm goal for 2014. <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

Large nonprofits more likely to prioritize brand awareness and thought leadership than smaller ones. <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

Small nonprofits more likely to prioritize volunteer recruitment and retention than larger ones. <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

Does nonprofit size, mission, region, or staff's age or title alter the comm plan? Sometimes. <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

## On Challenges

Lack of time, money, clear strategy top list of challenges for nonprofit communicators in 2014. <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

57% of nonprofit communicators feel overworked. 5% are underworked. 38% say just right. <http://npmg.us/2014> #nptrends14

# 2014 Highlights, Continued

## On Favorite Communications Channels

Nonprofit communicators to spend most time on e-newsletters, Facebook, and event marketing in 2014. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

Nonprofit communicators say in-person presentations, e-newsletters, print fundraising appeals most effective. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

In-person events more important to smaller nonprofits than larger ones. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

Media relations and print marketing more important to larger nonprofits than smaller ones. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

## On Social Media

Most important social media for nonprofits? Facebook (95%), Twitter (64%), YouTube (38%), LinkedIn (26%) <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

Nonprofits most likely to experiment with Instagram and Pinterest in 2014, then YouTube and LinkedIn. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

## On Email

A third of nonprofits will email fundraising or advocacy appeals at least monthly in 2014. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

Most nonprofits (59%) will send an e-newsletter at least once a month in 2014. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

Associations communicate with members via email more frequently than other types of nonprofits. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

## On Print/Direct Mail

Twice a year direct mail fundraising is most popular with nonprofits for 2014. 15% won't do it at all. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

Quarterly print newsletters most popular with nonprofits in 2014. A third won't do one at all. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

Religious organizations more likely to favor print communications than other types of nonprofits. <http://npgm.us/2014> #nptrends14

# Who Completed the Survey?

The trends you'll find in this report come from a survey fully completed by **2,135 nonprofits**.

This year we asked two new demographic questions about the survey participant's job title and age, in addition to their organization's budget size, location, and mission.

**Budget:** 50.2% have annual organizational budgets under \$1 million; 49.8% have annual budgets over \$1 million.

**Location:** 88% are in the United States, 6% in Canada, and 6% in 42 other nations.

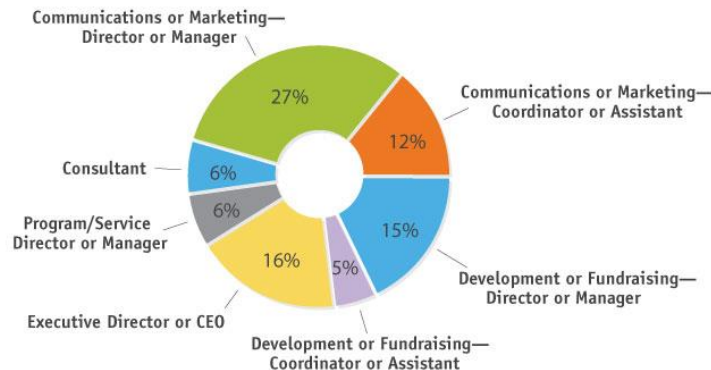
**Mission:** 23% are in Human Services, Housing, Food, Jobs; 16% are in Education; 10% are in Health, Disease, Medical Research.

**Job Title:** 60% are executive directors, communications directors, or development directors. 40% are in communications/marketing; 20% are in development/fundraising.

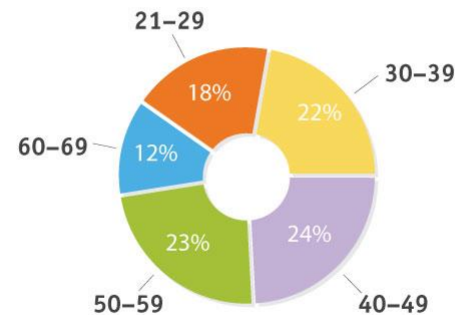
**Age:** All age groups in the workforce are well-represented.

The survey was conducted online in November 2013 by NonprofitMarketingGuide.com, using SurveyMonkey.com, with additional statistical analysis by MarketSight.com.

Current positions of survey participants



Age groups of survey participants



## Big Picture Goals

# Why Are Nonprofits Communicating?

This year we asked about goals in two ways. First we asked which broad category of goals was most important to success in their position. Our previous research and coaching with clients tells us that **many disagreements about nonprofit communications are really about unclear or conflicting goals**, especially related to the relative importance of short-term fundraising.

**A little more than half of survey participants** felt like they were **responsible for a combination** of fundraising, marketing or community engagement, and programmatic or service goals.

On the other hand, a **little less than half** felt their success was **more directly linked to one type of goal**: marketing or community engagement (18%), fundraising (16%), and programmatic or service goals (7%).



If you feel responsible for a combination of goals, try to get some clarity about priorities.

Which goal is really most important to your success in your position?



## Strategic Communications Goals

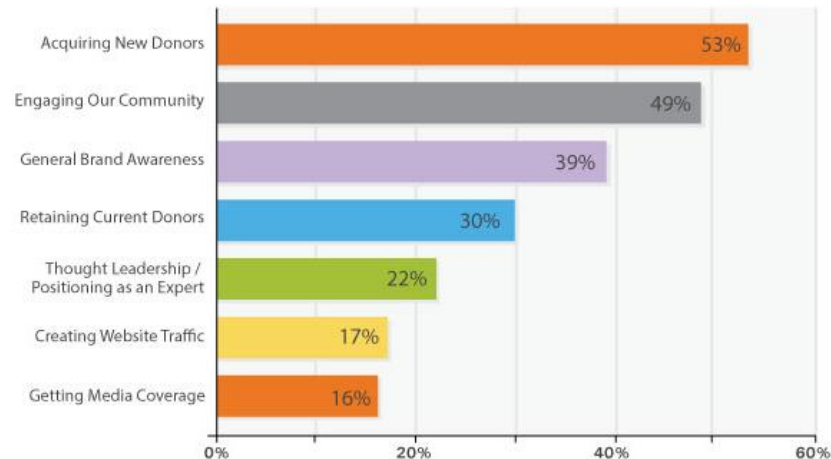
# What Are Nonprofits Trying to Achieve?

Next, we asked survey participants to select up to three of their most important goals for their communications strategies in 2014. As in 2013, we see a blend of fundraising and community engagement or marketing goals in the top responses.

**Acquiring new donors** (53%), **engaging our community** (49%) and **general brand awareness** (39%) were the clear stand-out answers, just as they were in 2013.

Not surprisingly, **communications staff and managers believe that engaging their community** is most important, while **development staff and managers believe that acquiring new donors** is most important. Executive directors also believe that donor acquisition is the top priority.

**Most important goals for nonprofit communications strategies in 2014**



It's important to value both **fundraising** and **community engagement** for long-term success.

Talk openly about how your nonprofit can work on both at the same time, with consistent messaging.



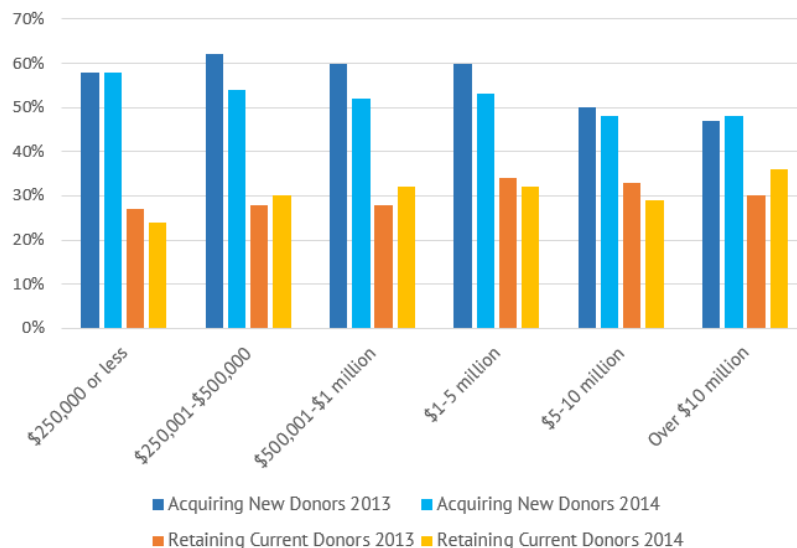
Everyone's Talking about It...

# What About Donor Retention?

Donor retention continues to be a hot topic . . . But are nonprofits doing more than talking about it? In our 2013 report, acquisition beat retention as a goal by nearly 2 to 1. In 2014, the number of nonprofits selecting retention as a top three goal held steady at 30%, while acquisition as a top three goal fell from 57% to 53%.

Larger organizations are more likely to strike a balance between the two (the orange/yellow bars are closer in height to the blue ones in the chart.) That's probably because bigger organizations tend to have more development and communications staff who can think more strategically about these questions, and larger organizations don't usually have quite the same start-up or fundraising crisis-survival mentalities that smaller nonprofits often do, which leads to more focus on acquisition.

**Donor Acquisition Versus Retention as Top Goals,  
by Nonprofit Budget Size,  
in 2013 and 2014**



**It's a common mistake to assume that the best way to raise money is always to get more new donors. In fact, donor retention strategies (additional gifts from current donors) often produce better results. For long-term success, you must do both.**

**Who believes donor retention is a top goal?**

**Development Directors – 64%**

**Executive Directors – 34%**

**Communications Directors – 16%**

**That's a big difference, so talk about it in your nonprofit to avoid conflict.**





# Which Communications Tools are Most and Least Important?

We asked participants to select **up to three communications tools** that were most important, somewhat important, and least important.

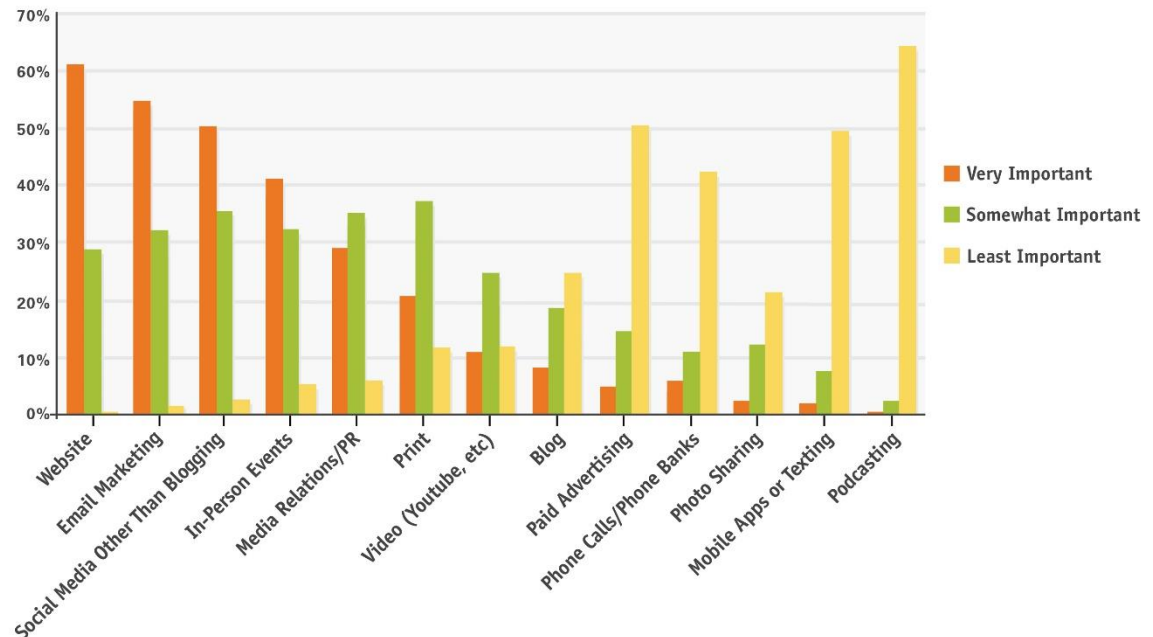
### The Big Six Hold Firm

As in 2011, 2012, and 2013, nonprofits identified as “very” important the same top six communications channels for 2013.

**Websites, email marketing, and social media other than blogging** are the most important tools, followed by **in-person events, media relations/PR, and print marketing**.

Social media and email continue to toggle back and forth in second and third place, with email beating social media in 2014.

### The most important communications channels in 2014



## Relative Importance of Communications Tools to Nonprofits in 2014

	Very Important + Somewhat Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Least Important
Website	91%	62%	29%	0%
Email Marketing	86%	54%	32%	2%
Social Media Other Than Blogging	86%	50%	36%	1%
In-Person Events	73%	41%	32%	4%
Media Relations/PR	63%	29%	34%	5%
Print Marketing	58%	21%	37%	12%
Video	36%	11%	25%	12%
Blog	28%	9%	19%	24%
Paid Advertising	18%	4%	14%	51%
Phone Calls/Phone Banks	17%	6%	11%	42%
Photo Sharing	14%	2%	12%	23%
Mobile Apps or Texting	11%	3%	8%	50%
Podcasting	3%	1%	2%	65%

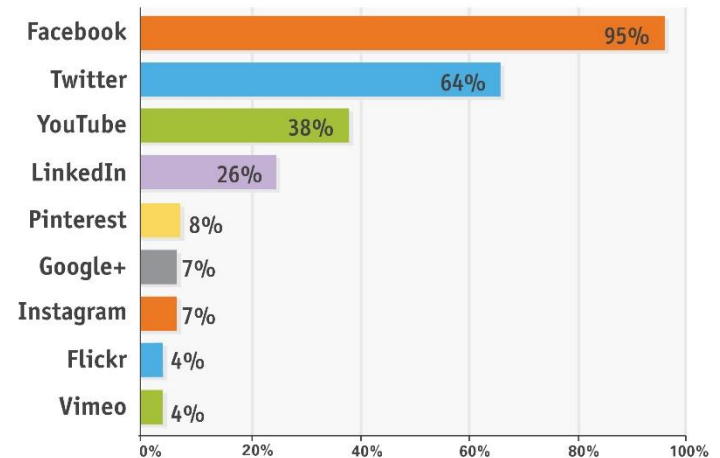
## Social Media

# Which Social Media Sites Are Nonprofits Using?

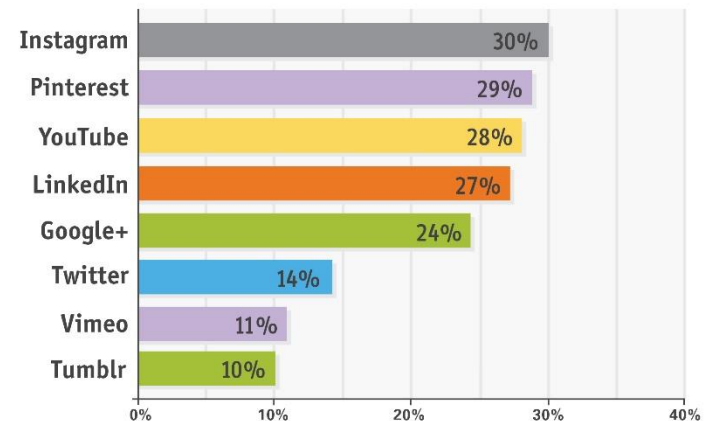
**Facebook** remains king of nonprofit social media with 95% identifying it as a top social media site. **Twitter** was selected as a most important social media site by 64% of nonprofits, followed by **YouTube** at 38% and **LinkedIn** at 26%. These results are very similar to the 2013 report.

We do see some **significant changes between 2013 and 2014** in where nonprofits say they will add or experiment with social media. **Instagram** surged from fifth place in 2013 to first place in 2014, with **Pinterest** falling to second place. **YouTube** and **LinkedIn** surpassed **Google+**, where the three were tied for third place in 2013.

Social media sites nonprofits expect to be the most important to communications strategies in 2014



Social media sites nonprofits expect to add or experiment with in 2014



## Email Fundraising and Advocacy

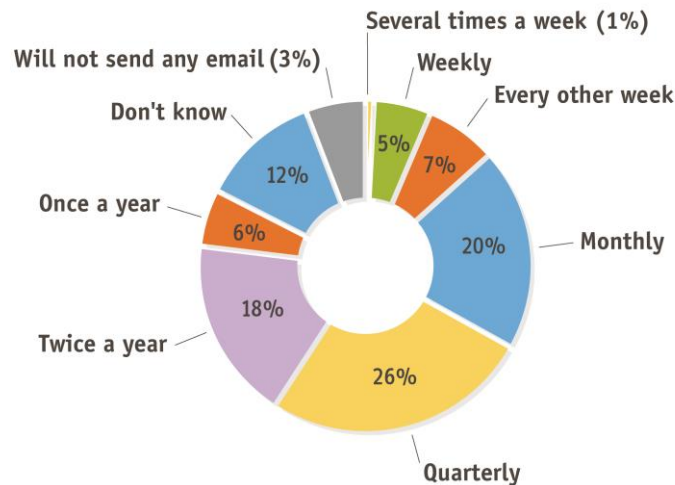
# How Often Do Nonprofits Send Email Appeals?

In previous surveys, we asked generally about email frequency. To better understand how nonprofits are using email, this year, we split the question into two: how often will you send an **email appeal (fundraising, advocacy or other direct call to action)** and how often will you send an **email newsletter (or other informational update)**.

Quarterly email appeals are the most popular frequency at 26%.

A third (33%) of nonprofits will email appeals at least monthly.

How often nonprofits expect to email appeals in 2014



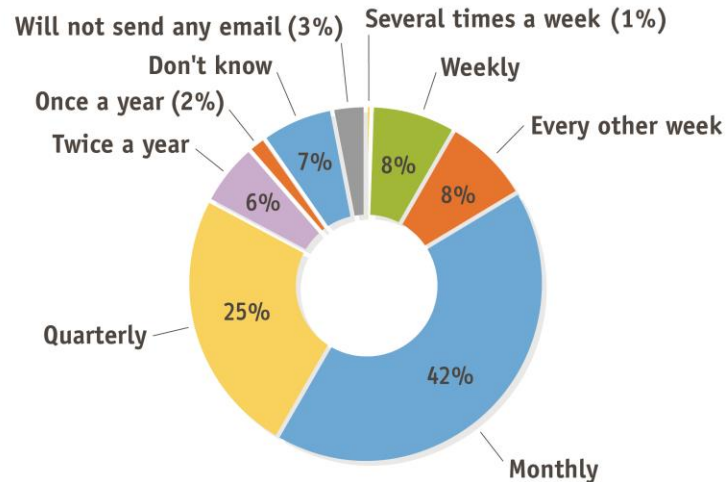
## Email Marketing

# How Often Do Nonprofits Send E-Newsletters?

Monthly email newsletters are the most popular frequency at 42%.

Most nonprofits (59%) will send an e-newsletter at least once a month.

How often nonprofits expect to email newsletters in 2014



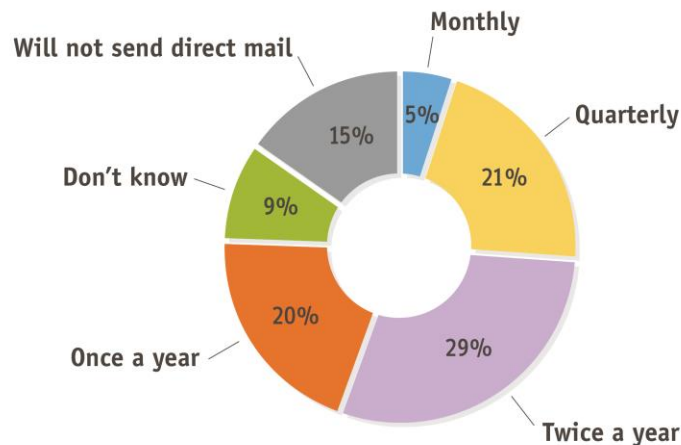
# How Often Do Nonprofits Send Direct Mail Appeals?

As with email, in previous surveys, we asked generally about direct mail frequency. To better understand how nonprofits are using direct mail, we changed the question in the same way we did for email: how often will you send a **direct mail (or print) appeal (fundraising, advocacy or other direct call to action)** and how often will you send a **direct mail (print) newsletter (or other informational update)**?

Twice a year print appeals are the most popular frequency at 29%.

15% of nonprofits don't plan to send print appeals in 2014.

How often nonprofits expect to direct mail appeals in 2014

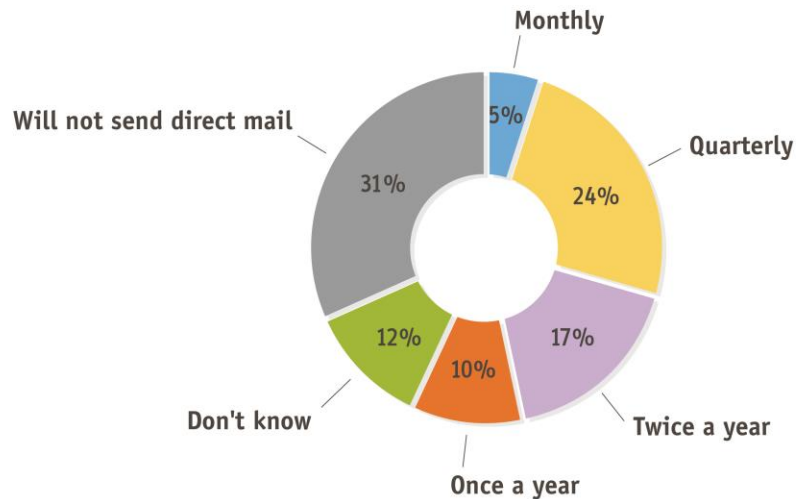


# How Often Do Nonprofits Send Print Newsletters?

Quarterly print newsletters are the most popular frequency at 24%.

A third (31%) of nonprofits don't plan to send print newsletters in 2014.

How often nonprofits expect to direct mail newsletters in 2014



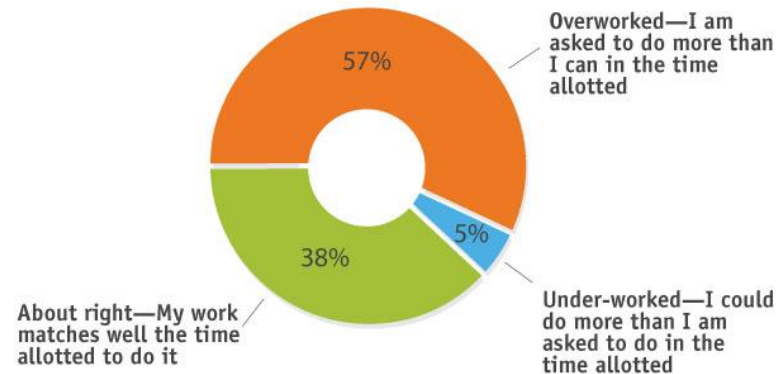
## Overworked, Underworked, or Just Right

# How Do Nonprofit Communicators Feel About Their Workloads?

After seeing reports about how overworked development directors feel, we decided to ask a question about workload too.

**A majority of survey participants in every position and every age group said they feel overworked.**

How nonprofit communicators feel about their workloads



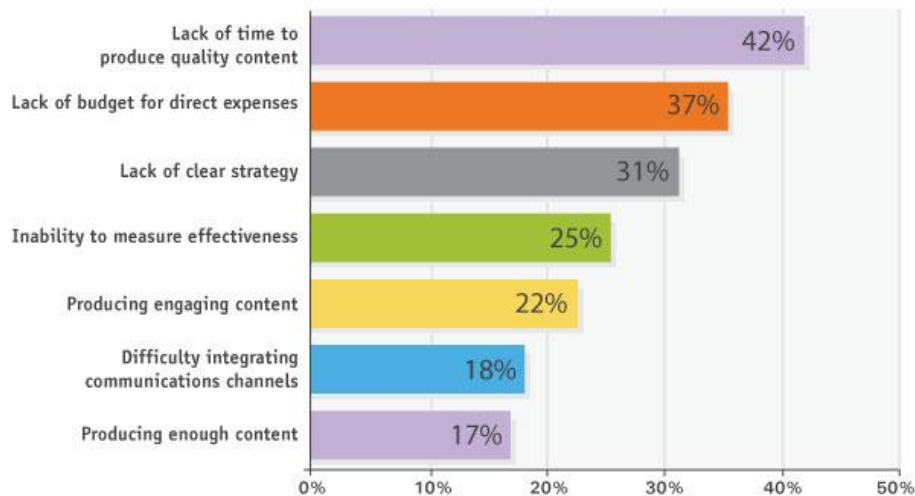


## What Gets in the Way

# What are the Biggest Challenges for Nonprofit Communicators?

As in 2013, **lack of time and money** top the list of challenges for nonprofit communicators. The order of the remaining challenges did shift somewhat from 2013 to 2014: **Lack of strategy** is now in third place instead of **inability to measure effectiveness**.

### Challenges nonprofits expect to have in 2014



### Why is she complaining?

Your position may affect which problems you think need the most attention.

**Executive directors** picked lack of budget for direct expenses as their top challenge.

**Communications and development directors/managers** selected lack of time to produce quality content as their top challenge.

**Communications and development coordinators/assistants** said lack of clear strategy was their top challenge.

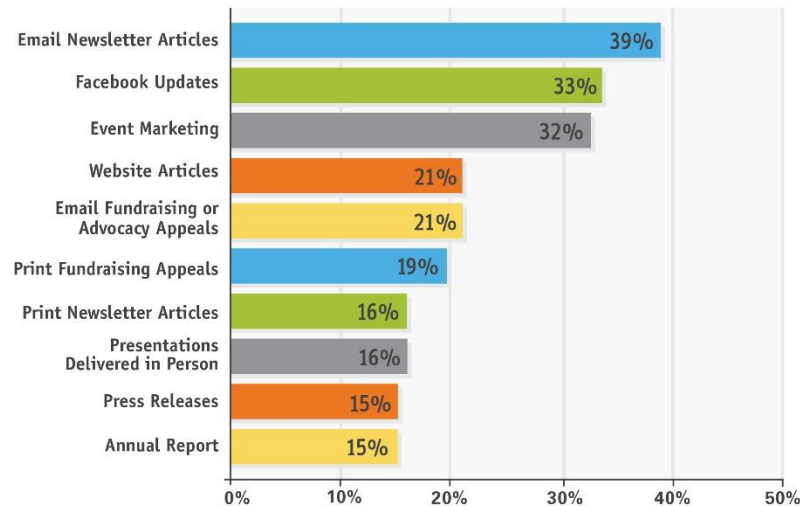


## Where Nonprofits Spend Their Communications Hours

# What Types of Content Consume the Most Time?

As in 2013, **email newsletter articles, Facebook updates, and event marketing** top the list of **time-consuming communications activities** for nonprofits. The overall order remains the same as 2013 with one exception: press releases dropped from sixth place to ninth place in the list for 2014.

### Types of content nonprofits expect to spend most of their time producing in 2014



### Why is she spending so much time on that?

**Communications directors** are more likely to spend time on website articles, blog posts, press releases, and videos than others.

**Development directors** are more likely to spend time on print and email appeals and annual reports than others.

**Executive directors** are more likely to spend time on presentations delivered in person and on Facebook updates than others.

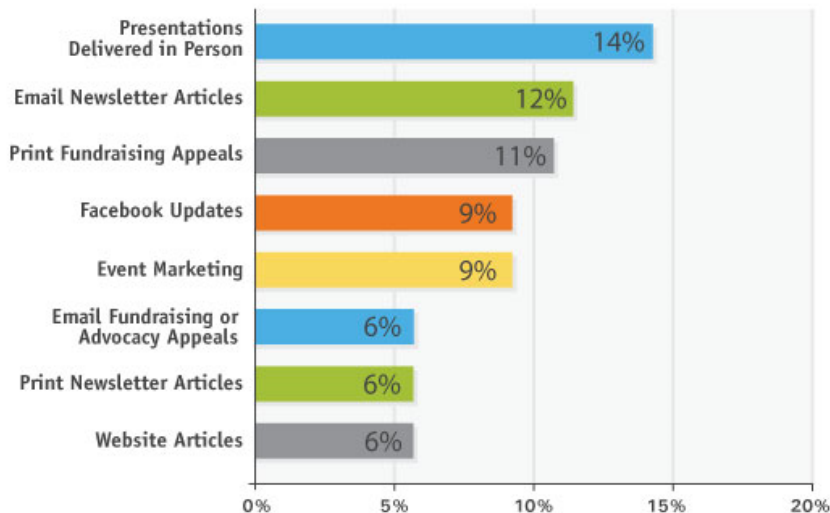


## What Works Best

# What Type of Content Gets the Best Results?

We asked the Nonprofit Marketing Guide community for suggested survey questions and this was a favorite: What one type of content do you think is most effective for your organization, regardless of the amount of time you spend producing it? **Presentations in person, email newsletter articles, and print fundraising appeals** topped the list.

### The most effective types of content



### Does that really work?

**Executive directors** picked presentations delivered in person as most effective.

**Communications directors** picked email newsletter articles as most effective.

**Development directors**  
Picked print fundraising Appeals as most effective.



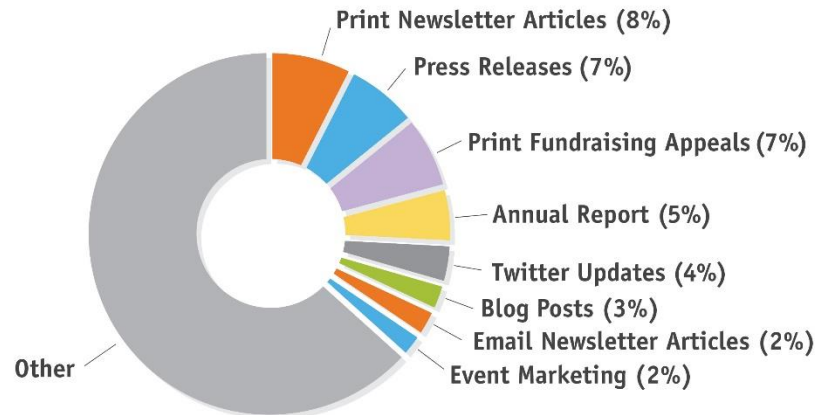
## Just Forget It!

# What Would You Stop Producing If You Could?

Here was another community-suggested question we added this year: What one thing would you stop producing if you could?

Many people elaborated in their specific choices with their organizations in the “Other” field, but from the list of content choices provided, **print newsletter articles**, **press releases**, and **print fundraising appeals** topped the list.

If in 2014 you could STOP producing one kind of content that you currently produce, what would it be?



Does **budget size** or **mission** of the nonprofit change the survey results?

What about the **job title** or **age** of the person who took the survey?

Why do we care?

Because in our training and coaching programs, **these factors are often mentioned as barriers** (rightly or wrongly) that get in the way of good communications strategy and tactics.

So this year, for the first time, we did some heavy-duty statistical analysis of the data (confidence level=99%, correcting for Type I errors, the whole bit). **We found that in most cases, there were few differences.**

**On the next few pages, we highlight the statistically significant differences we did find.**

## Variations in Communications Based on Budget Size

# Does Size Matter?

We compared nonprofits with **organizational budgets under and over \$1 million** and found the following significant differences\* related to top communications goals and “very important” communications tools.

**Larger organizations** are more likely to select **brand awareness and thought leadership** as top goals than smaller nonprofits. Larger organizations are also more likely to say that **media relations/PR and print marketing** are **very important** communications tools, compared to small nonprofits.

**Smaller organizations** are more likely to **prioritize acquiring new members, and acquiring and retaining volunteers** than larger nonprofits. Smaller nonprofits are also more likely to say that **in-person events** as a **very important** communications tool, compared to large nonprofits.

Selection as a Top Three Goal	Under \$1 million	Over \$1 million	Full Survey
Brand Awareness	36%	43%	40%
Thought Leadership	19%	25%	22%
Acquiring New Members	17%	11%	14%
Acquiring Volunteers	11%	5%	8%
Retaining Volunteers	4%	2%	3%

Selection of “Very Important” Communications Tools	Under \$1 million	Over \$1 million	Full Survey
In-person Events	46%	37%	42%
Media Relations/PR	26%	33%	29%
Print Marketing	18%	23%	21%

# Variations in Communications Based on Organizational Mission

## Does Mission Matter?

We asked survey participants to select from 10 categories of nonprofit missions. We found some interesting statistically significant\* differences in half of those categories.



### Human Services, Housing, Food & Jobs

**Most likely compared to other missions to . . .**

- Select acquiring new donors and retaining current donors as top goals

**Least likely compared to other missions to . . .**

- Select acquiring new participants or new members as a top goal
- Pick email marketing as a very important communications tool
- Say that they will not send an direct mail appeals or print newsletters



### Environment and Animals

**Most likely (along with Associations) compared to other missions to . . .**

- Select acquiring new members and retaining current members as top goals



## Religion

### Most likely compared to other missions to . . .

- Pick print marketing as a very important communications tool
- Send a print newsletter monthly

### Least likely compared to other missions to . . .

- Select getting media coverage as a top goal or media relations/PR as a very important communications tool
- Select LinkedIn as a most important social media site



## Association, Membership & Mutual Benefit

### Most likely compared to other missions to . . .

- Select acquiring new members and retaining current members as top goals
- Select thought leadership/positioning as an expert as a goal
- Send email appeals (fundraising, advocacy or other direct call to action) and e-newsletters several times a week or weekly
- Select LinkedIn and SlideShare as most important social media sites

### Least likely compared to other missions to . . .

- Select Facebook as a most important social media site





## Arts, Cultural and Humanities

**Most likely compared to other missions to . . .**

- Select acquiring new program participants as a top goal
- Pick Pinterest as a most important social media site

**Least likely compared to other missions to . . .**

- Select thought leadership/positioning as an expert as a goal

**No significant differences were found for nonprofits in these mission areas:**



**Health, Disease, and  
Medical Research**



**Education**



**Philanthropy or  
Grantmaking**



**International**



**Other Public Benefit  
Research or Advocacy**

## Variations in Communications Based on Position

# Does Job Title Matter?

We took a closer look at how three positions – executive directors, communications directors, and development directors – answered the survey.

We found several – but not surprising – statistically significant differences\* related to goals and “very important” communications channels.

### Executive Directors are more likely than the others to say . . .

- Meeting a combination of fundraising, marketing, and programmatic goals is important to their success

### Communications Directors are more likely than the others to say . . .

- Meeting marketing or community engagement goals are important to their success
- General brand awareness, thought leadership, and getting media coverage are top goals
- Websites, media relations/PR, and blogs will be very important communications tools

### Development Directors are more likely than the others to say . . .

- Meeting fundraising goals is important to their success
- Acquiring new donors and retaining current donors are top goals
- Print marketing, in-person events, and phone calls/phone banks will be very important communications tools

There was no significant variation on the questions about communications frequency with the exception of the email newsletter. **Communications directors** are much more likely than development directors or executive directors to say they will send out the e-newsletter **once or twice a month**. Development directors and executive directors were more likely to pick less frequent distribution.

## Variations in Communications Based on Age

# Does Age Matter?

Does the **age of your communications director or any other staff member matter** in how they would prioritize goals and communications channels? It's a sensitive question, but one that is often raised privately. The potential bias cuts both ways: Are younger people more likely to excel at online tactics? Are older people more likely to make better strategic decisions?

Let's put any assumptions aside and look at what the survey data says, which is that **there are few statistically significant\* differences in how people responded to the survey based on age.**

Here are **the few differences we did find:**

Survey participants in their **20s** are **more likely** than any other age group to select **general brand awareness** as a top three goal.

Survey participants **60 and older** are **more likely** than any other age group to select **acquiring new donors** as a top three goal. They are also **less likely** than any other age group to pick **social media** as a very important communications channel.

On the importance of various social media sites, people 50 and older were **less likely to say that Twitter was a most important** social media site compared to people under 40.

On social media sites they would add or experiment with, people in their **20s were more likely to pick Instagram**. People in their **40s were more likely to pick Tumblr**.

That's it.

### What would you assume?

In December 2013, we previewed the Trends Report results on a webinar hosted by Guidestar, with more than 500 people participating live. Before revealing results, we asked a few poll questions.

73% of webinar attendees assumed that the age of the survey participant would affect which communications tools were "very important."

69% of attendees thought age would influence which social media sites people would like to add or experiment with in 2014.



## Variations in Communications Based on U.S. Region

# Does Geography Matter?

Does the region of the U.S. where you work make a difference in your communications strategy? Nope.

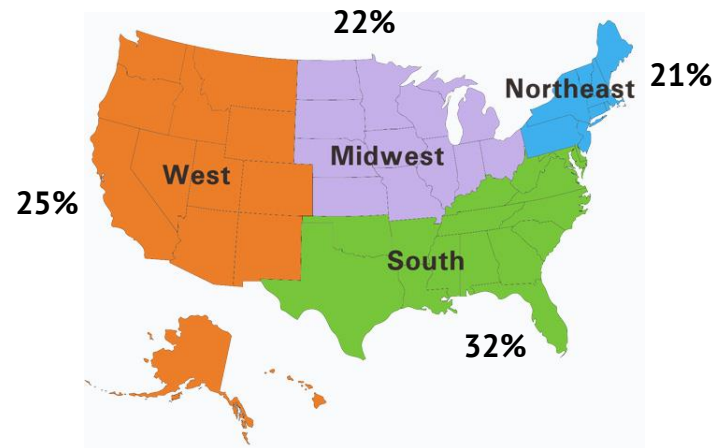
The only statistically significant\* difference we found when reviewing the data by the four U.S. Census regions was that nonprofits in the **Midwest are more likely than those in other regions to select acquiring new program participants** as a top three goal (at 21% versus 14% in the West and South, and 15% in the Northeast).

### States with **Most** Survey Participants

1. California (227)
2. New York (128)
3. Texas (117)
4. Pennsylvania (86)
5. North Carolina (75)

### States with **Fewest** Survey Participants

1. South Dakota (1)
2. Wyoming (3)
3. Hawaii (4)
4. North Dakota (4)
5. Rhode Island (4)



# What Excites You about 2014?

**In the answers to this open-ended question, we saw these primary themes:**

- New opportunities to reach people and the potential to expand their impact
- Learning about new strategies and tools
- Improving communications practices and taking them to new levels



# What Scares You about 2014?

**In the answers to this open-ended question, we saw these primary themes:**

- **Lack of time and funding to do a good job**
- **Unrealistic management expectations about what can be achieved with any particular communications strategy or tactic – and failing to meet those expectations**
- **Being overwhelmed by the demands of the job**





**Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com**



This work is licensed under  
a Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial-  
ShareAlike 4.0 License

At Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com, **we provide online training, practical advice, and group coaching to nonprofits** on communications, marketing, and fundraising.

**Learn more at [nonprofitmarketingguide.com](http://nonprofitmarketingguide.com).**

**Free weekly e-newsletter:**

[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/enews](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/enews)

**Free daily blog:**

[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/blog](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/blog)

**Free “My Nonprofit Marketing Guide” membership:**

[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/members](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/members)

**Online training:**

[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/training](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/training)

**Consulting:**

[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/consulting](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/consulting)

**Mentoring/Coaching programs:**

[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/mentoring](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/mentoring)

**Download this report and related infographics:**

[NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2014](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2014)