

Sue Fidler Ltd **e-consultancy for charities**

Email data management

Third sector 19/09/07

Collecting emails is an easy way to build up the names of people who want to hear from you. Every charity, no matter how small, should be building up email lists and sending out regular email newsletters. It can cost as little as £50 to set up an account with an email service provider (ESP) and £10 a month to send out professional emails and cost per email decreases with more emails.

Asking for email addresses on all supporter communication is obvious, adding it to donation forms, campaign forms and all web based sign ups should be second nature. These emails are added to the central database because you have some other contact with the supporter. But you must ask for a data protection opt-in to receiving email. You can then add them to your ESP system's address book manager by exporting all emails with an opt in from your database.

Capturing email addresses via an "enews" sign up form on your website is even easier. As long as the reason is prominent you do not even need an opt-in, so long as you stick to just sending enews.

More difficult is to decide what to ask for. First name (for personalisation), Last Name and Email are a normal minimum. Many people are put off by you asking for a postal details – if you are only sending enews why do you need their address? Surveys and tests have shown that the number of people who sign up will significantly decrease if you ask for other contact information.

But some databases, and many database managers, are unwilling to add supporters to the database if you only have name and email. This can result in a political battle of wills and the outcome may depend more on the power of the team than the needs of the organisation.

A compromise is to recognise that getting emails is a great marketing tool which allows "enquirers" to have a gentle and non-aggressive relationship with the charity. IF they decide to donate, shop or campaign they will naturally complete more detailed forms and give their postal addresses. So either add them to the database using the email address as a matching field, or leave them off until they participate in a more engaged way. With an ESP system the email-only people can live in an address books until their postal address is needed.