

2012

**Nonprofit Communications
Trends Report**



Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com

Introduction

Welcome to our second annual survey of what nonprofits predict for their communications in the coming year.

The trends you'll find in this report come from 1,288 nonprofits in 42 countries, with 82% from the U.S. and 6% from Canada. The survey was conducted online in November 2011.

We asked nonprofits . . .

- In what shape is your marketing plan for 2012?
- Which communications tools do you see as very important, somewhat important, and least important to you in 2012?
- How often do you plan to email the typical person on your email list? How often do you plan to send direct mail?
- What excites you about your work in 2012?
- What scares you about your work in 2012?

In this year's survey, we also asked nonprofits to categorize themselves by budget size, location, and mission. We've noted some of the interesting variations in their answers based on budget in this report.

Available in January 2012

As we continue to review the data from the survey, in early 2012 we will release

- Infographics of the key trends in this report
- Trends by regions of the U.S. and Canada
- Trends by mission of the organization
- Additional analysis of what excites and scares nonprofit communicators in the coming year

I hope you find the 2012 Nonprofit Communications Trends report enlightening!



Kivi

Kivi Leroux Miller
President, Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com

Summary of Survey Results

This report is based on a survey of **1,288 nonprofits** in November 2011 conducted at **Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com**.

Nonprofits with budgets under \$1 million represent **54%** of survey participants; **46%** have budgets over \$1 million.

Nonprofits in **42** countries completed the survey, with **82%** from the United States and **6%** from Canada.

- **Only ¼ of nonprofits (24%) have a written and approved marketing plan for 2012.** 59% have a written plan or informal notes for themselves only, not formally approved by leadership.
- **Email marketing and websites will be the most important** communications tools for nonprofits in 2012, followed by Facebook; print (newsletters, direct mail); in-person events; and media relations/PR. **These are the Big Six of nonprofit communications.**
- The importance of social media channels like **Facebook, Twitter, and blogging held steady** between 2011 and 2012, with only **video gaining in importance.**
- **Monthly emailing is the most popular frequency** for nonprofits at 43%, followed by every other week at 19% and quarterly at 14%. **More than three-quarters of nonprofits (78%) plan to email their typical supporters at least monthly.**
- **Quarterly direct mail is the most popular frequency** for nonprofits at 39%, followed by twice a year at 31%. **Only 12% expect to send direct mail to their typical supporters at least monthly.**
- Nonprofit communicators are **excited** about **investing in new websites, having real plans in place for the first time, integrating communications channels to increase effectiveness, and using social media to reach new supporters.**
- Nonprofit communicators are **scared** about **vying for supporters' attention; trying something new, especially social media; the slow economy and lack of investment in marketing; and being overworked and burning out.**

Download this report and additional infographics and analysis at NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

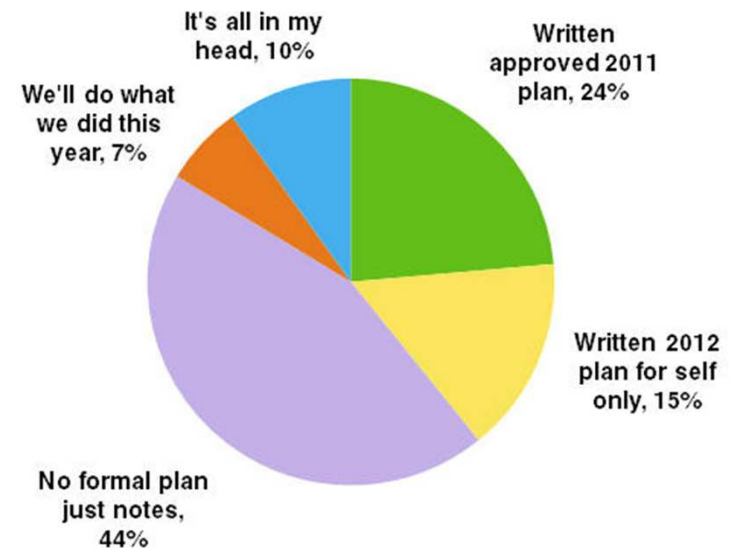
Marketing Plans

When you put a plan in writing, you increase the likelihood that you'll follow through on it. **Yet only 1/4 (24%) of nonprofits have a written and approved marketing plan for 2012.**

Three-fifths of nonprofit communicators (59%) have written plans or informal notes for themselves only, not formally approved by leadership. Seven percent will just do what they did last year. Ten percent have plans only in their heads.

The \$5 million budget mark appears to be where the shift between informal and formal planning begins to take place. For organizations with budgets under \$5 million, only 20% have a written and approved plan for 2012. Of those with budgets over \$5 million, 42% had a formal and approved plan.

What Best Describes Your 2012 Marketing or Communications Plan?



Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

Communications Tools

Nonprofits have more communications tools available to them than ever before. This survey listed **14 options** and asked participants to select **up to three** that were most important, somewhat important, and least important.

- Email Marketing - E-Newsletters
- Print (Newsletters-Direct Mail)
- Website
- Blog
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Video (YouTube etc.)
- Photo Sharing
- Audio (e.g. Podcasts)
- Media Relations/PR
- Paid Advertising
- Phone Calls/Phone Banks
- Texting
- In-Person Events

The Big Six: Most Important Nonprofit Communications Channels

As in 2011, nonprofits identified as “very” important the same top six communications channels for 2012. **Websites and email marketing are, by far, most important**, followed by **print (newsletter, direct mail); in-person events; Facebook; and media relations/PR.**

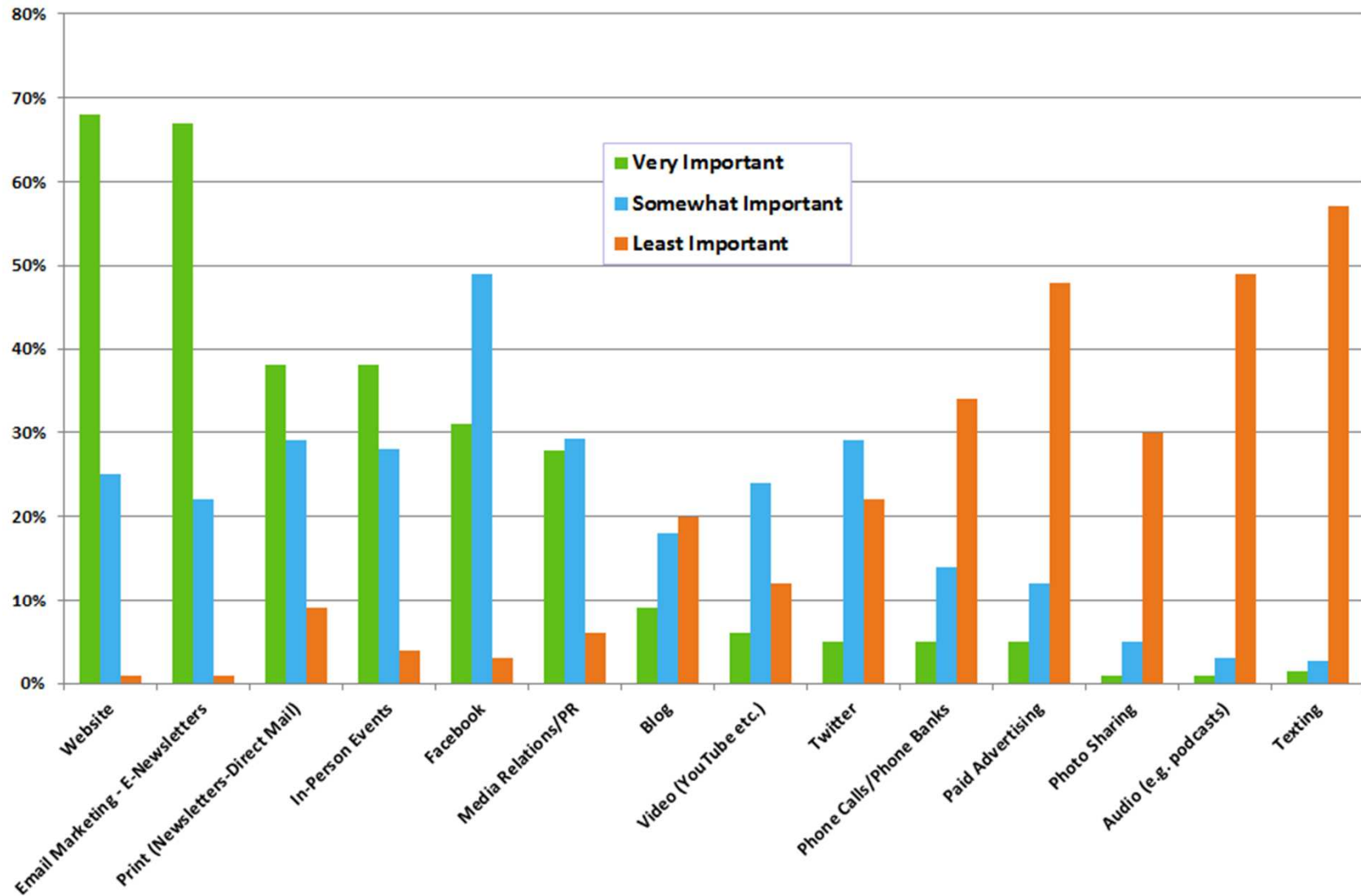
Texting, audio (e.g. podcasts), and photo sharing are the least important communications tools for nonprofits in 2012.

Communications Tools

Communications Tool	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Least Important
Website	68%	25%	1%
Email Marketing - E-Newsletters	67%	22%	1%
Print (Newsletters-Direct Mail)	38%	29%	9%
In-Person Events	38%	28%	4%
Facebook	31%	49%	3%
Media Relations/PR	28%	29%	6%
Blog	9%	18%	20%
Video (YouTube etc.)	6%	24%	12%
Twitter	5%	29%	22%
Paid Advertising	5%	12%	48%
Phone Calls/Phone Banks	5%	14%	34%
Photo Sharing	1%	5%	30%
Audio (e.g. podcasts)	1%	3%	49%
Texting	1%	3%	57%

Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

Relative Importance of Communications Tools to Nonprofits in 2012



Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

Online Communication Dominates

When you combine the “very important” and “somewhat important” rankings, you see instantly how **online marketing tools continue to dominate**, with **93% of participants identifying their website as being a very or somewhat important tool**, and **89% identifying email marketing the same way**. While these rankings are down from 2011, when websites ranked at 96% and email at 94%, these two channels are still clearly in first and second place.

As it did in 2011, Facebook follows in third place, with 80% identifying it as a very or somewhat important communications tool, trumping more traditional forms of nonprofit communication, such as print marketing (67%), in-person events (66%), and media relations/PR (57%).

These channels – **website, email, Facebook, print, in-person events, and media relations/PR** – are the **Big Six** for nonprofit communicators.

Smaller Orgs More Social; Larger Ones More Traditional

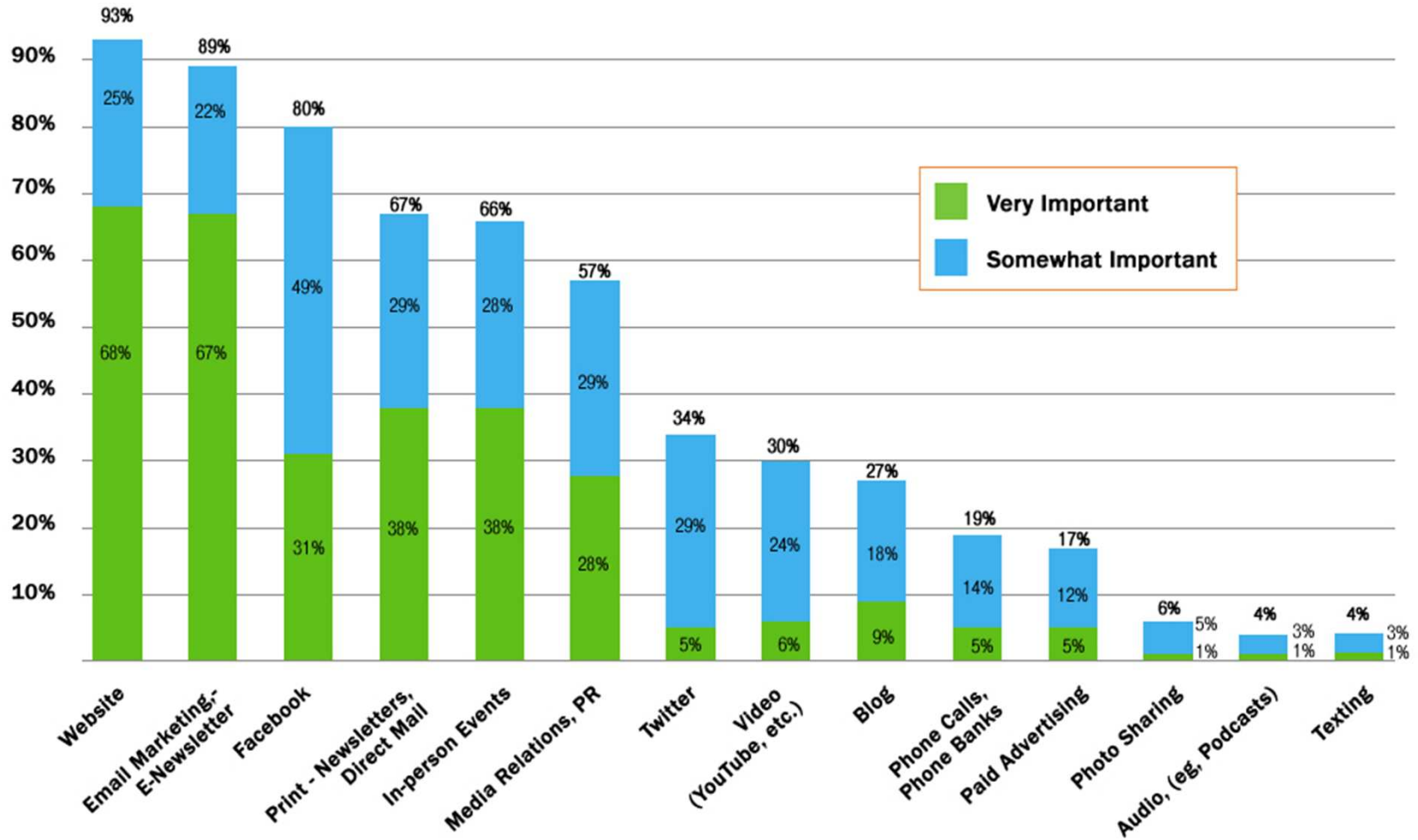
Smaller organizations are more “social” both online and in person. **They rated Facebook, Twitter, blogging, and in-person events higher than larger organizations.**

Larger organizations rely more heavily on traditional channels like print and media relations than smaller nonprofits.

Not surprisingly, **smaller organizations prefer low-cost channels** like email and social networking sites, while larger nonprofits are more likely than smaller ones to identify as very important more expensive channels like paid advertising, phone banks, and print.

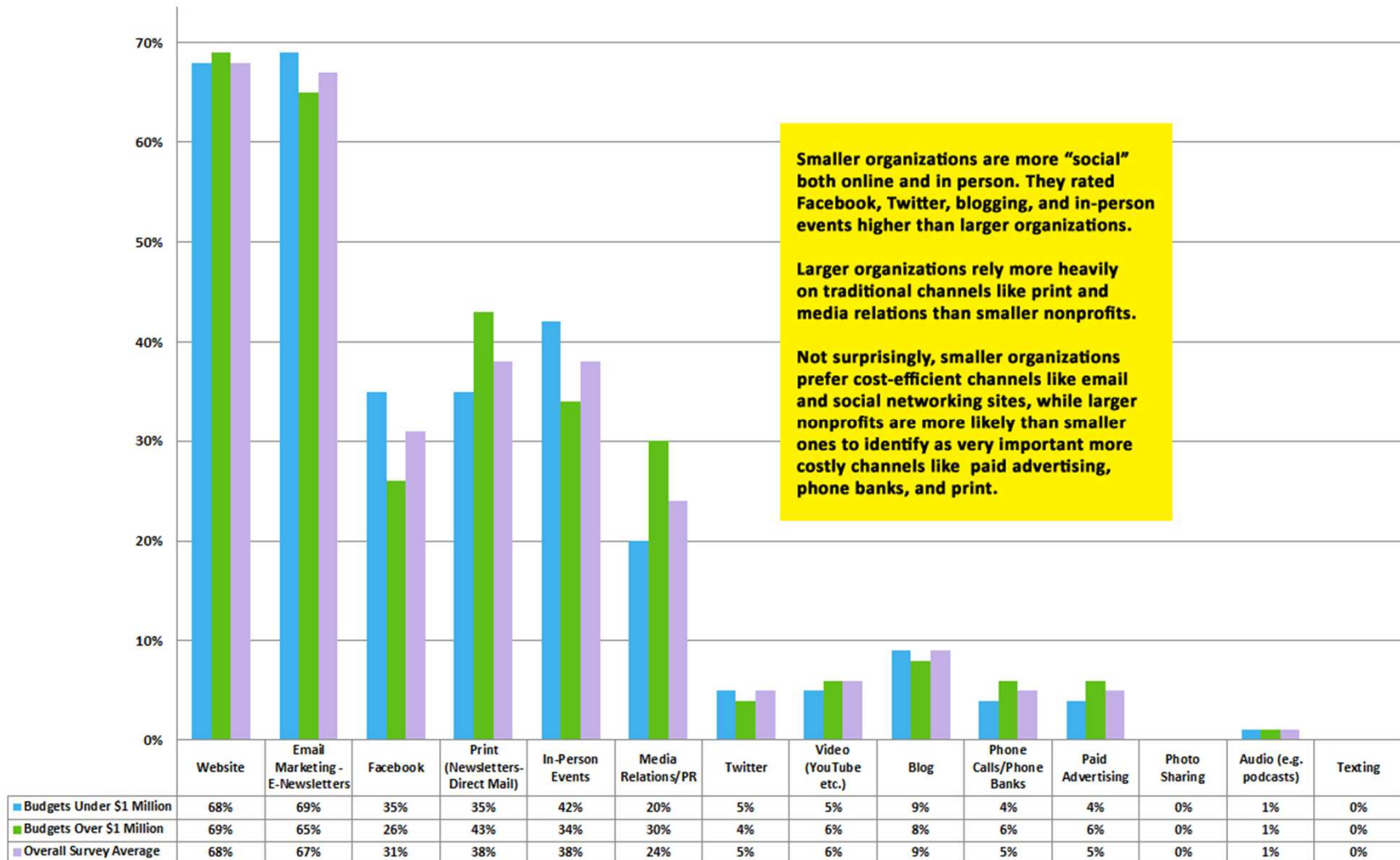
Most Important Communications Tools for Nonprofits in 2012

Combining “Very” and “Somewhat” Important Rankings



Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

Very Important Communications Tools for Nonprofits Based on Budget Size

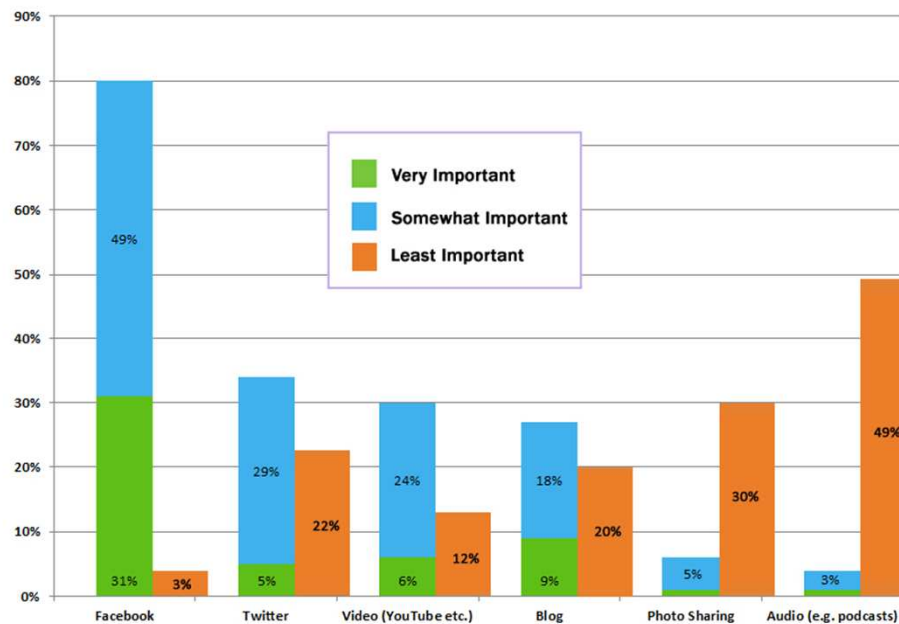


Social Media

With the exception of Facebook, other social media tools fall far behind other communications channels for nonprofits. Only 34% of participants identified Twitter as very or somewhat important, followed by online video (30%), blogging (27%), photo sharing (6%), and audio-podcasting (4%). It's worth noting, however, that while these tools ranked lower individually, many nonprofits do rely on blogging, video, photo sharing and podcasting to keep their website, email, and Facebook pages fresh and engaging.

Video gained in importance for nonprofits from 2011 to 2012, while Facebook, Twitter, and blogging held steady.

Relative Importance of Social Media Tools to Nonprofits in 2012



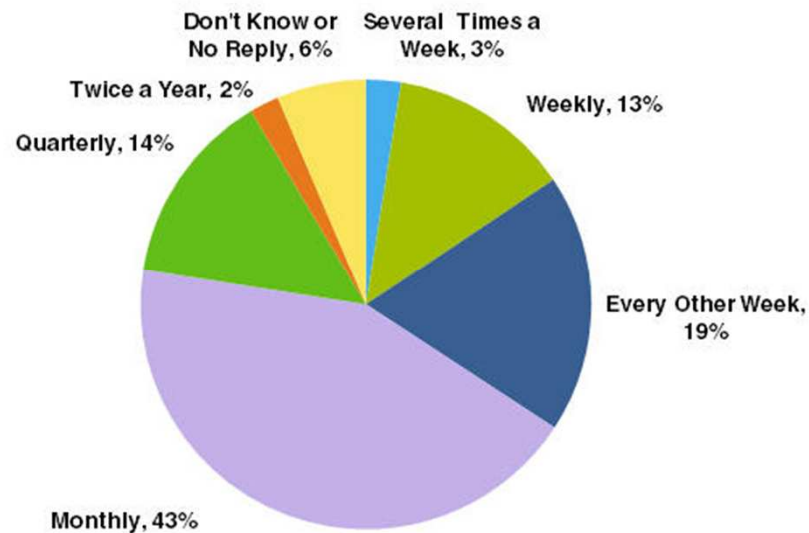
Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

Emailing Supporters

Monthly emailing to a typical person on an email list is the most popular frequency for nonprofits at 43%, followed by every other week at 19% and quarterly at 14%. More than three-quarters of nonprofits (78%) plan to email their typical supporters at least monthly, up from 75% in 2011.

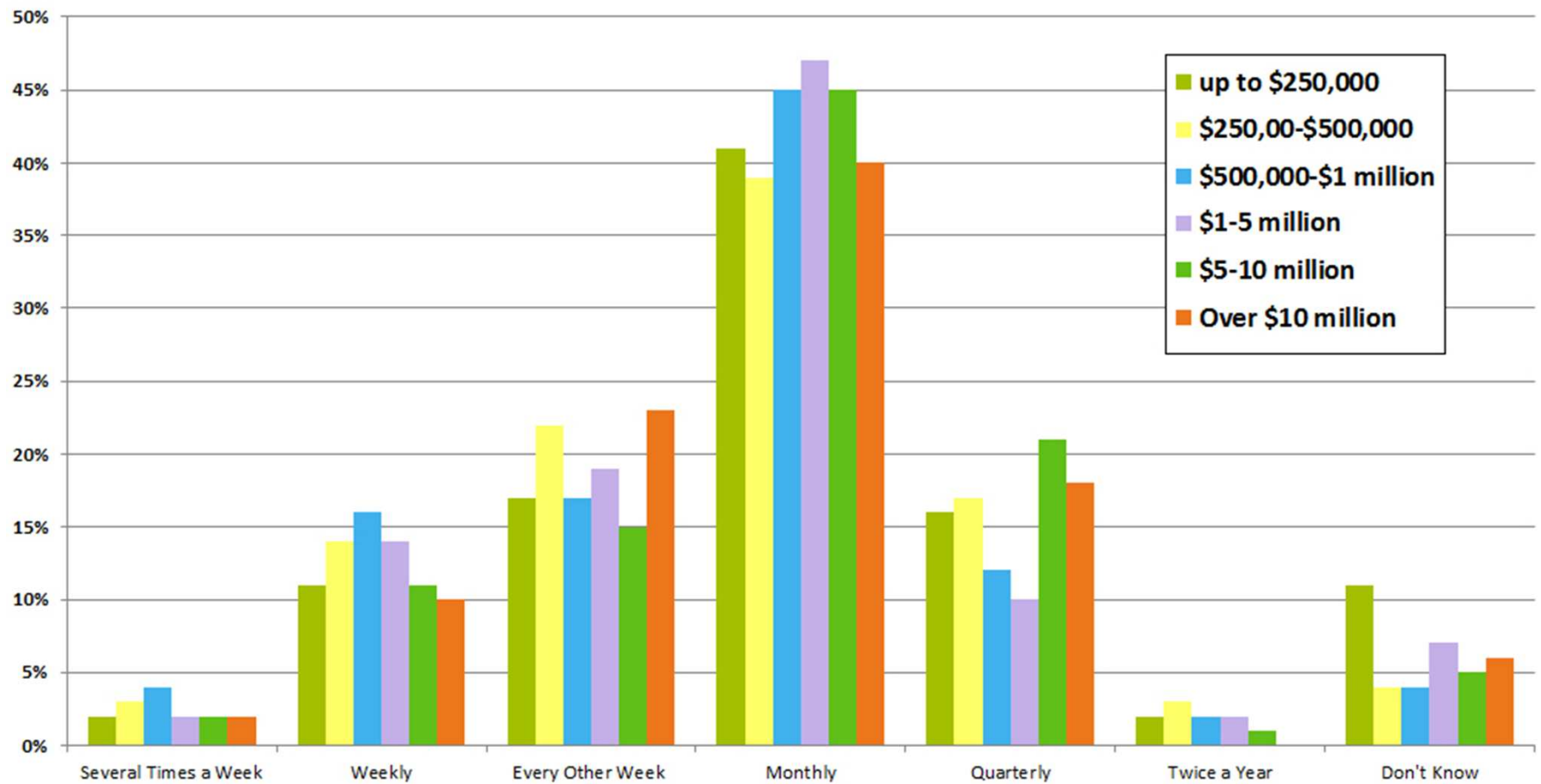
Not surprisingly, the **more important a nonprofit believes email to be as a communications tool, the more frequently they expect to email supporters:** 85% of the nonprofits that ranked email as a “very important” tool will email at least monthly (up from 81% in 2011), with 40% emailing every other week or more (up from 35% in 2011). On the other hand, of those ranking email as only “somewhat important,” 66% will email at least monthly and only 22% will email every other week or more.

How Often Will You Email the Typical Person on Your Email List?



Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

How Often Nonprofits Will Email the Typical Person on Their List, by Budget Size



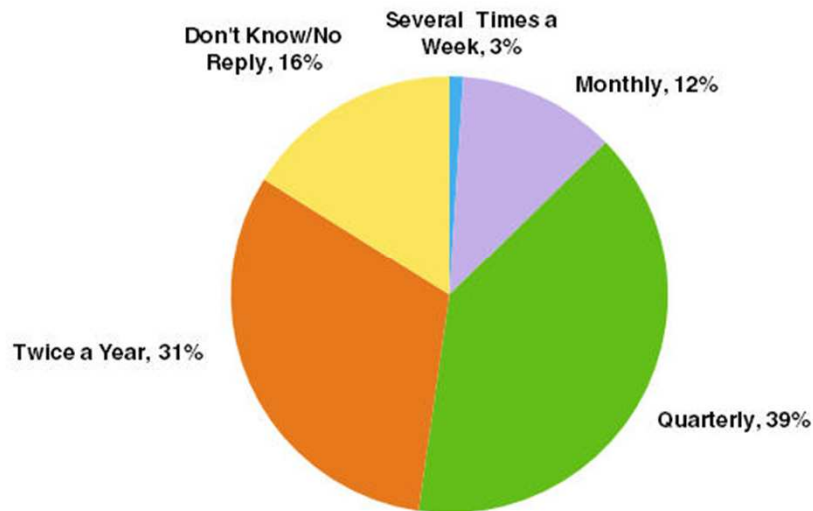
Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

Sending Direct Mail

Quarterly direct mail to the typical person on the mailing list is the most popular frequency for nonprofits at 39%, followed by twice a year at 31%. **Only 12% expect to send direct mail to their typical supporters at least monthly.** This is compared to 78% of nonprofits who expect to email their typical supporters at least monthly.

Half of nonprofits (51%) will send direct mail to their supporters at least four times a year, which is down from 55% last year.

How Often Will You Send Direct Mail the Typical Person on Your Print Mailing List?



Source: NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

What Excites You?

To hear participants speak about the coming year in their own words, we asked two open-ended questions:

- **What excites you most about your work in 2012?**
- **What scares you most about your work in 2012?**

While the answers to both questions fall across a wide spectrum, a few trends are clear, as seen in the word clouds and some representative samples below.

What's Exciting Nonprofit Communicators

Investing in New Websites

Many nonprofits have realized that old brochure-style websites don't work anymore and have invested in making their websites more user-focused and interactive.

"Finishing and launching our new website which will provide us with a better way to highlight our aid work and generate more interest in and donations for our projects."

"Having a new website to help integrate all of our online marketing."

"Promoting and working with our new website."

Having Real Plans in Place for the First Time

Communicators are thrilled that their organizations are finally taking marketing and communications seriously and are developing marketing plans, as well as fully incorporating marketing into their strategic plans.

"Finally evolving our communications strategy and having a real plan!"

"Setting goals that all parties will buy into."

"Boldly going where no one has gone before . . . we have never developed a marketing plan, ever. Until now!"

What Excites You?

Integrating Communications Channels to Increase Effectiveness

Nonprofits are learning how much more effective their marketing and fundraising can be when messages are shared in an integrated way across multiple communications channels.

“We are launching a multi-channel marketing strategy. It’s the first for our 46-year old nonprofit.”

“Moving from ‘old school’ communications (phone, print) to a primarily technology-based communications strategy (email, social media, website).”

“Continuing our work to use multiple channels to reach our key stakeholders.”

Using Social Media to Reach New Supporters

Nonprofits continue to explore ways to use social media to reach beyond their usual groups of supporters.

“We are moving into mobile, SMS, and integrating it with social media.”

“Launch of an online social community that ties into our database.”

“Incorporating social media more into our communications plan.”

What Scares You?

What's Scary to Nonprofit Communicators

Vying for Supporters' Attention

Despite having more ways to communicate (and perhaps because of that), many nonprofits feel that it is harder than ever to get the attention of their supporters.

"Ever-growing competition for the ears, minds, and hearts on the Internet."

"Trying to get and keep people's attention in an environment where the average person spends less than a second on our message."

"How to get people's attention when there is already so much noise out there."

Fear of Trying Something New, Especially Social Media

While nonprofits are excited about social media's potential, they are also leery about it, because they don't fully understand how to use it. Many organizations are also simply more comfortable with what they've always done, and anything new – including social media – is daunting.

"Internal trepidation about new strategies."

"My organization doesn't value new ways of communication, like social media."

"The lack of understanding of new social media tools and the hesitance of some to accept their use in the work environment."

What Scares You?

The Slow Economy and Lack of Investment in Marketing

Many nonprofits have yet to fully integrate marketing into their programming or fundraising strategies, and therefore see communications activities as an optional “feel good” expenditure, especially when revenues are down.

“Our communications are nearly 100% volunteer supported. Expectations are high and need to be more realistic. We can’t support a lot more unless money and staff are allocated.”

“Lack of resources and losing funding to cover marketing, communications, and fundraising costs.”

“It’s only me, with free online tools, and no budget to pull this off.”

Being Overworked and Burning Out

Tied to a lack of financial resources is the lack of time that many nonprofit staff responsible for marketing are given. Too-long to-do lists are a chronic problem throughout the nonprofit sector, but especially in communications, where new communications channels seem to spring up weekly.

“Time is running away. I have too many projects and it’s getting worse. It scares me that I will just walk away.”

“Staff resource limitations don’t allow us to do everything we think we need to do.”

“Too many projects, with too little staff time to devote, and too little internal technical knowledge for some of the upgrades we are undertaking.”

Coming Next . . .

Download this report and additional infographics and analysis at NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/2012trends

More Trends

Watch for additional data from this survey later in January 2012, including

- Infographics of the key trends in this report
- Trends by regions of the U.S. and Canada
- Trends by mission of the organization
- Additional analysis of what excites and scares nonprofit communicators in the coming year.

Free Webinar



**Attend live on January 5,
or watch the recording later.**

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At Nonprofit Marketing Guide, we give small nonprofits and communications departments of one the tips and training they need to do smart, savvy marketing, communications, and fundraising for their good causes.

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Keep up with the latest news, resources, and advice on Kivi's Nonprofit Communications Blog at NonprofitMarketingGuide.com/blog

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