



# Leveraging Your Web Site for High-Impact Marketing

How effective is your Web site in gaining new supporters? Here's how to turn your site into a powerful marketing tool.

By Vinay Bhagat

Surveys conducted with nonprofit organizations in 1999 showed that a mere 15% had a Web site. With the exception of huge groups like the World Wildlife Fund, nonprofit Web sites were “online brochures,” rarely updated and invariably managed by IT staff.

Today, virtually all nonprofit organizations recognize a Web site as a necessity. Many have moved beyond online brochures, building custom sites that let staff update content on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, many organizations find these custom sites inflexible, difficult to evolve, and ineffective at capturing and using data for marketing purposes. Nonprofits still commonly focus more on Web site aesthetics than marketing efficacy.

In contrast, many for-profit organizations have, for years, used their Web sites in conjunction with outbound e-mail to drive tangible marketing results. Through their sites, these companies have systematically registered subscribers, used aggressive promotions to drive impulse traffic, promoted loyalty programs, and personalized content according to a consumer's profile.

A few nonprofit organizations have also started to fully embrace the Internet for marketing. For example, Chicago-based Mercy Home for Boys & Girls recently launched an initiative to



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enable online outreach, define an integrated strategy, and add online marketing programs to their traditional mail appeals and special events. In just five months, it quadrupled its e-mail file and raised 8% of all appeal funds online. The organization is now exploring how it can leverage its Web site to support major gift efforts.

What accounts for this evolution? In the last five years, nonprofit software vendors have introduced online Constituent Relationship Management, or eCRM, technology. Now, nonprofit organizations can easily turn their Web sites into robust marketing tools. These solutions are available "out of the box," so nonprofits no longer have to build custom sites from scratch or invest money in customizing — really retrofitting — tools intended for for-profits. With today's eCRM-powered Web sites, you can do the following:

- **Capture constituent e-mail addresses** through online registration, polls, and the like.
- **Have a database** that collects all e-mail address data.
- **Track visitors' Web site interactions** (such as return visits and clicks on specific content, which provide insight into their interests), and store that information in your database.
- **Share your online constituent database** with other online tools for fundraising, e-mail marketing, advocacy, event management, directories, and so on.
- **Share data** with offline systems such as donor databases.
- **Use data in the constituent database** to personalize content for various audiences.
- **Use content management tools** that make it easy for non-technical staff across the organization to create and post content, with the appropriate controls and testing procedures.

You may also want to reconsider how you measure your Web site's effectiveness. Most organizations measure success in simplistic terms that include the number of visitors and page views. Others look to online donations, without analyzing what really drives these numbers. Here are some better ways to measure Web site success:

- **How many unique Web site visitors** arrive each month? (This is the most effective measure of Web traffic.)
- **What is the rate of conversion** of new visitors to e-mail subscribers?
- **How many visitors and subscribers** are converted to supporters (donors, activists, etc.)?
- **What is the average time** people stay on site? (This is a measure of how compelling content is.)
- **How much support** (in the form of donations, etc.) is generated online?
- **What is your site's impact** on offline programs? For example, does your site help identify major donors and planned giving prospects? Does it help retain direct-mail or telemarketing donors?

As more people move online and weave the Internet into their lives, you need to transform your

Web site into an effective marketing tool. Set tangible marketing goals to measure success and impact. Don't reinvent the wheel by building custom technology that is expensive and difficult to use when robust, easy to deploy and use "out of the box" software exists today. ■

**Resources**

Allen, Nick, "Using E-Mail & the Web to Acquire & Cultivate Donors," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 21, No. 1.

Bhagat, Vinay, "The New Marketing Model for Nonprofits," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 22, No. 6.

Bhagat, Vinay, "Beyond the Single E-Mail Message: Running Effective E-Mail Campaigns," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 23, No. 3.

Crooke, David, "E-Mail Deliverability: Increase Your Chances of E-Mail Getting Through," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 23, No. 2

Elges, Mary, "Driving Traffic to Your Web Site," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 6.

*These resources are available at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members).*

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