

Internet Savvy Nonprofits: Dot-Orging your Way to Success

WHICH OF THESE IS YOUR EXCUSE FOR NOT SETTING UP A WEB SITE?

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hy haven't nonprofits embraced the Internet as for-profit organizations have done? Asking nonprofit organizations that question revealed two reasons:

I. "The benefits of having our own Web site aren't great enough to cover the costs and headaches involved."

The fact is that the benefits of operating a Web site do offset the drawbacks for most nonprofits. Here are some of the amazing things you can accomplish with your Web site:

1. *Expose your organization and mission to vast numbers of people throughout the entire world.*

- People who want to research a topic can immediately be connected to your organization's information.
- A person in another country can be connected with you instantly.
- Unlimited numbers of people can obtain information from your Web site.
- Your site can help you identify your target market—the people your organization is benefitting the most.
- Your site will exhibit the percentage of funds allocated to financial resources vs. operations.
- Your site will increase awareness of your organization to corporate donors.

- You can increase recognition of your board members by listing them on your Web site.
- Your site offers an inexpensive way to market to a wide group of people, putting you on an equal plane with big ad budget corporations.

2. *Open lines of communication.*

- Interested parties of your organization can transfer information to others via electronic commerce. Included are list serves, an electronic bulletin board that can be used as a communication tool. Visitors can post an idea for others to read and respond.
- Registration to your Web site allows visitors to receive up-to-date information via their e-mail addresses.
- Visitors are given a direct link to your organization without picking up the telephone or stamping an envelope.
- You can post a quarterly or monthly newsletter on line and save the postage and printing expense.
- You will reduce long-distance bills.

3. **Provide new fundraising and volunteer opportunities.**

- Your site will open the door of interest to attract more volunteers to your organization.
- You can broadcast the benefits of donating to your organization and describe the many ways of donating, including estate gifts, event underwriting, corporate partnerships, cars, and merchandise gifts.
- Online affiliation programs are a great way to create an additional revenue stream. Affiliation programs donate a percentage of the transaction (approximately 4-15%) back to your organization. There is no cost for you to set up an affiliation program; it's *really* free money. Your organization receives commission checks each quarter. For an example of an affiliate program, visit www.igive.com.

4. **Create an organic work in progress.**

- News can be instantaneously changed for real-time information.
- Don't worry about deadlines, just post the new information.
- You needn't create a publication each month. Just update the information. No printing is necessary. Just post and read.
- You don't need to archive hard copies of publications. They are conveniently located on your Web site.

II. **"We don't have enough time or money to develop a Web site."**

Fortunately, the Internet provides many solutions for nonprofits with limited time and money. There's a complete range of prices and levels of service available to set up and maintain a Web site.

At one end of the spectrum are Web sites like www.tripod.com, a free service with a no-frills approach. An example of a mid-range site is www.website-design-hosting.net, which charges \$750-\$2000 to set up and maintain a Web site, including design, one year hosting, domain registration, and submission to

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major search engines. You should budget \$750 for a customer response page and \$150 for additional pages.

According to business owner Victor Vidal, "I believe many people are falling for Internet scams and paying thousands of dollars each year to keep their Web site up and running. That is why I created my Web site design business." You can find this Web site at www.smallbusinesses.com, where Web site design is free; you simply pay around \$100 per year (\$52 for second page and \$26 for third page). This price is charged to house the server and includes design and marketing of the Web site.

Vidal believes the emphasis should be on promoting an organization before huge amounts of money are put into a site. Vidal also feels strongly that "some nonprofits are making mistakes by choosing to accept credit cards on-line immediately. I'm not discouraging credit card use on-line, but build your target market first. Payments can be made by check or credit card via the telephone when beginning."

In the end, having your own Web site will actually save you time and money. It is an extremely cost-effective tool to reach more people than you could in any other way and to spread your mission and vision throughout the world. ■

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