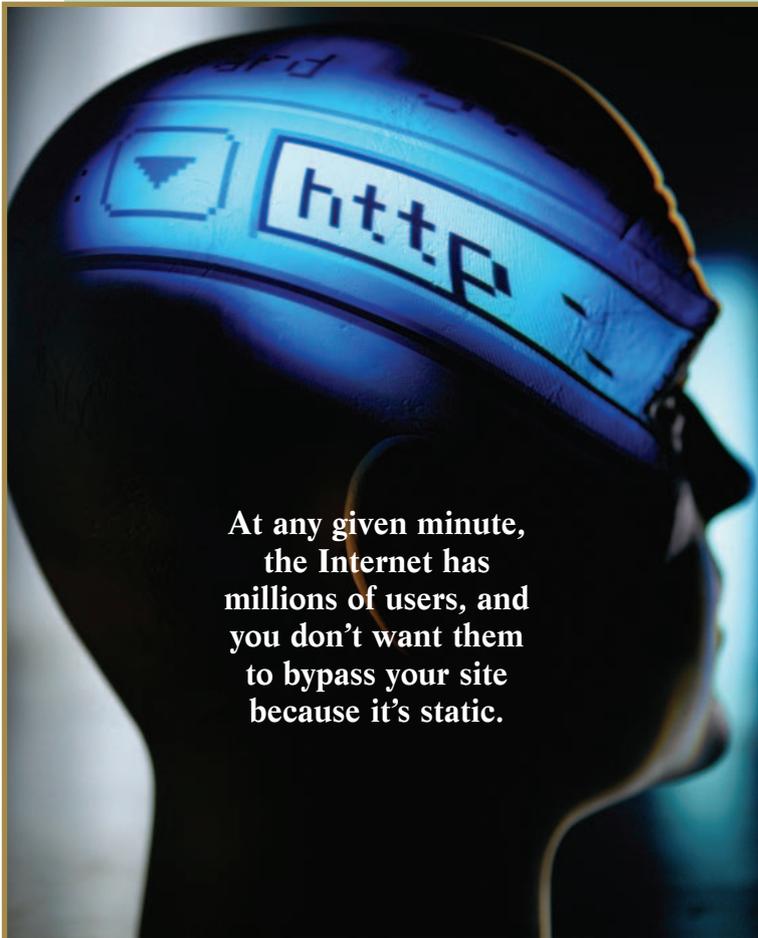




Charity Begins on the Web: Tips to Enhance Online Fundraising

Are you taking advantage of this huge, largely untapped source of revenue?

By Leonard Atlas



At any given minute, the Internet has millions of users, and you don't want them to bypass your site because it's static.

Many nonprofit organizations have yet to take advantage of cause-related marketing, fundraising, and communication on-line, mainly because they believe it's cost-prohibitive. However, in today's increasingly competitive cause-related market, it's more expensive *not* to use the modern tools available.

Not convinced? Go to the Internet and use a search engine, such as www.google.com, to find the words "online fundraising," and you'll discover approximately 1,730,000 matches that offer the opportunity to buy such diverse items as flowers, books, and computers, while donating a percentage of those sales to your favorite charity. Though such cause-related marketing is spreading geometrically, many nonprofits have yet to recognize the Internet as the perfect venue.

Following are some tips to help get e-fundraising

started and to make sure you're using the Internet to best advantage.

Think like a "business with a cause."

Adopt a mindset that lets your management team think like a business and make responsible choices accordingly. Fundraising options such as cause-related e-commerce can generate a great amount of leveraged income with virtually no labor required. Modern technology provides some of the most cost-effective means to growing an organization through marketing, raising funds, and communicating with both current and potential supporters. But first you must be open to using such tools.

Be flexible.

Time and again, people in the nonprofit world will do what they've done before just because "it's the way we've always done it" or "we don't want to offend those who have brought us this far." Such thinking can leave an organization not only in the dark ages but also in the poor house.

Survey a number of nonprofit executives and you'll find that many traditional fundraising activities (golf tournaments, dinners, and so on) are tremendous opportunities to foster relationships with their publics but aren't the cash cows for which they hoped. Therefore, it's imperative to leave egos at the door and embrace new fundraising ideas.

Build it, and they will come.

The most basic and relatively low-cost tool needed to engage in e-fundraising is a Web site. Before building or updating your site, consider the many options you can incorporate in the creation process. For instance, does your organization need a site that simply provides content (such as an Internet brochure, calendar, and newsletter)? Or should your site be "e-fundraising enabled"?

At any given minute, the Internet has millions of users, and you don't want them to bypass your site because it's static. So, while having a Web site that's e-fundraising enabled can cost a bit more, having the ability to accept transactions, purchases, or donations any time of day or night can be more than worth the initial outlay.

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The more often a site is visited, the more likely that visitors will take action and potentially donate.

Having trouble deciding? Then enroll the help of professionals. If you were building a car, you would probably need some help; the same goes for building a Web site. A Web site developer can provide some invaluable services: exploring the options available to determine what you need, mapping the site's layout, actually building the site, and so on. But one of the most important things a developer can do is to add Web site security measures. As the old adage goes, security is peace of mind.

An enormous amount of personal information (credit card numbers, addresses, and the like) can be collected and stored on a Web site. A Web site developer can ensure that such information is secure.

Now it's built, how do "they" get here?

Many organizations, once they build their e-fundraising enabled Web sites, don't use those sites' capabilities. One of their biggest mistakes is failing to link their sites to the many potential audiences out there.

Linking to other Web sites for additional information via cause-related marketing is a huge and largely untapped source of fundraising for nonprofits. For instance, through links (for example, banner ads), you can drive visitors to a Web site where they can make purchases and donate a percentage of the proceeds back to your organization.

An important step in the e-fundraising process is to hire an expert who can secure top placement on search engines within the right categories. The result? Imagine if every time people typed

in a "key word" that was indicative of your organization's mission, they were offered a link to your organization's Web site. Awesome, no? Now imagine that, of the 1,730,000 matches that might occur, your organization's Web site always appeared in the Top Ten. That can happen via a technique called search engine optimization.

Make the concept stick.

Today, many Web site owners are trying to create "sticky applications." They do so by giving visitors a reason to return to a site multiple times: a contest, drawing, mystery puzzle, information of the day, and so on. Why? The more often a site is visited, the more likely that visitors will take action and potentially donate.

Maximize e-mail.

Another tool, which most people consider the most valuable benefit of the Internet, is e-mail. If you're not gathering e-mail addresses and communicating with your supporters via e-mail, you're missing a huge opportunity to get the news out at a cost far less than snail mailed

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(U.S. Postal Service) material.

Yet, realizing that it's not unusual for people to receive 50 or more e-mail messages per day (and most people open only those that look familiar or interesting), it's important to make your message stand out with Rich HTML messaging. Unlike "plain text" e-mail (black type, white background), to which we're all accustomed, Rich HTML offers the value of design (a colorful logo), branding, and differentiation from all the junk people receive each day.

In addition, some companies have created versions of Rich HTML messages that actually give the appearance of the sender's Web site being e-mailed to the recipient, and a specific message

can be inserted into the Web site's cover page. The value of this technology is that readers needn't go elsewhere to learn more. Instead, they receive everything they need in one concise message. They have immediate access to the sender's Web site and can quickly locate any specific information they desire with just a few clicks.

In addition, most Rich HTML systems let the sender track the actions their recipients took, the pages they visited, and the documents they opened. This is valuable marketing information that can't be collected when using snail mail or plain text messaging. ■

Resources

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

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.

Frenza, JP & Leslie Hoffman, "Fundraising on the Internet: Three Easy Strategies," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 17, No. 4.

Hoffman, Leslie & J.P. Frenza, "Building Your Web Site: HTML Basics," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 3.

Roufa, Mike, "Marketing Your Web Site with Search Engines," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 17, No. 2.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members.

Leonard Atlas is CEO of CauseYouCare.com, a Web-based portal that offers consumers a chance to purchase a variety of products and services with proceeds from the transaction donated to any nonprofit of their choosing. The products and services available through the site range from such big-ticket items as residential and commercial mortgages to smaller purchases such as airline tickets and other travel services. To learn more about CauseYouCare.com, visit www.causeyoucare.com.