

Beyond the Basics:

Taking Five Website Staples to the Next Level

Introduction

Online donors are a key growth segment for not-for-profit organisations. The average online donor gives more initially and has a higher lifetime value than a conventional donor. Therefore, the importance of online giving as a growing revenue stream and website visitors as a target market worth focusing on cannot be underestimated. To enrich current relationships, establish new relationships, and encourage all supporters to interact and give online, not-for-profits must shift from offering a static, marketing-centric website to a dynamic, interactive and supporter-centric website.

So what are the universally accepted basics of website marketing? According to the not-for-profit community and as reported in Blackbaud's recent State of the Not-for-profit Industry (SONI) survey and validated by many other studies, not-for-profit website essentials include the following:

- **Direct or mass email marketing** — 82% of not-for-profits say they are doing this, although only 35% view their efforts as effectively meeting their organisation's strategic goals.
- **Online fundraising** — 49% of not-for-profits provide the ability for a website visitor to make a donation.
- **Electronic newsletters** — 56% of not-for-profits send out an electronic newsletter, which means that right away, there is an obvious opportunity for the remaining 26% who are running email campaigns to start sending e-newsletters as well.
- **Website usage report** — 59% of not-for-profits are utilising this absolutely essential.
- **Online event registration** — 35% of not-for-profits have the facility to register for (and often free!) tool. events online and 63% of not-for-profits send event invitations through direct mail — this wide gap between online and offline is an area that screams for better supporter service.

Is your organisation implementing a well-thought-out strategy in each of these areas, merely checking the box or not even in the game yet? Regardless of how well you are doing each, more than likely there is room for improvement in at least one of these five essential categories.

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Executive Summary

The importance of online giving as a growing revenue stream cannot be underestimated. The average online donor gives more initially and has a higher lifetime value than a conventional donor. This paper shows how not-for-profits can use five web staples to enrich current relationships, establish new relationships, and encourage constituents to interact and give online.

Direct email marketing

Only a slim minority of organisations say they don't engage in any email marketing. However, two-thirds of respondents believe their efforts are not as effective as they could be. The problem? In a word, "engagement." If your email messages are nothing more than generic solicitations to a list of practically anonymous email addresses, you may be losing email recipients faster than you can sign them up. In a time when 75% of email is spam and affluent households receive approximately 300 direct marketing appeals each month, you have to do more than just show up in an individual's email box. You must be meaningful, relevant and personal to engage your readers.

Some email marketing experts claim that the acquisition of email addresses, through anonymous subscription links, "tell-a-friend" forwards, list purchases or swaps has value in itself. This couldn't be further from the truth. The value of an email address is not in having it, but in getting to know the human being behind it and building a relationship with that individual. "Getting to know" can be in a mass setting, aided by technology that allows you to combine the online and offline behaviour of an individual also you can group that person with others who behave similarly and target your message to that group accordingly.

The point is that you treat email marketing as a continuous effort engaging your supporters and moving them along toward a desired outcome — which is hopefully a lifetime commitment to your cause.

Online fundraising

According to SONI, not even half of organisations provide the ability for a website visitor to make a donation online. Should it be assumed that the 51% who do not provide that capability do not engage in individual donor fundraising on any level? Because nothing is easier today than providing the ability for a donor to make a gift through your website, and donors absolutely expect the ability to do so.

Even if the primary purpose of your site is to educate (as 82% of SONI respondents said) versus raising funds (as 19% said), if your organisation accepts donations from individuals through any medium, you should be accepting them online.

If you're just starting with online donations, make it as easy as possible for people to figure out how to give by including a link — even a subtle one — on your homepage. Doing this allows people who read a direct mail piece or attended an event to find your web page through a Google search and get right to the donation page. It's also a gentle reminder to people visiting your site for other purposes that you can't exist without their generous support.

Allowing tribute gifts through your website is another easy, yet profound way to extend your network of support. More and more frequently, families are choosing to honour their loved ones through gifts to charity. Offering the convenience of online tribute giving provides families an easy way to share information on how and where to give and also allows their friends to make tribute gifts at any time, from anywhere, and to learn more about your cause in the process.

Once you begin allowing people to make gifts online, it only makes sense to allow them to set up regular gifts while they are at it. This is a terrific way to engage younger donors or to allow people on a fixed income to contribute significantly over time. Already popular in the UK, 23% of organisations believe they will see a steady hold on regular giving this year. 47% of organisations are expecting an increase.

Of course, providing the service of online donations is only one side of the equation. Once a supporter has given a gift, the rules of “engagement” must apply. You can further engage an online donor in three simple, yet essential ways: acknowledgement, appreciation, and recognition.

Acknowledgement: Every online donation should be instantly acknowledged via email. Providing instant electronic acknowledgements for gifts made online makes a donor feel appreciated and inspires confidence that the transaction was handled smoothly. It is also an opportunity to reinforce the message that inspired a gift in the first place. If your website allows a donor to select between funds when giving, setting up a unique thank-you in response should be simple and automatic.

Appreciation: Perhaps the most important way your website can acknowledge its recognition of a visitor is to say “thanks” the moment a repeat donor logs on. A simple dynamic welcome meets the expectations of someone who regularly shops or banks online and makes the visit warm and personal — the perfect mood to set when hoping to inspire continuing support.

Recognition: Finally, if you’re going to ask for gifts online, those gifts should recognise your repeat donors’ complete giving histories, whether the gifts were made online or through any other medium. This is much more than a nice acknowledgement of a donor’s relationship with you – it’s been proven that targeted asks result in higher gifts. Consider this: The average online gift in the UK is £34. But organisations who use the details of their relationships with donors, including their complete online/offline giving histories, to personalise the content delivered during website visits raise an average of £63 per gift!

Electronic newsletters

The 44% of organisations that don’t send a regular electronic newsletter may be missing out on the single most golden opportunity today’s internet offers. Not because newsletters have magical properties but because they are so powerful, effective and easy.

As stated earlier, the number one rule of email marketing is engagement. It is imperative that your organisation not just solicit via email, but also inform and steward. A newsletter allows this and usually just by recycling content that already exists or publishing content that is too timely to distribute via print.

Every organisation of every type and size should prepare an email version of the news it distributes to donors. It is a convenience that donors expect and appreciate, it is easy and inexpensive and it is perhaps the single most effective way to attract new supporters, thanks to the viral marketing or “pass-along” phenomenon. So perhaps they are magic, after all...

Providing an anonymous electronic news subscription link on your website is also a great way to grow your email subscription list for future engagement through other email channels. Anonymous electronic news subscriptions allow marginally interested parties to learn more about you before providing a great deal of personal information — the first step in engagement.

Website usage reports

Shockingly, only 59% of the organisations that responded to the SONI Survey rely on website usage reports. This is shocking for two reasons: firstly, because these tools are often free to implement and easy to use (see Google® Analytics) and secondly, because 45% of organisations expect an increase in online donations this year, which will only happen if their websites are “sticky.”

A sticky website is a site that keeps visitors on the site once they find it. Stickiness is monitored with website usage reports, which tell how a visitor arrived (via search engine, cooperative link, email click-through, etc.), where a visitor went (straight to the donation form, to a program case study before giving, to a friend's personal page, etc.), how long the visitor spent there, and whether he or she "converted" or completed the action you hoped for during the visit.

If you are not monitoring these simple statistics, you have no way of knowing if your site is doing its job. If you send an email that tested well but didn't get any donations as a result, should you trash the email and start over? Someone analysing website usage trends could tell you if the landing page was the culprit instead of the email. Perhaps the page didn't clearly direct the visitor to take the next step. Perhaps the page was too interesting or busy, and visitors got lost and wandered off to another page and then took action elsewhere. This type of intelligence is critical in order to tell what is working on your website so that you can optimise and replicate your successes.

Online event registrations

As we've established, your website is one of the most effective marketing tools you have. With it, you can put information about your events in the hands of people you know and people you haven't yet met. But providing information is only part of the equation. You risk missing a golden opportunity if you don't allow interested visitors to register for your events while they are on your site and thinking about how they can become involved with your organisation.

Moreover, allowing event registrations online is simply a good service. According to the SONI Survey, 42% of respondents say that their organisations expect fundraising contributions from events to increase this year and 32% expect revenue to hold steady. As special events are the top driver of contributions for UK not-for-profits, all organisations should be allowing registrations on the Web, versus the 35% that actually do. At a minimum, the 63% who advertise events through other direct marketing channels could almost certainly see an improvement in event participation and associated gifts by allowing interested parties to learn more and register online.

Of course, once you are using your website to market your events and collect registrations, the natural next step is to allow your most avid supporters to drive traffic there. One way this can be done is by providing supporters personal web pages where they can collect sponsorships in support of participation in fundraising challenges. This can generate excitement around your events and dramatically increase the money you raise from them.

Even if you already "do" these top five things, it doesn't necessarily mean they are already being done as well as they could be to achieve all that is possible from your website marketing efforts. Fortunately, the technologies that support dynamic, engaging websites are well established and becoming more mainstream in the not-for-profit world. Donors have expectations of quality web experiences that have been set and driven by the competitive environment in the commercial marketplace. Not-for-profits who meet or exceed donor expectations will earn their loyalty and reap the benefits.

Get started today!

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