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A Successful E-Fundraising Campaign

More and more not-for-profit organizations are realizing that if they do not offer the opportunity for members and contributors to make online donations, they are going to be left in the dust. There is a lot of competition on the Web and a potential contributor can easily make a couple of clicks with his mouse to find another charity that will accept his money.

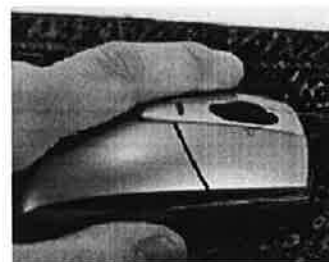
Much of the increased acceptance of e-fundraising came after the September 11th attacks. People became more willing to give online, particularly money for emergency and natural disaster relief.

A Few Things to Consider

However, fundraising professionals warn that there are a number of basic rules to successfully raising money using your website.

- First, do not expect that e-fundraising is going to replace the direct mail materials that you periodically send to your members. People used to say that television would kill radio, but it didn't. However, radio is very different today than it was before television came along. Put another way, e-fundraising is changing the way traditional fundraising works. For instance, a not-for-profit group might begin, but not end, a story on an endangered species in a direct mail brochure. From the brochure, the organization might direct members to its website, where they can learn more about threats to the species -- through visuals and audio enhancements.
- *Another important detail:* The same principles apply to traditional and cyber fundraising: Not-for-profit organizations must still take the time to educate, cultivate and solicit potential new donors online, just as they do by mail or in person. Fundraisers who meet people for the first time don't just come out and ask for a gift. Rather, they first educate the prospective donors about the organization, then cultivate relationships -- and finally, ask for a contribution.

However, fundraisers report that established contributors tend to make spontaneous and frequently larger contributions on the Internet. Furthermore, many organizations that have a Web store for their products remind buyers that a contribution can easily be made online at the same time they are shopping.



A Few Tips for Successful e-Fundraising:

Keep expectations realistic. Don't expect vast sums of money to arrive minutes after a solicitation appears on your website.

Remember that the power of the Internet is, first and foremost, about educating, communicating and building relationships.

Make sure the system for taking credit card information is absolutely secure and completely reliable.

- One detail that is crucial to successful cyber-fundraising is having a secure system for taking credit card information. Organizations that are not carefully shepherding e-contributions can face disastrous public relations problems if things go wrong.

There are no short cuts to building effective relationships -- just because it's done on the Internet. Organizations must still have a well-thought strategy, a professional campaign and understand that they won't see dramatic increases immediately. There is a learning -- as well as a time -- curve.

Bear in mind that fundraising -- via snail mail, e-mail or a website - is an investment of manpower, money and materials that organizations make in order to see a return. Visibility is important. Your donors expect to be able to conduct business online. It's too easy for potential donors to donate money elsewhere with a click of the mouse.

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