

Beyond the Basics:

Taking Five Website Staples to the Next Level

Allison Van Diest, Senior Product Marketing Manager for Blackbaud's Internet Solutions

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 nonprofits can use five web staples to enrich current relationships, establish new relationships, and encourage constituents to interact and give online.

Introduction

Online donors are a key growth segment for nonprofit organizations. 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 constituents to interact and give online, nonprofits must shift from offering a static, marketing-centric website to a dynamic, interactive, and constituent-centric website.

So what are the universally accepted basics of website marketing? According to the nonprofit community, and as reported in Blackbaud's recent State of the Nonprofit Industry survey, and validated by many other studies, nonprofit website essentials include the following:

- **Direct or mass email marketing** — 79% of nonprofits say they are doing this, although only 58% claim their email address files have grown in the past twelve months, indicating much room for improvement.
- **Online fundraising** — 68% of nonprofits provide the ability for a website visitor to make a donation.
- **Electronic newsletters** — 59% of nonprofits send out an electronic newsletter, which means that right away, there is an obvious opportunity for the 20% who are emailing without sending e-newsletters to add one to the marketing mix.
- **Website usage reports** — 49% of nonprofits are utilizing this absolutely essential (and often free!) tool.
- **Online event registration** — 43% of nonprofits allow prospective attendees to register for events online, and 78% of nonprofits send event invitations through direct mail — this wide gap between online and offline is an area that screams for better constituent service.

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Is your organization 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.

Direct Email Marketing

Only a slim minority of organizations say they don't engage in any email marketing. However, only slightly more than half say their email lists have grown in the past twelve months. 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 solicitations each month, you have to do more than just show 23 up in a constituent's email box. You must be meaningful, relevant, and personal to engage your readers.

Some would-be email marketing experts claim that the acquisition of email addresses, through anonymous subscription links, "tell-a-friend" forwards, or list purchases or swaps, has value in and of 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, of course. Any system that allows you to combine the online and offline behavior of a constituent so you can group that person with others who behave similarly and target your message to that group accordingly will suffice.

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

Online Fundraising

According to SONI, not even two-thirds of organizations provide the ability for a website visitor to make a donation online. Should it be assumed that the 38% 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 88% of SONI respondents said) versus to raise funds (as 21% said) if your organization 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.



About the Author

Allison Van Diest, senior product marketing manager for Blackbaud's Internet Solutions, has been a marketing professional for more than a decade. Over the course of her career, Allison has collaborated with hundreds of nonprofits and those who serve them to help develop sound Internet marketing strategies with measurable impact. Allison is a frequently published contributor to industry publications such as *Advancing Philanthropy*, *The NonProfit Times*, *Fundraising Well*, and *Philanthropy Journal*. She holds a BA in English from Florida State University and an MBA from The Citadel.

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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 honor their loved ones through gifts to charity. Offering the convenience of online tribute giving provides families an easy way to share information on how 24 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 recurring gifts while they are at it. Made popular in Canada and the UK, a recurring gift allows a donor to have a small gift regularly debited from an account. This is a terrific way to engage younger donors or to allow people on a fixed income to contribute significantly over time.

Of course, providing the service of allowing 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 unique thank-yous 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 recognize 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 is \$57. But organizations that use the details of their relationships with donors, including their complete online/offline giving histories, to personalize the content delivered during website visits raise an average of \$149 per gift!

Electronic Newsletters

The 41% of organizations that don’t send a regular electronic newsletter may be missing out on the single most golden opportunity today’s Internet offers. Not because e-newsletters have magical properties (many claim that “magic” is the purview of social networking), but because they are so powerful, so effective, and so darn easy.

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

Every organization of every type and size should prepare an email version of the news it distributes to constituents. 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, not quite half of the organizations that responded to the SONI Survey rely on website usage reports. This is shocking for two reasons: first, because these tools are often free to implement and easy to use (see Google Analytics), and second, because 55% of organizations 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 he 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 analyzing 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 optimize 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 met yet. 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 organization.

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Moreover, allowing event registrations online is simply a good service. According to the SONI Survey, 59% of respondents say that their organizations expect fundraising contributions from events to increase this year, and 26% expect that revenue to hold steady. Only 10% get no funding at all from events or don't hold events. So 90% should be allowing registrations on the Web, versus the 43% that actually do. At a minimum, the 78% that 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 sponsorship dollars in support of participation in “-athons,” tournaments, or fundraising challenges. Called “team-” or “sponsor-me” fundraising, this exciting new spin on volunteer solicitors can boost 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 nonprofit world. Donors have expectations of quality web experiences that have been set and driven by the competitive environment in the commercial marketplace. Nonprofits that meet or exceed donor expectations will earn their loyalty and reap the benefits.

About Blackbaud

Blackbaud is the leading global provider of software and services designed specifically for nonprofit organizations, enabling them to improve operational efficiency, build strong relationships, and raise more money to support their missions. Approximately 24,000 organizations — including The American Red Cross, Cancer Research UK, Earthjustice, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Lincoln Center, The Salvation Army, The Taft School, Tulsa Community Foundation, Ursinus College, the WGBH Educational Foundation, and Yale University — use one or more Blackbaud products and services for fundraising, constituent relationship management, financial management, website management, direct marketing, education administration, ticketing, business intelligence, prospect research, consulting, and analytics. Since 1981, Blackbaud's sole focus and expertise has been partnering with nonprofits and providing them the solutions they need to make a difference in their local communities and worldwide. Headquartered in the United States, Blackbaud also has operations in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit www.blackbaud.com.

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