

Tapping the Web

Written by Pam Baker

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Given the phenomenal successes of non-profits online such as cancer.org, aspca.org and aclu.org, few can argue the impact and import of tapping the Web to move any given cause ahead, both in terms of brand viability and fundraising. Even with these pay-offs from online activities, there are even more resources to be profited from. These include CRM (Customer Resource Management) for improving donor relationships and follow-throughs, and BPM (Business Process Management) for service management to prevent embarrassments in delivery such as those that beset the Red Cross in the Hurricane Katrina aftermath. Unfortunately, too few non-profits know these tools exist, where to find them, and more importantly how to rake money in from the web...

Sizing The Field

“Nonprofits need to be very careful to integrate technology that is appropriate for the scale of the nonprofit,” says Craig Harris, NOZA Founder & CEO.

This may be difficult for non-profits that have yet to prioritize technology skills in help wanted ads.

Larger non-profits have long ago learned that it is past time to update job descriptions to require some level of technology mastery at nearly every staff level. They also have the funds to hire experienced IT people to run the organization on both Web 1.0 and 2.0 levels.

“It is the small and medium-sized non-profits that are under-served and have historically turned to freelancers, job boards, classified sites and the recommendations of colleagues to obtain web services, which can yield unpredictable services,” says Rick Whittington, President of Rick Whittington Consulting.

“By the same token, non-profits shouldn’t expect to get quality web services for unrealistic prices,” he adds.

Before selecting a particular technology or provider, be very clear on objectives. The technology should fit your goals, not the other way around. Have skilled staff on hand to help you weigh your choices in technologies.

Roller-Skates and Cadillacs

Non-profits that exist in the brick-and-mortar realm should see using the web as one of

many channels to affect their goals. “Technology can be a double edged sword for nonprofit organizations,” says Harris. “All the technology in the world will not replace the most important aspect of sustaining organizations, which is developing personal relationships with those aligned with the mission.”

However, it is equally true that all the face-to-face glad-handing in the world will not come close to the massive number of donors that can be reached on the Web.

There are several tools available that will allow low-risk testing of the Web waters. Among them are:

- 1) Non-Profit Soapbox is a content management system designed for non-profits that includes helpful tools such as event calendars and constituent relationship management.
- 2) Kintera offers a platform to manage e-marketing, communications, programs, services, and online fundraising.
- 3) OpensourceCMS offers a free test drive of a multitude of open source CMS, blogs, groupware, wiki and forum tools.
- 4) Firstgiving.com is an easy site for U.S. accredited non-profits to raise funds.
- 5) Fundable and ChipIn are good fund-raising applications for non-accredited non-profits.
- 6) NTEN, the Nonprofit Technology Network, is a support organization for nonprofits using technology that holds informative conferences from time to time.
- 7) NOZA now offers its searchable database of foundation grants for free as well as a number of other database searches for a fee.

Picking a Web Winner

“Non-profits should use the same selection criteria as a C corp.,” explains Matthew Gallagher, proprietor of Maka’s Surf Shop, an immersive interactive design boutique. “Assess the organization’s needs and then find a partner that will guide them to the end goal.”

If technical skills are woefully short among existing staff, it is doubly important to get input from other sources that do possess those skills. Otherwise, a provider may deliver what was asked for rather than what was needed for the project to succeed.

“Many non-profits dictate a creative strategy and the service provider blindly follows it,” warns Whittington.

There is a plethora of providers who cater to the non-profit sector, but even among these it is important to assess the skills and knowledge of the people behind the promise.

“Understanding the complexities that non-profits are required to work within requires an understanding of more than pushing pixels on the screen,” says Gallagher.

The takeaway:

- To maximize contributions and savings found through the Web, work to add technical expertise to your staff and/or update staff job descriptions to include technical skills as a way to stay abreast of changes in technology and to “grow” new donors online.
- Secondly, do your homework on existing technologies appropriate for your scale of

business.

- Thirdly, test drive several offerings before committing funds and effort to any one platform or tool. Check for compatibility with your existing technologies before adding new ones. Ask for references from other non-profits and then take the time to listen to both praises and critiques.



About the author:

Pam Baker, an American writer, is the author of six books and numerous analytical studies on various technologies for VisionGain Research, headquartered in London. Her published credits also include hundreds of articles for national and international media such as Wireless IQ, Telematics Journal, IT Business Insider, Institutional Investor Magazine (covering the U.S., UK, Belgium, Ireland, Brazil and Turkey), Success Magazine, E-Commerce Times, I Six Sigma Magazine, CIO Today, NewsFactor.com, Enterprise I.T., BPM Today, MacNewsWorld, LinuxInsider, CRM Buyer, CRM Daily, SCI-Tech Today, TechNewsWorld, Georgia Trend Magazine, Economos International Business Magazine, and Knight-Ridder/McClasky newspapers.

Baker was nominated for the 2004 Templeton-Cambridge Journalism Fellowship in Science and Religion in the UK, and is a member of the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

She lives with her family in Georgia, USA and is working on her first fiction novel: a technological thriller.

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