

The Nonprofit Year in Review



Written by Pam Baker

THURSDAY, 06 DECEMBER 2007

NPTECHNEWS.COM

The year 2007 is winding to a close, finishing up one of the most exciting chapters in nonprofit technological achievements. It was the year that brought about greater acceptance of the newer Web 2.0 applications, such as Kintera's Sphere platform, that allows non-profits to reach thousands of constituents and contributors in a single forum and to create communities in unheard of numbers in real time.

It was the year that vendors brought about advanced offerings that simplified fundraising and contributor research making the Web a powerful ally to even the smallest nonprofits on the planet. NOZA's free foundation grant database, released in October, immediately comes to mind. It was the year that non-profits began to show up at the social computing events of the decade.

"The popularity of YouTube and social media sites has companies and non-profits alike wondering how they can use video and social media to get their messages out," says Rick Whittington, president of Rick Whittington Consulting. "Some forward-thinking organizations are already using these media to promote their causes."

The ongoing effort, begun in 2007, to tap the burgeoning social aspects of the Web is creating a new, savvier leadership level in non-profits.

"Adoption by development directors to use online communication tools to connect with and link with various sectors increased in 2007," says Johnson Hor, an attorney and manager of Quality Improvement, Compliance, and Contracts at non-profit Walden House in San Francisco. "Much like how politicians are using actblue or convio to convey their message, manage their content, etc."

"Lower cost to market programs that can be adopted by NPOs with limited IT support like Giftworks from Mission

Research also attracted interest in 2007,” adds Hor.

In a nutshell, 2007 was the year non-profits discovered the Internet in a power-packed, serious money-gathering, major brand-building way.

Not Over Yet

But that is not to say that the nonprofit arena is now fully up to speed on the technologies that will carry them forward and, indeed, define their future.

One case in point: the convergence in emergency response communications, now well underway in federally fueled and funded initiatives, has led to highly organized relief and evacuation efforts such as the statewide program recently launched by the Governor’s Division of Emergency Management (GDEM) in Texas aided by the University of Texas Center for Space Research (CSR).

In that program, handheld computers are combined with bar-coded wristbands powered by RFID (radio frequency identification) and GPS technologies to locate and move evacuees in the path of natural disasters and to provide relief to victims of any emergency on a massive scale. As part of delivering aid, the state of Texas issues equipment to nonprofit partners. This has the effect of forcing participating nonprofits to become proficient at using these technologies in the heat of a crisis.

Beyond delivering relief and aid, system compatibility ultimately defines which nonprofits will be included in such programs in the future, which in turn, affects the nonprofits’ revenue generating ability. Nonprofits that do not keep up will soon be left behind.

Getting Up To Speed

Despite the advances made in 2007, non-profits are merely easing onto the cyber-highway while the rest of the world is zooming by. More work lies ahead to gain significant ground – not only in emergency management and relief but in communicating with constituents and contributors.

“The web design and development community as a whole have embraced web standards and more modern web site coding techniques. This has helped web sites be more accessible to not only those with disabilities but also those using

mobile devices like Blackberries and iPhones,” says Whittington. “Non-profits need to test their web sites on the iPhone, Blackberries and Treo SmartPhones as people use these devices while on-the-go to get information quickly.”

The year 2008 is bringing new glimmers of promise on many fronts for nonprofits. Not the least of which is the craigslist Resource Center, specifically its Project Entry Point, launching in early 2008. To see the initial, non-functional prototype, go to <http://www.craigslistfoundation.org/redesign.html>

“It is designed with the realization that there is currently no one point of entry to the nonprofit sector,” says Hor. “Imagine the impact of a website where emerging and established nonprofits and social entrepreneurs, donors, volunteers, and other compassionate citizens could find everything they need to do good.”

“Support resources already exist; what’s missing is a single place that connects people and organizations to what they need,” he added. “In a nutshell, it’s craigslist for the nonprofit sector. To this end, we are transforming CraigslistFoundation.org into this entry point using a design inspired by craigslist.org and customized to the needs of the social sector.”

According to Hor, the new year will also see nonprofits moving towards adopting IPTV (Internet-based Television) platforms to broadcast messages to constituents, using venues such as videoegg or YouTube. To gain revenue from existing programs by selling or renting them, nonprofits will turn increasingly to the likes of zipidee.com.

“Old nonprofits will gradually adopt Web 2.0 technology but will be behind the curve due to budget constraints,” says Hor. “New nonprofits will be on the curve as a means to be viable against the brick and mortar type establishments.”

The good news is that in 2008 technology will continue to be modified to meet the needs of the new consumer, which includes nonprofits. But it is also the turning point year, where nonprofits will live and die according to their understanding and acumen with using these new venues.



Pam Baker

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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Last Updated (Friday, 07 December 2007)

