

# Winning Online: Fast & Lasting Strategies for Nonprofits

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**A** well-conceived online strategy has become pivotal for mission-driven organizations. This is a fact!

Online donors are giving more—and making bigger gifts—than at any time in the past.

Crowd sourcing and online peer-to-peer fundraising experienced double digit growth over each of the last three years. Social causes used these tools to generate over \$2.4 billion in 2013 alone.

The benefits go way beyond online giving. The most successful online strategies elevate the successes of offline sales, marketing and fundraising activities.

What is driving the increasing impact?

**Consumer Behavior:** Many more people—across every generation, race, ethnicity and income bracket—are using the Internet to get information, communicate and transact.

**Technology Advances:** Powerful and cheap smart phones are accelerating the behavior change. Major companies like Amazon, Fedex and UPS were caught unable to meet online consumer demands during the 2013 holiday season, and 2014 growth continues at a double digit pace.

**Ease of Implementation:** With increasing flexibility, nonprofits can quickly and inexpensively launch, and then refine, powerful online solutions for fundraising, advocacy and recruitment.

Here is the challenge. As it becomes easier to launch and expand a digital presence, the competition for capturing the attention of any stakeholder is more intense.

Emails clutter our inboxes with content we don't want to read. Facebook, Linked In and Twitter are bogged down with lots of chatter. Big brands are spending more to push their messages across the Internet. Getting top billing on search pages is becoming more challenging.

What makes for success? Great execution is always important, but the real key is developing a strategic approach to combining the tactics for building stakeholder relationships, both online and offline.

## Building Online Relationships: A 5 Step Process

Relationship development is a very natural, human process. Evolving digital technologies enable nonprofits to extend this process to wider circles.

### 5 Steps to Online Success for Mission-Driven Organizations



## Increase the Right Traffic

The digital world is remarkable. With growing precision we can find people who are looking for an organization just like ours. Usually, there is not just one type of person or one large segment. There are a series of narrower segments that are highly aligned with something that your organization does or seeks to accomplish. In these segments, mission-driven organizations successfully compete for the traffic that is most meaningful.

Your organization will be most successful when visitors are brought to the right place in your ecosystem. Often, that is not the home page! Instead, it will be a page carefully created to answer the searcher's specific question(s).

## Establish 2-Way Communication

The data is clear. New visitors are unlikely to donate or buy the first time they arrive on your site. Yes, a few people may, but unless there is a great sense of urgency—like a call for relief aid following a catastrophe—that is the exception to the rule.

What's the alternative? Engage your visitors and motivate them to become prospects. What makes a prospect different from a visitor? A visitor is somebody who comes to your site, hunts for some information and then leaves. Visitors become prospects when they leave behind a way to continue communications. This may be an email address. It may be a Facebook 'like.' It may be a 'follow' on Twitter or a phone number for texting.

A winning online strategy moves 35% or more of their visitors to prospects!

***"In 2012, The American Lung Association Raised 29.6% of Its Annual Donations from Online Giving."***

### **Building the Relationship**

What do all great relationship builders have in common? They listen. They quickly learn what causes somebody to tune-in or tune-out, to become excited and interested or annoyed and irritated. They adapt communications to what they hear.

It once took big dollars to get enough data to understand these dynamics. Big companies could afford to take these risks. Most nonprofits could not.

The Internet has changed these economics. All nonprofits can effectively and inexpensively listen, adapt and drive their communities to action.

***"For the Environmental Defense Fund, First-Time Donations are Roughly Twice as Large Online as Direct-Mail."***

### **Move to Action**

You succeeded in reaching the people interested in your mission and programs. You obtained emails, 'likes' or follows. You are using online communications, guided by online metrics, to engage these prospects. You are now gaining community applause. Congratulations! You have reached an important relationship milestone. You have earned the right to make an 'ask.'

But moving someone from an engaged reader to an active supporter represents a big psychological step. Effective online strategies find the right messages, campaigns and transaction technology to make taking this step easy. Think through your 'asks' carefully!

### **Deepen the Relationship**

The data here is clear. The real payoff comes when first time supporters become long term advocates. Keep high quality, targeted communications flowing. Keep refining your understanding of each of your supporters. And continue to develop your process, refined by using online metrics.

### **Strategic Jump-Starts**

With an online relationship strategy, you can start today. No new Website or fancy donor management software needed.

Target one, or perhaps a few, stakeholder segments. With tools like **Google Grants** (fast and easy to get) and **Facebook boosting** you can quickly find the right people to engage. Then, craft a simple stream of communications that online tools can now deliver automatically. Think about the campaign that moves these relationships to action. Then think about how to make the 'ask.' Next steps: launch, track and refine. You likely will find that the online relationship strategy is very intuitive. You'll feel empowered. You'll be winning online.

*Rob Leighton of iMission Partners will present a workshop on Innovations in Nonprofit Funding: Google Grants, Crowd Sourcing and Social Impact Bonds at the 12th Annual CT Nonprofit Conference on November 6th at the CT Convention Center in Hartford.*

