FIVE WAYS TECHNOLOGY WILL SHAPE THE NONPROFIT SECTOR IN 2014

By: Mary Beth Westmoreland

Technology is changing the world around us — sometimes in subtle ways and sometimes in very dramatic ways. Consumer behavior is changing and companies are figuring out how to best use the latest technology to sell products and services and improve brand loyalty.

It’s no different for nonprofits. Technology is causing an ongoing transformation in the nonprofit sector, from the way supporters engage with their favorite nonprofits to the way organizations fundraise, market, and manage information, and this trend will only continue to evolve in 2014. Think back even five years ago, ten years ago — how different is the nonprofit landscape now compared to then? It’s pretty dramatic.

In 2014, tremendous opportunities exist for nonprofit organizations to use technology to deliver on their missions in a very effective and scalable way. Some of the technology trends that will have the biggest impact on the nonprofit sector this year include:

Mobile

Mobile will continue to be an essential part of how nonprofits engage with supporters and expand the reach of their staff. Nearly half of all emails are now read on mobile devices, which means having a mobile-friendly approach to engaging donors has never been more important. Mobile devices are quickly becoming the platform of choice for computing and collaboration versus sitting behind a desk, which will change how organizations leverage data and drive mission delivery.
Analytics

Data is the most valuable asset in any nonprofit organization. Consider how much additional web, social, and interaction data is now being gathered by charities. This ever increasing amount of data means nonprofits must shift from collecting to analyzing. Nonprofits will use this data to understand which communication channels are most effective, how to better fundraise (who to ask for how much), how to effectively facilitate events or peer-to-peer fundraise, how to increase recurring giving, etc. Indicators for where other nonprofits are successful, how individuals respond to different communication (marketing) channels, and each supporter’s overall propensity and ability to give will be integrated into software to make it “smarter,” ultimately enabling nonprofits to be much more successful.

Software

Software will continue to shift away from the importance of the underlying technology to the quality of the user experience. Deep knowledge of how nonprofits need to run their businesses and the mission-critical processes they depend on will trump the bits and bytes. As the switch to mobile devices for computing needs continues to gain momentum, solutions will be developed for mobile devices, tablets, and traditional desktops by default. Information and functionality will be available to users in any environment, without having to tab through monolithic apps or go through training programs. And data will be shared among these apps, accelerating a move away from on-premises installations of software to software-as-a-service/cloud-based implementations.

Cloud

We’ve been talking about the cloud for a few years — and with good reason. Cloud hosting provides a secure, highly available, managed, cheaper, and less cumbersome environment for organizations. Nonprofits will continue to move to the cloud in 2014 as they acknowledge that they are not in the IT infrastructure business. There will be less need to maintain applications and data in-house when it’s far more cost effective, accessible, and offers a higher quality of service via the cloud. The move to the cloud becomes even more critical when we consider the pervasive nature of mobile devices. The two environments were made for each other to share vast amounts of data and information from any place, any time in a simple way. Ultimately, the cloud will serve as a game changer for many nonprofits, providing access to a multitude of services that were otherwise too costly even three years ago.

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Social media

Social media will become more integrated as a communication channel. Social networks are the communication channel of choice for the emerging generations and will become more pervasive for business and personal use. Networks such as Facebook®, LinkedIn®, and Twitter® provide access to networks of potential donors, volunteers, members, alumni, patrons, and supporters. Applications will more seamlessly integrate with social networks and enable peer-to-peer and direct communication with constituents, and the benefits and options for leveraging this integration are limitless.

So there you have it — these are the trends that will have the biggest impact on nonprofits in 2014. The organizations that understand and embrace these changes will be best positioned for success.

About the Author

Mary Beth Westmoreland is Blackbaud’s vice president of product development, responsible for global product engineering, quality assurance engineering, user experience, and user education teams.

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