

Making the Most of Your Online Event Fundraising Efforts

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With the financial downturn recently covering headlines, there has been concern among nonprofits about the effect it will have on their fundraising and donations. It is during these times that charities should double their efforts to engage donors and get creative in the ways they seek new donors. Online event fundraising continues to be an effective method to accomplish both of these goals. Since 2000, event fundraising technologies have proven to be an area of growth for many organizations and multiple surveys suggest that online tools provide a more satisfying overall donor experience.

And now, with the fall events season complete, this is the best time for organizations to review their spring event fundraising strategies. Because online participants raise almost six times more than those who don't use the Internet, it is worth giving this fundraising medium a fresh look.

If raising six times more isn't convincing enough, here are some more statistics. These statistics are based on aggregated data from 28,000 events that all used Sphere® Events™ from 2000 to September 2008. These events collectively raised \$850 million online from more than 12 million participants and 22 million donors. Historically, the average participant sends about 22 emails, with approximately 25 percent resulting in a donation. Data also indicates that the average online donation amount is \$50. That makes each personal solicitation email worth about \$12.50.

However, these statistics are averages. Some organizations exceed these returns, while others lag behind. The good news is that there are a number of tactics fundraisers can employ to help increase the success of online event fundraising efforts. As organizations prepare for the spring, here are a few tactics worth consideration.

- 1. Launch the event online at least six months ahead.** On average, organizations set up the online event about five-and-a-half months before the event. While about 55 percent of donations collected online will come the last 20 days before the event, participants need a head start to ensure online adoption and effective use of the tools. Starting too late means participants will raise an average 27 percent less online than if they were given six months or more to fundraise.
- 2. Extend the online duration of the event.** Let the event run online longer past the event date. Keeping the event pages up for approximately 40 days after the conclusion of the event has been a good rule for many organizations. Statistics show that only five percent of total donations come in after the event; however, since the event is over, there is little to no expense associated with these donations. Don't forget to shut down registration and be sure to update the site with appropriate awareness messaging around the event.
- 3. Encourage online registration.** Participants using online tools tend to raise six times more than non-users and tend to be more engaged with the event. Encourage online registration by making the event's web address prominent in all event materials and communications. Most events average only 21 percent active online usage by their



About the Author

Mark Davis is Director of Technical Solutions based in San Diego for the Blackbaud Internet Solutions Division. He has worked directly with many of the largest nonprofits in the industry, such as American Heart Association, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, and Arthritis Foundation, helping to deploy online fundraising solutions. As one of the original architects of Friends Asking Friends technology, he has actively participated in the development of the Blackbaud Sphere product. He received a bachelor's degree in engineering from Duke University and a master's degree in engineering from Stanford University.

participants. By successfully marketing online registration, extensive team captain training, and providing incentives, some event organizations have succeeded in getting up to 60 percent of participants actively using online tools.

- 4. Make it easy for participants to send more emails.** Do some of the leg work for participants. Providing email templates makes solicitation easier for participants and helps save time – two common concerns of new or volunteer fundraisers. The average event should have at least four email templates: team leader, general participant, team member, and a donor thank-you message. Also, use email communications to continually motivate participants. Include the participants' user names and other personalized data, such as name and fundraising goal, to motivate them to log into the event website. On average, about 15 percent of event participants use email. Events with higher online adoption outperform those with less adoption by 58 percent.
- 5. Focus on customer service.** Giving participants a phone number to call if they need help setting up their personal pages can have a significant impact on event success and overall participant satisfaction. Participants are less likely to give up when they can call and get answers to their questions. This also helps create a positive experience with the organization that can contribute to an increase in return participants and build organizational affinity. Some organizations actually offer 24-hour customer service in the last 20 days before an event to make sure they can maximize online fundraising.
- 6. Follow up.** Just because the event is over doesn't mean you shouldn't keep in touch. Immediately following an event is one of the best times to engage participants and work toward building donor retention. Soliciting feedback is one of the simplest ways to engage event participants after the event, but there are additional methods available. Some organizations launch a post-event website with message boards and community building tools that encourage participants to interact with one another. But, don't forget the all important "thank you."

With the world online and event participants online, it is important to get the most out of your online events software. From consulting with participants on fundraising best practices to offering basic technical support, the tips above can help transform a single event to an experience participants will carry with them year to year.



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 22,000 organizations – including University of Arizona Foundation, American Red Cross, Cancer Research UK, The Taft School, Lincoln Center, In Touch Ministries, Tulsa Community Foundation, Ursinus College, Earthjustice, International Fund for Animal Welfare, and the WGBH Educational Foundation – 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, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit www.blackbaud.com.



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