

# Understanding the Value of Team Captains

Amy Braiterman, Principal Strategy Consultant, Blackbaud

Peer-to-peer fundraising events have proven to be an effective way for nonprofit organizations to empower their participants to reach more people and raise more funds for their cause. While team captains have become the cornerstone of peer-to-peer fundraising events, to date there has not been a reliable way to measure the overall impact that team captains have on events. That is until now. In December 2010, Target Analytics, a Blackbaud company, brought together six national nonprofit organizations to discuss event fundraising and compare fundraising performance of team captains, team members, individuals (non-team participants), and donors. Participating organizations were a self-selected group with an interest in creating a collaborative environment to learn from each other's experiences to grow their peer-to-peer fundraising events.

One common theme continued to stand out as the group discussed fundraising performance, retention, and revenue distribution; team captains are vital to the health, growth, and success of peer-to-peer fundraising events.

The six organizations include:

- Alzheimer's Association
- Arthritis Foundation
- Autism Speaks
- LIVESTRONG
- March of Dimes
- National Multiple Sclerosis Society

## Team Captain Fundraising Performance

Team captains play the most important role in peer-to-peer event fundraising; however, for the six organizations participating in our research, team captains only accounted for an average of 13 percent of the participant event population. How can a small group make such large impact?

Jeff Shuck, president and CEO of Event 360, elaborates. "In our work, there are two reasons we find that team captains are the most influential fundraisers. First, they have a natural tendency to organize

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and affiliate; that is, anyone who volunteers to lead a group of people is likely predisposed to making connections, building relationships, and asking for help — three of the primary ingredients in successful fundraising. Second, team captains tend to be more connected to the cause than other participants. Something about their own experience has spurred them to not only get involved, but to recruit others as well. This combination of relationship-building, skill, and connection to the cause is powerful.”

As Mr. Shuck points out, team captains are natural leaders. In addition to their team building efforts, team captains tend to be the most successful event fundraisers. Even though team captains account for only 13 percent of the participant population, they raise an average of one third of the overall participant revenue. In fact, it’s worth noting; our report showed that team captains receive larger gifts than team members and individuals. In addition to receiving larger gifts, team captains also received more gifts than other participant types. When looking at events without a fundraising minimum, team captains received an average of nine gifts compared to team members and individuals who received an average of three gifts each.

“The collaborative report showed the value of team captains. We know team captains are important, but being able to share with our staff that the average team captain not only receives more gifts, but also larger gifts is powerful information. We’ll continue to stress the importance of team captains, but a take-away for me was that we need to coach team captains on getting team members involved in fundraising.”

— Scott Archimbaud

Vice President of March for Babies  
March of Dimes

“When can we meet again? That was the first question I asked when the meeting was ending. It was great to come together, review the report, and learn from each other. Since the meeting, we’ve identified our key initiatives for 2011, based on what we learned. I’m excited about our potential this year and I feel we’re making the right decisions for the Arthritis Foundation and our events.”

— Rick Bell  
Managing Director  
Cause Development  
Arthritis Foundation

## Team Captain Retention and Revenue

Retention and revenue are two separate, yet connected topics. The report revealed on average 41 percent of participants who raised funds are retained from one year to the next. Across the group, retained participants account for about 53 percent of the current year revenue.

Retention rates impact revenue in many ways. Multi-year team captains raise two to three times more than new team captains, retaining about 86 percent of their prior year revenue. Team captains are not only retaining donors but, when we look at the retention rates of the different participant types, team members are also retained at a higher rate than individuals.

Mr. Shuck elaborates, “Again, one of the forces at work here is the social aspect. Event fundraising is different than many other forms of fundraising in that the social connections made are not simply between a donor and a development officer or between a donor and an organization, but between groups of people bound by a shared experience. It is common for us to see this not only in fundraising results but in event satisfaction surveys — team members perceive the event through the lens of their team, and generally give better satisfaction scores than individuals. Team membership is not only a more effective form of fundraising, it is simply more fun.”



## About the Contributor

Jeff Shuck has led the Event 360 team to produce more than 200 fundraising events involving hundreds of thousands of participants, which have collectively raised more than \$600 million for charity. Prior to co-founding Event 360, Jeff was the Vice President of Productions for Pallotta TeamWorks, where he was responsible for all aspects of event production for the firm's large-scale fundraising events. He has also worked extensively in the higher education arena and served on the staff of an educational association for six years. Jeff currently serves on the board of the ACLU of Illinois. Jeff is also a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, as well as Vistage, a national CEO organization. He graduated magna cum laude from the University of Rochester, where he was a National Merit Scholar and elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He earned his MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

“We tend to beat ourselves up over our retention rate, because we haven’t been able to measure ourselves to an industry standard. It was nice to see that we are on par with our peers. Having the data to show the connection between retention and revenue will help when communicating with NMSS staff why retention is a game changer for events.”

—Betty Ross

Associate Vice President, Campaign Development  
National Multiple Sclerosis Society

## Creating a Plan for Success

When speaking about peer-to-peer event fundraising, one word comes to mind: empower. It’s the job of fundraising staff to empower participants to become successful fundraisers. The group meeting can be summed up using this same word. Having an understanding of participant performances, trends, and behaviors can empower organizations to create data driven strategies to increase revenue and participation.

How can you take what this group learned and use it to drive revenue and participation for your events? First, start by looking at your event data and answer the following questions about team captains:

1. What percentage of the event participant population do team captains represent?
2. What percentage of participant revenue can be attributed to team captains?
3. How many gifts do team captains receive?
4. What are the team captains' fundraising averages?
5. What is your team retention rate?

After answering these five questions, compare your results to our group. Team captains represent what percentage of the overall participant population and revenue? See what stands out to you; identify successes and areas for improvement. Use what you’ve learned by answering these five questions to set goals and create your event plan. For example: if your goal is to increase the number of gifts that a team captain receives, then what are the tactics you will use to meet your goal?

Be sure to track your progress leading up to the event and evaluate the final results. Did you reach your goal? Which tactics worked the best? How would you rate your overall event plan? Event fundraising is not an exact science, but understanding your data and comparing it your peers will help you assess where to invest your time and resources.

Jeff Shuck adds, “Ultimately, our event programs, like the missions of the organizations we serve, are living, evolving entities. Like everything living and growing, our programs need a bit of food, light, and water. This caretaking doesn’t need to be a complex process — even small inquiries can lead to dramatic growth. You may not see it overnight, but with a bit of regular attention, you’ll create something you are proud of, and something that bears fruit for the world around you.”

## About the donorCentrics™ Events Benchmarking Group

The six organizations named in this paper participated in the donorCentrics™ Events Benchmarking Group. To provide a factual basis for discussion, Target Analytics, a Blackbaud company, obtained data from all six organizations and produced reports comparing their event fundraising performance. Target Analytics delivers data-driven, collaborative solutions designed to help nonprofit organizations maximize their fundraising potential. Target Analytics was the first company to bring forward-thinking nonprofit organizations together to establish industry-standard benchmarking and openly discuss successful strategies and practices.

## 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 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, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For more information about Blackbaud solutions, contact a Blackbaud account representative. In the United States and Canada, call toll-free 800.443.9441. In Europe, call +44 (0) 141 575 0000. Visit us on the web at [www.blackbaud.com](http://www.blackbaud.com).

> **Get involved! Contact us at [solutions@blackbaud.com](mailto:solutions@blackbaud.com) for more information.**

## About the Author

Amy Braiterman, principal strategy consultant at Blackbaud, is a facilitator for the donorCentrics Events Benchmarking Group. She also supports customers with their peer-to-peer fundraising events with a process she refers to as “data-driven strategy.” Amy’s data-driven strategy analyzes how effective event participants are using online fundraising tools and takes those results to develop an event fundraising plan. Prior to joining Blackbaud, Amy earned her fundraising stripes managing events for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Alzheimer’s Association, and Share Our Strength. She shares her fundraising know-how through her popular blog [FriendsAskingAmy.com](http://FriendsAskingAmy.com), by hosting educational webinars and speaking at customer conferences.

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