
Cybergifts

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ABSTRACT

THE INTERNET PROVIDES A VALUABLE NEW fund-raising tool for libraries and other non-profit organizations. However, simply putting a “give now” button on your home page will not bring new gifts. Development directors should use the concept of “Permission Marketing” to structure an approach to building the constituency for your institution. And while the Web may attract visitors, it is e-mail that can be your most powerful fund-raising ally.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes I find myself driving on an out-of-the way suburban street only to come across a scene straight out of Peanuts. Two children are sitting behind a makeshift lemonade stand with paper cups and a change box at the ready. Their mother is usually perched in a lawn chair behind them, both protecting and encouraging her little ones in what has to be their first foray into retail commerce. After Dad and a few neighbors have purchased their obligatory cup of lemonade, one wonders who else stops to make a purchase. There is little evidence that this is a thriving business.

It is astonishing that nonprofit organizations, making their first foray into online giving, often set up the equivalent of a lemonade stand in a suburban cul-de-sac. They create an uninteresting online donation form, bury it levels down on their Web sites, and wonder why nobody makes a gift in response. Thus there are sites intended to solicit donors that have

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been up for a year or more and that have received less than twenty-five gifts. Is cyber-giving therefore a failure? Of course not. The only failure is a failure of imagination.

BEYOND BROCHUREWARE

The first stage of any invention is to think of it in terms of one's current frame of reference. Thus the automobile was the "horseless carriage," electronic message delivery is "e-mail," and Web sites have a "home page." Not surprisingly, then, most early pioneers of the World Wide Web thought in terms of print format. Their first impulse was to put their various brochures, press releases, annual reports, and newsletters online.

When it came to gifts, memberships, and purchases, most non-profit organizations started with what might be found on any brochure: a mailing address, an "800" number, and a "form" that readers were encouraged to "print out and mail." Or, for institutions that were really progressive, "print out and fax." These early efforts were the equivalent of the suburban lemonade stand—institutions built them, but nobody came.

The next level of innovation began to capture the power of e-mail. Web sites peppered their pages with "mail tos" allowing readers to easily click and send comments in a freeform box. Next were simple "cgi" scripts that allowed the creation of online forms. Now our visitors could fill in the blanks, click on "send," and communicate substantively with the library. That message could be a pledge in any amount. It could be a membership application with a "bill me" checkbox. It could even be a credit card number, expiration date, and gift designation. Voila! Cybergiving is born.

Currently, libraries have the capacity to accept credit card gifts online with varying levels of security. Those who are willing to pay the extra cost can also have real-time validation, direct transfer to a merchant account, full integration with accounting and donor-tracking systems, and automatically generated and personalized acknowledgments.

FUTURE THINKING

As we invent the future together, here are three "science fiction" ideas to ponder, each of which has vast implications for fund-raising.

The first idea is micropayments. One way or another, we will soon be able to spend small amounts of money online—perhaps 15 cents for a transaction. Whether this payment is made through digital cash or through micro-debit is immaterial. Think about how an institution might be able to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars through micropayments—even millions!

The second concept is convergence. While admittedly a stale buzzword, however it is finally tagged, one must consider the possibilities when voice, text, and image all flow smoothly through an individual's information

appliance. Prospects will be able to scan the library's site and, if desired, "click-up" a real-time conversation online. Virtual donor-initiated visits become possible. And, just to add an interesting twist, imagine that people cannot only speak to each other in real-time and see each other in real-time, but that speech can be translated into any of forty languages and dialects in real-time and vice versa. English becomes Parisian-accented French; French becomes Peter Jennings-style Canadian. Oh, and the computer smoothly renders mouths so that it appears that the speaker is actually speaking the translated language.

The final concept is identity. Imagine this: A surgeon receives an e-mail saying "Doctor, I understand that my son's survival depends on a lung transplant. You have my permission to operate." What surgeon in his right mind would proceed? Yet some day such identification mechanisms will be so rock-solid, the law will have caught up with the technology, and legally-binding decisions "online" will be commonplace. Enter a binding pledge through e-mail? No problem. Buy a house online? You bet. Transfer \$10 million? Just say where you want it to go.

We are not even at the "toddler" stage in cybergiving. We are just learning to crawl. Yet there are already some very exciting examples of innovation out there, and some of them are beginning to produce gold.

DONATE NOW

The simplest method for cybergiving is to place a "donate now" or "click here to give" button on a library's Web site. The visitor clicks, receives a long or short form to fill out with the amount of the gift and credit card data, and clicks "send" or "complete gift." Ignoring a lot of behind-the-scenes processing, the gift is done. And the money (less processing fees) has gone to the library.

For most people who think of cybergiving, the above example practically defines the concept: create a credit card form, place links to it on the Web site, and wait for the money to arrive. In some cases, this approach does work.

Those of us who follow cybergiving were electrified by the news that the Red Cross had taken in over \$1.2 million in online gifts for Balkan Relief from more than 9,000 donors in the first half of 1999 (Red Cross Press Release, 1999). Other relief organizations, like CARE and World Vision, also reported very significant giving during this same period (Miller, 1999, p. F1). Clearly, people were touched by stories of suffering in the Balkans and wanted to do something about it.

It would be a huge mistake to think that the Red Cross "breakthrough" heralds great things for the rest of us. About four years ago this author predicted that disaster relief organizations would be the first agencies to experience a flood of small online gifts. This prognostication came from the experience of working for the American Friends Service Committee

(AFSC) when the news of the holocaust in Cambodia first hit the world press. The AFSC was one of the few agencies that could channel aid to Cambodia, and tens of thousands of spontaneous donations came its way—office workers passed the hat in Texas, schoolchildren took up collections in New England, and little old ladies and college students wrote out checks and then found the AFSC address through the phone book or at their library. Such outpourings of public sentiment occur when publicity is widespread and the need is clear.

While the Red Cross does many things, it is best known for its work with natural and human-made disasters. Therefore a critical strategy for its site is to offer timely and accurate information about such disasters. The Red Cross decided that its site must enable visitors to quickly:

- find out what happened;
- find out what the Red Cross is doing about it;
- find out what you can do about it, including volunteering;
- donate on the spot.

All of this was in place when the refugee crisis in Kosovo began flooding the news. Gifts followed. Not just online gifts, but 800-number gifts, mailed gifts, and major gifts from foundations and individuals such as Bill and Melinda Gates.

And, my prediction was, that's it. Disaster relief will have early take-off, but every other form of fund-raising will have to slog through the trenches for several more years. But I was wrong.

Next was politics. Politics has more than one thing in common with disasters, but the strong link with fund-raising is that politics can generate high emotions and, apparently, high levels of gift motivation. On February 1, 2000 John McCain scored a surprise victory over George W. Bush in New Hampshire. By noon of the next day, \$300,000 had poured into his Web site. By the next day, the number had reached \$1 million (Fallows, 2000, p. 59). By the end of February, *Fortune* magazine estimated that McCain has raised an astonishing \$4.3 million via the Internet, and the other candidates also picked up a fair amount of money through their sites as well. Bush: \$400,000; Bradley: \$1.7 million; Gore: \$1.1 million (Birnbaum, 2000, pp. 86-88).

But this is peanuts compared to the experience of MoveOn.org. According to a front-page story in *USA Today* (Drinkard, 1999), this "grass-roots movement" has generated over \$13 million in online pledges (p. 1A). If even half of that is paid, this drive will be by far the most successful example of Internet fund-raising in the medium's young history.

Here is what happened. Silicon Valley husband-and-wife team Joan Blades and Wes Boyd got fed up with the long drawn out campaign to punish Bill Clinton for his peccadilloes. They launched an online petition campaign asking others who felt the same way to urge Congress to "cen-

sure and move on” and to pass the petition along. The petition spread through the net community and soon over 500,000 petitions were clogging Capitol Hill computers (Drinkard, 1999, p. 1A).

Sometime later, they launched a “We will Remember” drive to raise funds to defeat legislators who were anti-Clinton activists (<http://www.MoveOn.org>). They placed an online pledge and donation form on their site and thus far have garnered \$13 million in gifts and pledges—mostly pledges due by November 2000 at the latest (Drinkard, 1999, p. 1A).

They also launched a “We will Act” drive to collect pledges that people would work for candidates in this election. As of September 1, 1999, they have collected pledges of 776,485 hours of volunteer work (<http://www.MoveOn.org>).

Is this kind of success not only real but sustainable? Well, they have already distributed \$336,000 to political candidates, and more donations and pledge-payment checks are coming in every day so, yes, it is definitely real, and experience thus far suggests sustainability as well (Drinkard, 1999, p. 1A).

This case is, in fact, so real that some political professionals are predicting vast changes in a very short period of time. *USA Today* found one pundit, John Phillips, who predicted that more than \$25 million in political donations would be raised online by November 2000. By Election Day 2004, Phillips predicts, “as much as 80% of all money raised—\$600 million or more—could flow through electronic channels” (Drinkard, 1999, p. 1A) (but note that Phillips sells political fund-raising software, so a few grains of salt may be in order).

One would hope that Bill Clinton is not the only “political cause” which will open people’s cyberwallets. How about gun control? One might suspect that the gun control movement would receive considerable support online following the series of terrible shooting episodes in 1999. MoveOn.org does have a gun control petition drive in motion and has collected 60,000 signatures thus far (<http://www.MoveOn.org>).

So a second area of online fund-raising is “taking off.” Even so, periods of high gift motivation are unusual for most charities most of the time. Clearly however, when such periods occur, a charity should be prepared to handle them. What might be examples of such times? Consider these situations:

- Your organization was just given a glowing segment on “60 minutes.”
- You have just announced a breakthrough treatment discovery for a major disease.
- Your come-from-behind football team just won the Rose Bowl, and your alumni are delirious with joy.
- Your library has just experienced a disastrous flood.
- It’s December 31st.

The year-end giving phenomenon is common to most charitable causes. Some donors wait until the last minute to make their gift and still be able to take advantage of a this-year tax deduction. When Brown University set up a donation site, they received a spurt of gifts in late December. They also noted that donors made gifts at unusual hours, such as 3 a.m. Someone will certainly come up with a "night owl" gift strategy beyond the obvious benefit that Web sites are available at all hours.

The trick, of course, is to work with the opportunity that is presented by a high-profile event, using well-known techniques: do a quick mailing, make phone calls, run ads. But the most immediate way to get the word out, and to suggest a related gift, is by e-mail.

There is much to be said about e-mail as a major fund-raising tool, and it will be said in due course. For the moment, however, note this advice: *Use every opportunity to collect e-mail addresses from constituents and would-be constituents.* Even if the library's development organization doesn't yet have a Web site, it will, and those e-mail addresses will be institutional "gold." If your current printed information forms don't have a line for e-mail addresses, throw them out. It will be worth the expense to print new ones.

A REASON TO VISIT

Having a good Web site with a "donate now" button is just the "beginning" of online fund-raising, not the culmination. A library can create the most attractive, most easy-to-donate, Web site in the world, but that doesn't mean that anyone will visit or that visitors will make gifts or pledges in support of the library's mission.

Librarians must ask themselves this question: Why would anyone want to visit my site? If there is not a good answer to that question, the library development effort has encountered a big problem in its use of technology to reach prospects.

Some charities assume that, if they create a Web site describing their mission, large numbers of people will surf over to see what they are about and that a percentage of those visitors will donate. This assumption could not be more wrong. Cyberspace is awash with tens of millions of Web pages. People will need a "reason" to visit your lemonade stand or you will end up with a lot of melting ice and watery lemonade.

PULL AND PUSH

There are a few simple concepts that are worth keeping in mind as we review Internet-based fund-raising. One is "Pull." The other is "Push." Pull and push are the two ways to get attention in cyberspace. A pull strategy draws your prospect to your site. A push strategy takes your site or your message and puts it directly in front of your prospects.

Pull

Fund-raising sites need to have pull. The more visitors, the more opportunities the library has to present gift options.

Some sites “pull” visitors because they are information-rich. For those concerned about human rights, Amnesty International can relate exactly what is going on in practically every country in the world and, if there are abuses, then describe exactly what an individual can do about it (<http://www.amnesty.org>). For those concerned about cancer and who want to know about survival-rates and treatment options, then OncoLink is a good site (<http://www.oncolink.org>).

Some sites can pull visitors because they are product-rich. The Metropolitan Museum, with its upscale online shop, is an example. I happen to like neckties based on designs by M.C. Escher and William Morris, so I will go out of my way to find them and, happily, the Met currently has a Morris thistle tie that looks just right (<http://metmuseum.org>).

Some sites pull visitors because they are service-rich, enabling the visitor to accomplish a task online. A good example would be a digital library site, or any college Web site that allows prospective students the opportunity to apply online. Last summer, our family was delighted to discover that we could reserve a tent site at a tiny state campground in New Hampshire, at the last minute, and get an instant confirmation.

Another visitor attraction is entertainment. Some nonprofit sites include games, unique movie footage, contests, music, and online exhibitions. An example of an “entertainment” draw would be the Metropolitan Museum’s site on its re-opened Greek Galleries. This site offers a “pre-view” of eighteen objects, views of the galleries, a timeline “illustrated with signal works of art,” a map of the Mediterranean, and more. It is so alluring and so well done that I found it hard not to pause for an hour and dally there (see <http://www.metmuseum.org/htmlfile/newexhib/greek/greek1.htm>).

The Metropolitan site almost “says it all” in terms of good design and clever strategy. Consider its bottom menu bar, which constantly offers the following options:

- Membership
- Calendar
- Collections
- Exhibitions
- Information
- News
- Education
- Store
- Home

The most important pull strategy is involvement. If an organization can involve its visitors and entice them to come back again and again, then the fund-raising effort is operating at a very new and unusual level. Simply put, supporters will be able to move from visitor, to participant, to member of your community. A loyal member of your community is the highest kind of gift prospect.

Online education is one example of involvement. People who take an online course will visit that site repeatedly. They will be asking questions, viewing resources, downloading class material, consulting with the teacher one-to-one, and engaging with their fellow classmates in meaningful chat. Well-organized and well-staffed online courses are perhaps the most powerful devices for "engaging" your members and friends.

Recently, an Op-Ed page advertisement in the *New York Times* told readers about the "Virtual Jewish University," a new online offering from Israel's Bar-Ilan University (*New York Times* advertisement, 1999). The ad offered:

Thanks to VJU, [you] can take on-line, for-credit courses in English on the Judean Desert Scrolls, the history of Jerusalem, war and peace in the bible, Jewish holidays, the Jewish musical tradition and more. VJU students benefit from some of the world's most advanced long-distance learning technology: a virtual helicopter ride over Jerusalem, a chance to see and hear a Moroccan prayer service, video clips of archeological digs, private conferences with professors and "chats" with fellow students.

This advertisement is compelling. Anyone with the slightest interest in Jewish subjects, and/or with an interest in Internet technology—or the hope of a free helicopter ride—would be very likely to cruise over and see what VJU is all about (<http://www.bar-ilan.edu>). This is an example of Push and Pull. As an inveterate *New York Times* reader, the ad was "pushed" in my face, and the content descriptions started to "pull" me to the site.

Online education will not be the sole province of traditional colleges and universities. Any nonprofit can offer a class online—of any duration and on any subject. This can be a perfect strategy for attracting visitors to the library's site and for making them long-term members of the library community.

Other examples of involvement include offering periodic chat sessions with "stars" or experts, online book clubs, online chat groups, online threaded discussion groups, and online "members-only" interactive groups. Princeton University offers interactive areas for their alumni in each class. Princeton also hosts online exchanges on broad topics in which any alumni can participate. Recent examples include discussions on real estate and biomedical issues (see <http://tignetnet.princeton.edu/>). If you would like to see an example of an "open" alumni exchange, see

the one at Colby College (<http://www.colby.edu/alumni/bulletin/index.html>).

A very different example of involvement can be found at the Amnesty International site. There, the visitor can become involved in a campaign or take action to help free a prisoner of conscience (see <http://www.amnesty.org>). Similarly, The Nature Conservancy has a section called "Get Involved" and the World Wildlife Fund, USA, starts right off with a banner saying "Take Action: Protect Sharks" (<http://www.tnc.org> and <http://www.worldwildlife.org/>).

To summarize: sites should offer something that will pull visitors and not just once but repeatedly. Library Web designers should be clever, test ideas, and allow themselves to be surprised. Consider what unique information that the library has that might interest your potential constituents and build the site around it.

Push

A push strategy takes a site, or your message, and presents it very obviously to prospects. The most annoying instance of push is "spam" e-mail where a prospect receives an unrequested message about a product or service.

Advertisements and products are pushed at us all day long. They come to us on the radio, on television, from banner ads, from our newspaper, from telemarketing calls, from billboards, from pop-up coupons at the supermarket. Even "And-have-I-told-you-about-our-two-for-one-apple-crisp-special?" is a push.

Personally, I prefer the "pull" of the popcorn smell in a theater lobby or the "pull" of a measured dose of caffeine in a can of Diet Coke. Generally, the public dislikes spam, feeling it to be an unwanted intrusion.

So what is the rationale for using "push" methods for Internet fundraising? Because, rightly done, it may be the most powerful tool we have for bringing in online gifts. Any organization with a Web presence can use traditional "push" methods to try to drive traffic to their site. This can be as simple as putting your URL in direct mail pieces to having a radio announcer say "or contact www.sywash.edu/go-team/newlockerrooms/donate.html."

Banner ads are a good example. Some charities have taken to running such advertisements on heavily-visited sites and with good results. The Internet society *does* accept banner ads, the same way we accept advertisements during our favorite TV shows. Library development organizations could add to their tool kits banner advertisements inducing visitors to "click here" to learn about our organization.

Banner ads can be very sophisticated these days, and they will be getting even more sophisticated as time goes on. Any good development officer will know that paying hard money for banner ads is only one way to

proceed. The Yahoos and other portals could be persuaded to *donate* banner ads to your cause. Some of them have a good portion of their ad space unsold, which represents an opportunity for charities.

Internet push is in its infancy, and at this early stage one can imagine any number of other tactics that might be tried:

- sign up as a sponsor for a “free TV” giveaway and have Web-enabled multimedia promotions for library.edu built into the hard drive;
- give away pretty or clever screensaver software, and build promotions into the mix: the university’s beautiful campus in all four seasons, along with campus songs softly sung by the glee club, with an occasional pitch for your capital campaign and the library;
- emulate Pointcast and offer “push” channel services to your constituents. There are vendors who will set you up with a complete package, including news and stockmarket feeds.

Imagination will stimulate further ways to use this technology. Internet push is here to stay, and we cannot even imagine all the forms it will take in the future. But that’s then, and this is now. Right now, most of us are ignoring the most fabulous “push” technology available: e-mail.

E-MAIL

E-mail? Fabulous? How can this be? E-mail is old technology already. It’s downright boring. True, but how many of us have come to depend on e-mail to get our work done? To stay in touch with friends? To lightly remind our daughter at college that she still has a family at home who loves her dearly and would like to hear from her once in awhile? To request a service or ask a question or make a complaint or tell President Clinton what we think?

The statistics are staggering: total pieces of first class mail delivered in 1998 was 107 billion; total pieces of e-mail delivered in 1998 was 3.4 trillion (Business 2.0, April 1999).

The total marginal transport cost of sending first class mail to 100 additional addresses is \$33.00. The total marginal cost of sending e-mail to 100 or 1 million additional addresses is \$0.

Surveys indicate that 80 percent of the people who plunk down hard money for an Internet Service Provider cite e-mail as their main motivation. Many of us have older relatives who acquire computer systems in their 70s and 80s to join the e-mail circle that children and grandchildren have created. Children thought the Web was boring (especially at pre-cable-modem speeds) but have abandoned television and even the phone for e-mail.

Earlier, we cited the *USA Today* cover story on the astonishing success of MoveOn.org. Says Joan Blades: “[Online giving] makes it simpler for people to contribute. You don’t even have to find a stamp. It’s pretty danged

easy” (Drinkard, 1999, p. 1A). It’s pretty dangd easy, says the woman who has raised more money online than anyone else. What made it easy was the high level of political passion that Boyd and Blades tapped into. They did not accomplish their results through direct mail or even direct e-mail. They were successful because people passed the message on to their friends through chain e-mail.

The power of chain e-mail is tremendous. Chain e-mail is not spam, though sometimes it feels like it. Chain e-mail is what one friend passes along to another. If it is something that people feel passionate about, or think is funny, or cute, or insightful, or compelling, or alarming; it can literally go around the world in minutes.

This past spring, a fifth grade class in a small Canadian town sent an e-mail out into the ether. They told the recipients that they were trying an experiment. Their teacher had told them that e-mail connects people all over the world. They asked anyone who got the message to pass it along, and to e-mail back to them and say where they lived in the world. They said they wanted to see how far the message would travel in thirty days. Many recipients (including this author’s wife as well as the editor of this issue of *Library Trends*) responded and passed the message on. After a day, participants received an automatically-generated message from the school’s ISP. Messages were avalanching in to the school. The responses had shut down their computer after the first few days.

Chain e-mail can be a very powerful marketing tool. In fact, it already has been dubbed viral marketing. Viral marketing is just an electronic version of “word of mouth” marketing. MoveOn.org will not be the only NPO to profit from this technique. How can other nonprofits use viral marketing and chain e-mail for fund-raising?

CLICK TO GIVE

Tim Snyder, director of Advancement Technologies for Wake Forest University, recently discussed the establishment of online credit card giving mechanisms and its results in an e-mail exchange with this author. Wake Forest is using this technology very effectively. A number of Web-based gifts have been made, some in the \$5,000 range. An e-mail with a link back to the giving site has proven an impressive way to collect on unpaid phonathon pledges. In fact, one alum who received an e-mail Annual Giving solicitation wrote back saying that if they promised to never phone solicit him again, but used e-mail instead, he would double his pledge.

These links are useful examples of the concept of e-mail’s power:

<http://www.wfu.edu/alumni/giving/onlinegiving.html>
<http://www.redcross.org/donate/donation-form.asp>
<http://st1.yahoo.com/ajoin/noname.html>

PERMISSION E-MAIL

Permission e-mail is simple to understand. It's e-mail that you have asked for, or agreed to receive, or haven't said no to. Permission e-mail generally starts with a straightforward post to a listserv. In the case of this author, a new listserv was forming, called Cybergifts, sponsored by charitychannel.com. The potential contents were described, and the signup mechanism was clear. It sounded relevant, so I signed up.

At some point in the signup process, I was told that Cybergifts would contain advertisements. I was also assured that it would be easy to sign off the list if I lost interest. Since that time, charitychannel.com has sought to extend my level of permission from one service to several. First, they started sending job advertisements. Then they sent postings about other listservs they were starting. Then they added e-mailed book reviews. These additional messages were not solicited, but each message assures the list subscriber that the subscription can be terminated at the desire of the subscriber. Anyone who has not elected to opt out has de facto "opted in" or given "negative permission."

So now I am a "customer" of charitychannel, and they are slowly establishing "trust" with me. Will they seek to keep extending that trust and sell me additional services? I presume so. But since the benefits are worth it so far, I continue to extend permission.

Another name for permission e-mail is "opt-in" e-mail. The "E-Commerce Report" in the *New York Times* recently focused on this topic and found that commercial entities like Macy's and J. Crew are making it a central part of their online marketing. People who elect to receive Macy's opt-in communications make purchases five to seven times more frequently than other site visitors (Tadeschi, 1999, p. C5).

The principles of permission marketing are everywhere on the Net. They are, in the immortal and defining words of Seth Godin (1999), "anticipated, personal, and relevant". Godin claims that the Internet is the most powerful "direct marketing" vehicle ever invented. Stronger than snail mail, more powerful than telemarketing, able to leap the vast distance between stranger and friend with a series of carefully-calibrated bounds. In his book, he asserts that traditional marketing is dying, and that Internet marketing will replace it. This transition will not occur if the Internet is thought of in TV terms as a dumb "broadcast" medium, but only if the Internet is seen in its own terms: as an incredible tool for one-to-one marketing (p. 43).

Several not-for-profit organizations are using their Web sites to establish two-way ongoing communication with their constituents. A good example is the Nature Conservancy (<http://www.tnc.org>) which offers:

Free! The Nature Conservancy e-News Every Month
 Yes! I want to subscribe to The Nature Conservancy e-News! It's a
 free, electronic newsletter that will help expand the Conservancy's

efforts to protect our natural heritage!

With this subscription I'm eligible for the following benefits:

- Monthly issues of The Nature Conservancy e-News our free electronic newsletter that will keep you up to date on new initiatives on our web site.
- Opportunities to support the conservation work of The Nature Conservancy!
- Free 1999 Edition of The Nature Conservancy Screen Saver with beautiful nature images that represent our protection work.
- Shop with the Conservancy and support our work with purchases through our partner GreaterGood.com
- Volunteer opportunities and other local conservation news by visiting local chapter sites!
- Give us some feedback on our site—tell us what you are interested in—we want to hear from you!

Another example would be the CARE “e-mail update,” which offers readers a choice of several options:

Check the e-mail updates that you are interested in receiving.

Please send me updates when there is an emergency.

Please send me monthly updates on new features to the CARE Web site.

Please send me electronic versions of CARE's newsletters and publications (when available).

Please send me information about key CARE events or other activities I can participate in.

Please send me information about opportunities to contribute to CARE.

(See <http://www.care.org>)

Both organizations are inviting visitors to enter into a dialogue. Both are quite “up front” about the fact that they will use this permission to ask for contributions.

When it comes to acquiring new constituents through an institutional Home Page, Godin (1999) makes a challenging proposal: create two home pages. One home page is for your members, committed constituents, and so on. That page is where you do business and have most of your resources. The other page is the one you promote, the one with the shortest and easiest-to-remember address, designed solely to attract visitors and gain permission to enter into a relationship with them (pp. 220-25). Once they have “raised their hand” by giving the organization their e-mail address and permission to mail to them, they can be pointed to the “members” page. This strategy may not be appropriate for all non-profit Web sites, but it does highlight the fact that an institution's Web page should be clearly focused on turning “strangers” into friends.

CONCLUSION

What does the electronic world mean for nonprofit fund-raising? We have the tools needed to sell our “lemonade.” Earlier it was argued that

Internet fund-raising would not work if we just grafted a “give now” page onto our Web site and waited for people to drive by and toss money. Good Web fund-raising will require us to use the creative tools that are available—both “pull” and “push” tools—and to use our imagination.

Godin and his colleagues at Yoyodine, a “permission” marketer, honed their tools for commercial purposes. They found that, if they structured their offers correctly, they could go from 2 percent response rates to 36 percent response rates. Now Godin is VP for Direct Marketing at Yahoo! and we can follow the evolution of his craft by tuning in to that site.

In many ways, libraries are in a much better position than the companies for which Godin is pitching his message. They are trying to sell mouth-wash or used cars. We are service organizations with a direct impact on human lives. There is a difference. Dell computer, as agile and clever as it may be on the Internet, is still a commercial entity aimed at “the bottom line.” Amazon.com, as friendly and “personalized” as it is, still is about the business of making money and boosting its stock value. Nonprofit organizations are about something else altogether.

Seth Godin is a for-profit marketer and a good one. In his book, he lays out something that he calls the “ladder of permission.” Basically, he is trying to help companies turn strangers into long-term and loyal customers. That happens, he argues, when companies establish trust and are focused on a mutually-beneficial relationship. Their goal is to keep customers, get them to buy again, get them to buy “up,” and get them to “cross” buy, or to buy more expensive goods and services and to buy new goods and services.

At the very core of his method is the strongest of motivators: self-interest. Says Godin: “Permission Marketers make every single interaction selfish for the customer. ‘What’s in it for me’ is the question that must be answered at every step.”

And that is not what non-profit organizations are about. When we ask for support for our work, we are not ultimately appealing to our donor’s selfish instincts. Rather, we are appealing to his or her self-less instincts. We are asking people to be compassionate, caring, empathetic: to take joy in helping a child, or a tree, or a homeless kitten, to nurture someone’s faith, to give someone a chance at a better life, to help someone get out of a drug habit or an abusive relationship.

We may joke about how “selfish” our donors can sometimes be. We may even become cynical about the premiums, the “naming opportunities,” the stewardship dinners. But the bottom line for nonprofit fund-raising is simply this: we are asking people to freely part with their money in order to help others.

Charitable and educational institutions part from the path that Godin takes. We don’t start with people cruising the net to see “what’s in it for me?” In general, we start with people who are concerned about some part

of the world and think that we may be able to help. If they end up giving us money and become loyal supporters (not loyal customers), it will be because they believe in our organization and have faith in our work.

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