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More Than a Donate Button: Composing Your Online Fundraising Plan in '09
with John Kenyon
Sponsored by Network for Good

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Katya Andresen: I am thrilled to introduce our presenter, John Kenyon. John Kenyon is someone I know personally and think so highly of as a fundraising consultant. I'm delighted he's agreed to volunteer his time today. He's been helping nonprofits for over 18 years, providing advice, teaching, and writing about all kinds of effective uses of technology.

He's worn many hats throughout his career. He's been an author, trainer, consulting manager, private consultant, adjunct professor, and featured speaker in the United States, England, Australia and online. And his consulting practice concentrates on strategic uses of appropriate technologies with a focus on leveraging the Internet.

So I'm delighted to introduce John Kenyon. John, why don't you take it away?

John Kenyon: Welcome, everybody, and welcome to today's session about online engagement planning. I'm pretty much going go through the outline that Katya just mentioned. So if you have that up or want to download that. I'm going to be going through the first couple pages first and just kind of walk through it. It talks about hwo you really need to have a thoughtful plan and clear goals if you're going to be successful with online engagement and online fundraising. I'm just going to, as I said, walk through the steps that I identified in terms of starting with identifying the members of the team.

Who is going to be helping you think about online fundraising, online engagement? And what would the activities be? And to make sure that you have the correct elements of the plan. And again, I have an example plan that I'll speak to in a few minutes.

The plan should start with an organizational profile, starting with the current situation of the organization and the direction it's going in, things like that. Then you should also have online and offline communication goals. There's three questions that I encourage you to get the answers to: Who are your three primary audiences? What are the three things that you want those audience to know? And then what are the three things they can do to support your work?

Because as you likely know, people come to you website to learn and then to act. So it's great to give them good information, but you also want to give them something that they can actually do, whether it be volunteer or donate or contribute in other non-financial ways.

So be sure to articulate goals for both organizational and departmental communications. You should include benchmarks based on data collected about the organization's email and website activities. And I'll talk about metrics in a minute.

Besides those strategic online and operational goals, you then, by project, want a description of each project, listing what the benefits are. I really encourage you to really highlight the benefits. A lot of people on their plans will start with the tasks or the costs. But it's important to be able to communicate what are the benefits.

And I also encourage you to find ways to speak to the needs of the other members of the staff. For example, if you're speaking to the people who are doing development -- which may be you -- then think about how this is going to help development. In what ways is this going to help you engage more audiences, get more people singed up for your email, get more people donating to you online?

And so to think about that and try to be as specific as you can about how this is going to make their lives easier, or improve operations or improve your effectiveness and efficiency. And then, besides the benefits, I walk through the tasks and the costs.

And then I include some items that your project would likely cover. And I'm going to say a few things about these. The first is an effective website in driving traffic. This means an engaging and well-designed and well-organized website. Because content, navigation and design are primarily what comprise a website's effectiveness.

So it's important that you start out with a well-thought-out navigation that logically groups your content areas. Create a look and feel for your site that matches your brand identity and is accessible. And include appropriately engaging and interactive elements, such as maps or quizzes, perhaps some video or audio or things like that.

Although I do recommend that you use video and audio somewhat sparingly. Unless it's small or discreet, often not on the home page, because sometimes that can make downloading a little bit more slow.

Also think about effective ways to drive traffic to your website. And of course email is one of the most effective ways to drive traffic. So make sure that that's an important part you plan.

Next is regular content creation. Stories of how your programs affect people and how your stakeholders help your organization are your best pieces of content. It's great if you can get in that organizational habit of collecting pictures and stories of events, of programs, of your supporters.

And understand that this really isn't just the job of the web manager, it's everyone's job. I believe that the website helps everyone. It helps programs find more people that can benefit from the programs. It helps development find people who want to be supporters and donors. It can even help administration. So everyone should be included in contributing content.

I just wanted to say that writing for the Internet is different than writing for print. If you're a print writer, then you really need to being a different editing eye to your writing. One rule of thumb is to take what you've written and cut it in half and then cut it in half again. And that's serious, because people really don't read websites, they scan them and they glance at emails.

So what are ways that you can make your content more scannable, more glanceable? With highlighted keywords, bullet lists, things like this. I see my clients having the most success with concise, well-written stories and emails. Not long blocks of text or e-newsletters with 20 items in them. Try to make your writing a little more scan-and-glance friendly by including images, bullet points, highlighting linked keywords, and chunking your content into smaller pieces.

The next project I mention is regular e-communication. As I mentioned before, e-communication is a primary driver of traffic to your website. And if you have more than 10 or 20 supporters, which hopefully most of you do, it is important to use a bulk email to send emails and e-newsletters, and not to use Outlook.

The primary reason for that is, with Outlook, you cannot track the activity of those emails. How many people opened the email? How many people clicked on the different links? And that information is one of the most important aspects of online engagement and online fundraising.

Emails could be purely informational, or they could be focused on a campaign, whether it's fundraising, education or advocacy. So consider mixing up those type of emails so that you're not always asking for something every time you contact your stakeholders.

I also recommend that you have a system for first-time donators. For example, at one point I made a donation to an organization and the next week they wrote back and asked me for more money, and they never even told me what they did with my first donation. So consider that.

Keep e-newsletters short if you want to keep them out of the email trash bucket. Each story should have an enticing teaser and a related image. And both should be designed to entice the reader to click through and read the rest of the story on you website, thereby driving traffic to your website.

You can include practical tips or resources, but it's best usually to keep them to just a few. Also remember to encourage people to pass on communications and make them as engaging as possible so that they're motivated to pass them on.

The next project is online campaign, integrated with direct mail. It's important, and I mentioned a little lower in the plan about creating and including a calendar for the year that maps out website content, campaigns, and e-news topics and expected email campaigns.

So it's a great idea if you can think ahead and think: OK, what are our main fundraising events, what are our other events that we have going on, and how do we want to communicate around them? How can we integrate our online campaigns with direct mail?

Oftentimes it's important to have the same theme, the same story. Because what is the first thing that I'm going to do when I get a piece of your direct mail? I'm going to go to your website. And if your website doesn't have the same message, the same focus on a specific campaign that you're running that month, then you don't look coordinated. And in fact, you're really not as coordinated as you might be.

So it's important to think about those things ahead of time, because with planning it's much easier to coordinate than it is on the fly.

The next item is an excellent online donation experience. You should make it easy for people to donate online and to find your donate button. I recommend that you have the donate button on every page, and that often I recommend that it should be part of the navigation. And don't ask a lot of extra questions on your donation page. Also make sure you include your logo and a sentence or two about the great things you're going to do with donations.

In my personal opinion, PayPal is fine for e-commerce, but I'm not a fan of it for online donations, because there are important aspects about that online donation experience that PayPal is really not designed to deliver.

If you really want to find out what is an excellent online donation experience, learn by doing. Make donations at other nonprofit websites and note that experience. Was it easy to find important information to donors? For example, financial information and privacy policies. I know for myself, one of the first things I look at when I go to make a donation to a cause is their financial information.

And you may know that in the "Chronicle of Philanthropy" a while back, they said that only 20% of Americans feel that nonprofits do a good job with the money they're given. That's not very good. So one way to combat that is to be as open as you possibly can about your finances. Have an overview, perhaps have some pie charts. But also perhaps have a downloadable annual report for those people that want more detail.

Then thinking back to that online donation experience, what was the email thank you note that you got? Was is just robotic, from noreply@nonprofit.org? Or was it a nice note from either the development director of the executive director?

So that's a tip for you. If you work at writing one of these automatic thank-yous that's going to be sent out when someone makes a donation, consider having the development director or executive director write a couple of sentences about, "Thank you so much for this donation, it's really going to help us do X," so that you help personalize that. It kind of puts a face on that online donation experience as well.

Next is one of the most important ones, which is about knowing your metrics and adjusting benchmarks. As I said earlier, one of the best things about the online environment is good data on your supporters. Regularly reviewing your email and your website metrics via an analytics tool is very important.

You should be tracking your website activity. You could use a tree tool such as Google Analytics, which is at analytics.google.com. And email activity is measured through your bulk email software, and online donations information through your online donation tool. Or if you have one of the combined tools, that'll all be in one place.

So some of the basic website items to track I included in the sample. They include unique visitors, page views, the time people are spending on the site, the top static pages like "about us" or "home" or "programs," but also the top content and stories. What are the stories that are most popular on your website? It's really important to figure out what those are so you can give people more of those. Not just what you think they want to know about, but what they are actually clicking on, what they're actually downloading.

For email, you want to track the number of subscribers to your e-news and also the number of un-subscribers, to make sure that you're going in the right direction. You want to track the open rate of emails and the specific links that people click on, or "click-throughs" as they're called.

And as you may have seen, there are many emails and they have several URLs or highlighted underlined words that you can click on that will lead you to a website. It's tracking how many people click on them.

I recommend that every quarter you review the trends in your past and your current activity and that you use the data to create and update benchmarks. And I'll talk about benchmarks in a few minutes when I go through the example plan that I sent out.

Finally, something that a lot of organizations have been thinking about especially in the recent couple of years is understanding Web 2.0 and the social media strategy. As most of you may know, Web 2.0 is this perceived second generation of Internet Tools. There was never any time when Web 1.0 ended and Web 2.0 began. We're talking about these social networking and social media tools where people can share profiles, can share interests, things like that.

As these sites and tools continue to become mainstream, it's important to keep those in your plan. These tools are ushering in a new era of communication for nonprofits, one is that is a dialogue, not a monologue. Oftentimes traditionally nonprofits are used to sending as one to many. We're going to send out information to people.

But it's important that you not only share your stories and solutions, but you also listen to your supporters' ideas. Not, "This is the solution to the problem we're facing, " but, "This is what we thing solutions are to this problem. What do you think?" And asking your supporters, and also listening to them, listening to the comments they may make on your blog. Listening to the feedback that they give you around this thing, the way that they may participate with you in an online discussion.

Katya: John?

John: Yes?

Katya: We're just going to have you pause for a moment there. Speaking of one for many, we apparently have a lot of traffic on our site right now with people trying to download your forms. Some people are getting in and some are timing out. We're having some problems. So I wanted to let folks know that if you're having any trouble getting the attachments, please simply email us at fundraising123@networkforgood.org and we will be happy to send them to you as attachments. The other thing you can do is try back in a couple of minutes. It seems like it mostly works, but a handful of people have had trouble downloading, so I just want to let you know, feel free to email us if you'd rather have them as attachments.

OK, back to you, John.

John: Great, Katya, thanks. So as I was saying about Web 2.0, listening is a new but essential skill, and so oftentimes when I talk about listening, it's not only looking at blog comments and things like that, but being sure that you are being aware of your metrics. Listening by looking at your website content, looking at your website metrics, looking at your email metrics and seeing what content are people most interested in?

And then also looking at your campaigns. What kinds of messages get the most response from our stakeholders? Because each one of your organizations has a unique set of stakeholders. So it's up to you to figure out exactly what works for you. There's really no such thing as an industry-wide benchmark.

There was an excellent report that was put out recently about the e-nonprofit benchmark study, which did look at a whole variety of nonprofits and what their results have been, especially in terms of email. And so that's interesting information, but again, it's much more important to benchmark against yourself and your own metrics, and not to be too hung up about how you compare with the industry.

Because as I said, there are no industry-wide standard benchmarks. There's too much variety in the nonprofit sector right now and really too little data on what's been collected and examined.

So make sure, in terms of Web 2.0 and social media, that you devote a little time to learn about those tools, learn about how they can support your online strategy. Because they have the power to engage a whole new audience that you may never have been able to reach in the past or bring new people closer to your mission.

All right, so those are the projects you would likely include in your plan. Next of course, is the budget. It's important to not only include hard costs like purchasing software or purchasing tools, but to include the cost of the time. Some of you may be familiar with the 30/70 rule, which is that only 30% of the cost of a technology over time is the initial purchase, but 70% of that cost is going to be the maintenance, the upkeep, all those sorts of things.

So be sure to include those personnel skills in your budget. I'm especially talking to those organizations on the call who have what we call an "accidental techie." That means that no one in your organization actually has the technology job as a job descriptor, but they're the person that everyone goes to when a printer breaks or a computer doesn't work.

Make sure that you are accurately budgeting for that. If you're paying someone $30,000 a year and they're spending 20% of their time answering people's questions, helping to get the printer unstuck, doing those sort of technology-related things, make sure in your budget that you're recognizing that. You're not hiding that cost of technology support in that person's job, but you're really pulling it out and examining it so that you're being accurate about how much you're spending on technology, not just in hard costs but with personnel as well.

And then of course, include that timeline and critical path. Because with technology, things need to happen in a logical order. It's important to sit down and think about how are we going to get from A to B? We get way up there and start examining our metrics until we have an online donation tool and a bulk email tool, and we can start looking at them after we collected some data. And so think about including that timeline, that critical path, as well in your plan.

And as I said at the bottom, you really should have that calendar that maps out your content themes. Perhaps in May it's going to be themed around Mother's Day, and in June it'll be around Father's Day. Things like that. As I said, if you have a fundraising event in the spring or the fall, whenever it may be, you message around that a few months beforehand. Reminding people to save the data and getting them excited about the event, things like that.

Also it says to allocate money when budgeting for any new or existing tool, make sure you're budgeting money for training, because that's the way you get the most out of the tools you have. Include required system improvements, staffing. Because oftentimes it's much less expensive to get your consulting help from someone who has experience rather than try and figure out these things yourself. And also use other educational opportunities.

All right, so for the next couple minutes, I wanted to address what I have on the second page, and what I think is especially appropriate these days, which is responding to resource reduction. I know that many of your organizations, most of the ones I'm talking to, are all dealing with some reduction in resources that during the coming months many nonprofits will be faced with.

So here are some strategies to consider related to technology and the Internet. First of course is planning. The best way to make the most of your resources is intelligent planning. Take the time to do a thoughtful plan. Remember to make what are called "smart" goals. Different people have different definitions for it, but for me it's that the goal is specific, is measurable, is attainable, is realistic, and is timely.

So coordinating your communications and development activities makes the most out of your message and its impact. Not only make sure that you're coordinating, but make sure that you prioritize: what is important, what can wait, and then what are the trade-offs.

Next is a focus on basics. Really focus on improvements that are informed by data in your foundational areas, your website, and your e-communication. Areas you are considering for experimentation, like online communities or any fancy social media gymnastics, are best done using small, discrete experiments.

And if you don't really feel like you have an excellent web presence, or that your e-communications aren't the best that they can be, focus on those first. Social media isn't going anywhere; it will be around. There are ways to dip your toe in without spending a lot of resources there.

So just look at those metrics, look at what are your most popular website pages, what are your most popular stories, and use that data to make your website and your e-communications the best they can be.

Next is get help with content. As I spoke about before, as much as you can, try to spread out the work. As I said, the website benefits everyone, so everyone should contribute to its success. And that can be being interviewed occasionally or having a monthly writing assignment.

As I said, your stories are you best content. So if there's a current event coming up, think about it and think about what is your angle on the story? Or if something was just in the news, is there a way that you can tap into that as a hot topic?

I think that development should write about initiative in development. Programs should contribute about the great things that are happening in programs. And even the board should - I always encourage people if they can to get a board member or two to write 200 words about why are you on board, why do you volunteer your precious time to be on this board? Why do you love this organization?

And the same for volunteers. Why are you volunteering for this organization? What do you love about it? That is excellent content. So I would encourage you to look beyond your web manager or whoever is doing your content now and get help with that content.

Now this does often mean that you'll likely need an editor to stitch things together and check facts and have a consistent voice and things. But of course, everything is lot less work than creating all of the content. So if you're the main content creator, if you can get a group of people to help you at different times, then you can take on the more of the editor role and keep your sanity a little better usually.

So consider recruiting volunteer writers and photographers to be your eyes and ears at events. Conduct interviews or conduct other content creation activities. Make sure that you give them some guidelines and a little training, because that can help them provide lots of content. And give them deadlines weeks before publication date to allow for late submissions, revising, editing, all those things.

Next is track data. All of this about online engagement and online fundraising, it all comes down to data. Keeping data on who is interested in your organization, what are their interests, what do they want to know, what are the most popular pages on a our website and the most popular stories and email.

So take a good look at your database and how you use it. Are you really getting the most out of it? Are you intentionally using that database to support good business practices? Or are you just speeding up bad processes because you've never stopped to look at your business processes?

That hard look at your business process - what happens when a check comes in the door? Who has to touch it? How many times does it have to get entered? Did the thank-you go out in a timely manner? How does that happen? So think about things like that, those business processes, and how they're supported or not with technology. Because often those can reveal significant inefficiencies.

And at this time, as much as ever, it's important to be as efficient and effective as possible. For example, I had a client that was doing an online calendar every month. They were spending about 10 hours a month getting the calendar together. Then when we finally looked at their website metrics, we realized that no one ever looked at the online calendar. [laughs]

So we were able to save 10 hours a month, and wouldn't you like an extra 10 hours a month. So by looking at your data, by being on top of it, you can find ways to be more effective and efficient. As I said, this is really the power of the online medium, these metrics. This is golden information. So I encourage you to pay attention to it and let it guide you.

Finally, knowledge really lights the way. I encourage you not to neglect education and training. It's excellent that you're on this call today, that you're taking time away to learn about this, because I think that's the way that you become -- you can do this in a more intelligent way and you can build your knowledge and skills.

As you probably know, you can waste a lot of time floundering around in the tech world trying to figure something out yourself. So do spend time to research and do spend the money to learn from experienced professionals. As much as possible, don't let your consultants or your vendors fish for you. Have them teach you how to fish, how to improve your skills and knowledge so that you are in control of your technology and not the other way around.

I was just going to spend a couple of minutes talking about some of the parts in the online engagement plan example. And so as I said, I'm just going to touch on a couple of these because I'd like to leave enough time for question and answer.

This is just an example of a plan for a fictitious organization. They're facing the economic downturn and they're looking at the prospect of reduced funding. In the past they had expanded their programs, but they really took a hard look over the last three months of 2008. They looked at and revised their strategic plan, their development plan, their communications and technology plan to reflect a change in direction.

They decided that they're going to try to eliminate some programs and refocus on their core activity of advocacy. They're also going to try and incorporate some social media into their online plan.

First they start with the strategic and operational goals about integrating online fundraising and engagement with their offline activities. Making sure that they have a communications team that meets on a monthly basis to coordinate communication activities across programs, across fundraising and advocacy, all the different spaces that are communicating.

Using a tool like Google Analytics to track website activity, and using tracking tool in their bulk email software to track communications. And not only tracking data, but learning from it and making adjustments. Then this is going to take the form of quarterly meetings, and based on the data they will create changes for the website or communications along with any necessary changes in strategy.

It goes on to strategies and tactics and it talks about, as the organization changes, so will the goals change to support it. And that with a greater focus on them for the advocacy, they will review other nonprofits online donation experiences like I recommended earlier. And they will refine their own online donation experience and track the online donations against visits to the online donations page.

So again, looking at website metrics can be interesting. If you have 200 people during the month visit your online donation page but only 10 of them actually made an online donation, what might you do to improve that online donation page? Is it the language you're using? Are you asking them 20 different questions before they can get to the end of it? What might you do to improve it and how can you look at other organizations and see what they're doing?

So on the next page it lists the specific efforts they're going to try to drive traffic, including a monthly e-newsletter, featuring some of the website content in a quarterly print publication. I'm not an advocate of getting rid of print publications in favor or electronic publications. I think there's still some value for that. Print publications hang around; they could be on someone's desk or someone's table. Unless someone is digging through your email, they're not going to see an email from an organization like they may a print publication.

Next is checking on keyword data to improve their website metatags. For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, what I mean is when we look at something like Google Analytics, it will give you the keywords that people are using to find your site. These are the words they use to search for your organization.

In your website, there are things called "keyword metatags" which tells Google and other engines, "These are the words I want associated with my website." When someone searches for these words, I want my website to be included in that.

So by harvesting from your analytics package the keywords that people are actually using, you can improve the keyword metatags that you have on your website. And you can talk to whoever produces your website or manages it for you about changing those metatags.

Also checking on referring sites is going to be another very interesting piece of information you can get from your metrics. This is who is referring and sending traffic to your site.

And also incorporating the website into their newly revised logo. They're going to continue to encourage signups by encouraging people to tell a friend. Having more interactive website content in emails, featuring videos or surveys or quizzes or podcasts, whatever it may be. Having a website section where people can see their past e-newsletters. Oftentimes that makes them more likely to sign up because they see what they're getting.

And also making sure that in the list of the website stories they have, they're going to add a line about, "Are you interested in more stories like this? Sign up for a newsletter." So in every possible way they're encouraging that signup.

Then it goes into talking about their initiatives, and that this year they're really going to focus on changing their system and transitioning to a new system. And to begin to be educated about Web 2.0.

As you see on the next page, I have an example of a web presence benchmark. And here they are listing their benchmark numbers for 2008, including the most popular pages. And then based on that they create these benchmarks for 2009, about what they're hoping for, for unique visitors, for page views, visits and the time on site.

And again, I just want to say that benchmarks are not a pass/fail kind of thing, they're just used to measure your progress toward a goal. Don't feel like, oh, I didn't make December, I failed. It's not about that, it's about progressing toward those numbers.

Lastly on the plan, I give a project detail example. And again, it's talking about an organization that decided to focus on advocacy, their current tools are not meeting their needs because the vendor has not upgraded or improved their tools in any significant way, and they've really been focused on marketing and sales instead of product improvement.

So now that they have a new direction, they have looked at their needs, mapped them out, matched them against available tools. And I include a resource in there which many of you may be familiar with, which is idealware.com. Idealware.com is the consumer reports for nonprofit software, and they have great articles about online donation tools, different email tools, things like that. So again, it's idealware.com and it's listed in the report.

And so let me list the projects and tasks required for this transition. They need a timeline. They include the budget, including how much staff time this is going to take and who is included in this. And they're really smart, they have a data team that's made up of participants from development and programs and administration. Because as much as possible, this should not be something that that just the technology department does. This should be something that people from all departments are involved in.

And then they give the estimated costs, and then a couple paragraphs about the social media, that they want to create a presence on Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr. They're gong to conduct research. And NTEN is giving a wonderful training called "We Are Media" here in San Francisco in February, so they're going to attend that.

OK, I'm going to wrap up. As I said in the beginning, it's just really going through the steps on that first page about making sure you have all the elements of a plan, having the plan as an active, living thing. You're looking at your metrics on a regular basis so you can improve your planning and improving what you're doing on a regular basis.

Great, so I think I've covered most of the content. I'm going to be happy to start answering your questions, from those of you online who have submitted questions. Katya, are there questions to get started with?

Katya: Loads of questions, John. First of all, thank you for a terrific information-packed presentation. A wonderful job. We have lots of people saying "thank you" and then lots of people have lots of questions. So I'm going to turn to those. I would remind everyone if you have a questions for John Kenyon, email us at fundraising123@networkforgood.org. Also, if you haven't been able get the handouts at nonprofit911.org, which should be working now, feel free to email us. We've been emailing those out to folks.

And last, we had a few questions about what was the offer for EmailNow, Custom DonateNow, our service for email campaigns and raising money online. Email us at fundraising123@networkforgood.org for more details on that too.

OK. We had the most questions about the topic of how to build an email list. I'm going to read you one from Nunay at Santa Maria Community Services, which is very representative of this group. She says, "Our database contains about 3, 000 names of donors who at some point gave to the agency. Of this number, we have email addresses for no more than 200 people. Our donor database provider is open to helping us acquire about 500 clean and correct email addresses for people, but it will cost money and actually we don't have the resources to do that."

Nunay, I think that's a situation we can all relate to. She wants to know, John, "What suggestions do you have for us to acquire email addresses for the people we already have in our database?" She says, "We do ask for email addresses in our return envelopes, but hardly anyone fills out that information."

The second part of her question is, "What would you suggest if we doesn't have the resources for the bulk mail email services of the e-newsletter." In other words, "What would you suggest we do if we don't have resources for bulk email service of the e-newsletter, let alone the fact we don't have enough email addresses?"

So her question is focused on, how do I get more email addresses outside of existing donors as well. A lot of people had questions about that. How do I build an email list? I'm going to turn that question over to you for your thoughts.

John: Great. That's a great question. The answer is that quality email lists must be built one email at a time. There is no such thing as buying or borrowing or renting email lists. It's not a good idea. It's against law in terms of spam, because you don't have permission to email those people. So there's a couple things I'd suggest. One, keep up your efforts with asking people for their email address. Consider even perhaps creating a special postcard just focused on that. And it's important to encourage and explain to people why you want to do that. Explain to them that not only are you helping us save us trees, because we don't have to mow down the rainforest to be mailing these things to you, but also explain to them how it saves you money.

It can cost up to $2 or more to send out a direct mail piece. But oftentimes it's only around 20 cents to send out an email. So explain that to them. It's really important that you encourage them, not just, "Please give us your email address, " but give them a compelling reason. Let them understand that if I sign up for the email list I'm really giving you money because I'm giving you $1.80 for every mailing that you might send to me.

So I think that's one way. Another system that I've seen work for organization is what's called "cross-pollination." So let's say that you're in the Santa Maria center and you have a sister organization in town that you work well with, that you often may co-market and do things like that.

What you can do is in your e-newsletter for example, "We really love this organization and we encourage you to check out their website. You may want to sign up for their e-newsletter. Here's the link." Then people are free to go to that website if they want and they can sign up for their e-newsletter.

And then that organization can reciprocate for you. They can send it out to their supporters saying, "We really like this organization, we think they do a great job, please go and visit their website and sing up for an e-newsletter." So you're kind of cross-pollinating, you're not automatically signing people up.

And I guess that last thing I'd say about that is make sure you do not pre-check the "Yes, I want your e-newsletter." I know in a lot of donation forms, they will have a button -- which is a smart idea, and make sure on your donation form you do have a "sign me up for the e-newsletter" button, a box that I can check.

But do not pre-check that. That gives you a lower quality list, because people may not realize it was checked and they're signing up for it. You want people who actually want your e-newsletter to sign up for it, so you have a high-quality list.

Then in terms of the second part of the question in terms of tools. I think that, again, I would encourage you to go to idealware.com and look under their reports, look under a few good email messaging tools. They have a list of a variety of them. Oftentimes they're very affordable. Katya can correct me on this, but I think that EmailNow only runs about $20 a month.

And so that's going to really be the most -- the more email addresses you have, there's usually a direct correlation between increase in email addresses and an increase in online donations. So as you build that list, you're also going to be building your online donations, which partially can help pay for that email tool. I think that's it.

Katya: Great. Thank you, John. And yes, our email tool is $29.95 a month, but that's for up to 20, 000 emails a month included. Grace and Angie and Carolyn all have the same question for you. You had mentioned, John, that e-commerce is not the most optimal donor experience. They want to know, could you elaborate on why that's the case or why they maybe shouldn't be using PayPal? That's from Angie, Carolyn and Grace.

John: Sure. So there's a couple things about that. One is, when I click on that link to PayPal, I go to a different site. It can have some of your information on it, but a lot of people lack confidence that they are giving to your organization when you send them to a different site. That's one of the nice things, for example, about having Custom DonateNow or an integrated donation system in your website, because then it's clear that I have not left your site. We know that there are lots of scams on the Internet, lots of people trying to get money out of people. So people can often lack confidence around that.

And as I said, I think PayPal is fine for e-commerce because it's built for that. But for example -- and I haven't looked at it lately so I don't know if it's changed -- but for me what's really important is I can give donations in memoriam for someone, in tribute to someone, and I want to be able to specify that I'm giving this gift in honor of this person. And I want the receipt to go to this other person to let them know that I made a donation in memory of their husband, their wife, their son, whatever it may be. So I want to make sure that you have that ability.

And also in terms of the custom questions, be able to ask people, "These are our three areas of focus, which of these three are you most interested in?" Because again, I want you to be tracking what are people actually interested in, not what you think they might be interested in. And that's a great way of being able to track it.

So I like I said, being able to include those custom questions. Also something like monthly donations. And again, I haven't set up PayPal for a while or seen a good implementation of it, so I don't know if you can also do the monthly referring donations, but that's another important thing because often it's easier to give you $20 a month than to give you $240 all at once, or $480 all at once.

Katya: Great. Thank you. Here's a question from Justin. "John, we have many contacts that we email on a monthly basis. We have volunteers, past donors, corporate sponsors, foundation staff, government partners, et cetera. Is it appropriate to solicit everyone for individual gifts? Or do you think we run the risk of turning people off? Our office is split on this issue."

John: Great question. For example, I know there's a management support organization out here in California that I won't name, but I have been an affiliate consultant for them, I've done trainings for them, and things like that. Once a year they do send out a request that says, "As somebody who is a member or a partner of our organization, we'd like to give you the opportunity to donate." On one hand, like you say, I'm thinking, I'm actually a partner, I'm not a donor or a funder of that organization. But I understand why they're doing it, because, like everyone else, they need to diversify their sources of income. And I think development folks would say that everybody who's a stakeholder in your organization is really a prospect and that it can't hurt to ask them.

For me, I think it's just one click to go delete that email if I don't want to give, but if I do, I have to be asked. You have to ask people in order for them to give. So if you're not asking those people and some of them want to give, you're not going to get a donation from them. So I guess I would side with the people who say it is appropriate.

Now, not to ask them every month, not to ask them even every quarter, but maybe once or twice a year. You may ask your donors more often, but to ask that wider group, I would really kind of limit it. And try it. Let's try and do it once and let's see what the reaction is. If we get a lot of negative feedback, great. We can look at that feedback, see what it is, maybe we change the way we ask it or we no longer ask volunteers or something once we've got the background.

But base your decision on data, not on guesses about what you think might happen. Try it and see what happens, and then you can move from there. Great question.

Katya: And good advice. Following up on that point about "go with the data, " Sarah and a number of other people acknowledge that there is no industry-wide benchmark, but they still wanted to know that study which you cited. [laughs] So maybe you could remind us of that. And they also want to know, how do they know they're progressing? You said to measure against yourself, what advice do you have if perhaps the industry-wide benchmarks aren't as meaningful? Could you spend a little bit more time on that? And before you answer that question, while you're thinking about it, folks were also asking again for the address for Idealware. It's idealware.org. OK, so what would you like say about benchmarks?

John: First I'll give them the url for the email profit benchmarks study. That's www.e-benchmarksstudy.com. And that's from M+R Strategic Services and NTEN. So that's the study. And like I said, it's interesting to look at so you can see, OK, of these organizations that they looked at, what were their metrics? And then look at your metrics and see, hmm, how to I compare? Am I right on with some of them? But as I said, not to base your strategy on the difference between your benchmarks and the ones in the study.

In terms of getting your benchmarks the best they can be, first of all it's just setting up the tools and just letting them work for a while. It's not a good idea, I think, to base a strategy or change your tactics based on a few weeks or months of data. Have a whole quarter of data, if possible six months of data.

And be looking at trends. Don't try to focus on small, individual pieces of data, because they're just really not that useful. And especially with something like Google Analytics, you have an ocean of data, so you really need to focus on, what are the most important things I need to look at?

So really refine your list, and ask yourself: what are my most important business questions? Like I asked before, who are your audiences, what are the messages you want them to get, and what do you want them to do? If your answer is, I want them to donate, I want them to sign up for the e-newsletter, I want them to click on our video, well, great. Focus on those. And then think about, what are different strategies? Where else can I highlight that content to drive traffic to that place?

As I said, it's really just creating that kind of learning loop, where I'm going to try something, I'm going to track the results and see how many people click on it or were interested in it or commented on it. Maybe you have a blog and some stories generate a lot more comments than others. Great. Notice that and give people more of that content that excites and interests them.

And as I said, try and keep your list pretty short of how many benchmarks you follow, especially if you're just getting started in it. You can get more sophisticated later, or if you're a larger organization, maybe you have the resources to be more sophisticated and look at more data. But I'm especially thinking of smaller organizations where you could look at that plan like I did and just focus on those.

Over the last year, what were our top five most popular stories? And then you learn from that. In the plan example, what I tried to do in that benchmarks part was to talk about that. I said, I've got this little thing under notes about strategy. They did the story about Obama and human rights. So it's important to tie into current events. They had a video around the history of US discrimination and that was very popular. It was an attractive element.

So think about all those things and, as I said, look at other sites, look at other places who may be doing similar things to you and see the things that you really like. You can borrow their ideas, but them track what the results are from them and create that learning loop where you're regularly looking at the trends and then your changing your strategy based on them.

Because some things may be working right and you may not need to change them. You just need to make sure everyone understands that you need more of this content and you need less of this preachy stuff, and what went wrong. You want more stories about success in this example. A great question.

Katya: Terrific. Lilly has a question for you that I particularly like. She says, "Thank you so much for organizing this. My question is, how can I sell the ideas that John's talking about better? I'm a professional online marketer for my day job and all these ideas are second nature to me, but I can't get through to our board at the nonprofit I volunteer for. They think what I'm talking about is corporate marketing. I feel that they won't listen to another board member, and that we need an outside consultant, but why waste the money?" I wanted to address this one to you, John, because a lot people will probably be very excited by what you're saying on the call, but they may have trouble selling these types of initiatives internally, just as Lilly is referring to. What would be your advice to them?

John: Sure. Again, I think there's a couple tactics. One, of course, is that some people respond to data. Every year for the past, I think, six or seven years at least, the "Chronicle of Philanthropy" every year in June has released a report about online fundraising. It showed the double, sometimes triple-digit increases that people have seen year to year in online fundraising, and that it just keeps going up and up. And also, as Katya mentioned earlier, it is really a very cost effective way to fundraise. And it is my understanding the responses to direct mail hover below something like 5%. And that if you work hard on getting your email campaign based on metrics, really improving them and getting to a good point, you can likely have much more of that.

Also the average donation online is higher. It is my understanding that offline through direct mail, it is around $23, $25 and that online, it is closer to $40. And I know for some organizations, they seem to be much higher. Some organizations, they have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of online donations and the percentage of online donation that make up that part of their total donation.

So I think data is one way. Talking about bringing in an outside voice, because like you say, I hear this all the time where I meet with boards and the internal board member has been trying to get them to understand this for a year or two. And then if you can bring somebody with that outside perspective, it has helped them. These are all the great things you could be doing and this is why they work, then that can sometimes encourage them.

Another thing that I would encourage you to do is find stories of similar organizations, and if you can, find the peers of those people like the board members who are doing it. For example, I work with a wonderful religious community and the person who has been maintaining their website, not anymore, but until recently was Sister Margaret, and Sister Margaret is 80 years old. So you know, if Sister Margaret can be maintaining the website at 80, you know then anybody could be doing this well.

And understand that there are probably a lot of fears and trepidation there. This is not something that a lot of people who are on boards now grew up with and that they are comfortable with. So if you can tell them a story about an organization like theirs, who wasn't sure about it, but tried it and then now has good success and is reaching new people.

I mean what if we were able to say, by doing this, it is possible that we could serve 20% more people with the exact same resources we have, because of the savings that we will get when we move people from sending out print publications to email, to getting them to donate online, because it is more convenient and it is more cost effective for us.

So again, it can be these multiple tactics about: here are some data, here are some images, here are some stories, here are some outside voice, because oftentimes when I am talking about website redesigns to boards, they are like, "Oh I don't like this and I don't like that and I wouldn't do that." And I have to remind them, "You are not the audience. I understand you might not like this, but you are not the audience, let's talk about who the audience is and what they like and let's look at your metrics."

Katya Andresen: Oh, I certainly agree with that one. We have time for a couple more questions and before I proceed to those, I wanted to let everyone know, we have so many terrific questions from you, which we won't have time to get to. What we are going to do is everyone who asked a question that we haven't gotten to right now, we will be answering it in the next Tips newsletter. And we will be asking John to weigh in on our answers to you, so we will be sure to get to those. And if you don't get the Tips newsletter, sign up for that at fundraising123.org, there is a signup right there on the home page and we will be sure to get you answers because there are so many great questions.

John, we got many questions about people feeling rather unhappy about their websites. They said, "My website is not great. I don't know where to begin. I have very few resources." Some of them said, "I am just not sure if I should get going with the kind or program you are describing as my website isn't that hot." What would be your advice to someone in that situation? How do they prioritize what they should do next and what is the best course forward?

John: Great. Well first of all, I think that they are right on in terms of priorities and tactics, because as I said, the website is the foundation of your online presence. And it is not going to do any good sending out e-newsletters that link back to a website where people can't find their way around or is all text and not a balance of text and images. So things like that. What do you currently have control over? Well most places at least have control over their content and their images. So if they are a good balance, you have an equal amount of space devoted to images and text, because that's much better for your online medium. And then again, I would encourage you to start with data, make sure that you are tracking your metrics, that you have some sort of analytics package.

Even if you have not yet signed up for Google Analytics, whoever is hosting your website should have some data about what has been happening in your website over the last two years, because as I said, you need to start with being able to tell me what are your five most popular pages on your website, what five pages do people spend the most time on, what kinds of stories do people read the most and click on the most. So then, based on that, you can start making smart database changes to what you are doing now.

And again, like you say, you may not right now have the resources to do a complete redesign. I mean that is often a lot of my work that I help the clients, I coach them in walking through a website redesign project. And the place I start is having them explain what are your communication goals. Oftentimes, this has not been articulated and that makes for not only a messy web presence, but a messy approach, because you don't have any limits, you don't have any sets around the things you are going to focus on for online presence.

So it is really important to start with those goals, who are your audiences, what are your messages, what do you want them to do, and make sure that that is crystal clear. When I go to your website, there should be three big buttons that say, "Sonate, " "Sign up for these enews, " "Learn more" or whatever your three priorities are, so there is no question about that.

And you don't have to do the whole redesign at once. List out all the things that you would like to change, put them in priority order and just walk down the list as you have time and resources, because some of the things are pretty quick glimpse, like I said if you don't have an e-newsletter signup on every page of your site, how can you incorporate that into the navigation and somehow put it on every site, same with the donate button, because you never know what story I might read on your website that motivates me to donate, and I want to be able to click on it, not hunt for it.

The other thing that I would recommend is what is called A usability test. And in fact the Nonprofit Technology conferences happening here in San Francisco in April, I am going to be doing a session on usability testing for websites for small organizations. And what I mean by that is create like a 10-question survey on Survey Monthly or something that says, "Try to find this piece of content. Were you able to find it? Click here and sign up for the e-newsletter. Did you get what you expected?"

Ask people who actually use the website and also ask friends in the organization, your parents and kids, try to get a variety of people looking at the site and filling up the form and giving you feedback; what do people actually think about it, what do they think you could improve, because sometimes those are gold mines of information and they can give you even the smallest most discrete things like, "I don't understand your mission or when I open up the website, I don't know what you do."

Do you have a clear concise tagline or do you have a three-paragraph mission statement that no one is going to read through. So things like that, those are some ideas that I'd give in terms of that. So good question.

Katya: And those are terrific ideas, in fact you have many of them today. We are so grateful for your time John Kenyon. I encourage everyone to stay tuned to your email, because as I noted earlier, we are going to be emailing you a link to the mp3 file of this call and soon after we will be posting a transcript in our Learning Center, because I am sure as I found it that you found it was just packed with information that it was hard to process all at once, and so it is worth revisiting over and over again. So John, you can live on In our Learning Center, which you can get to at fundraising123.org and the training tab has John's handouts. We have a team of people sitting with me right here answering all your emails when you ask for the handout to be sent directly to you or working through those. And we also have some wonderful questions we did not get to, but that we will be answering in our Tips in the next couple of days.

And lastly, I wanted to note for those of you who wanted more information about our own services EmailNow and Custom DonateNow, simply email us at fundraising123@networkforgood.org and you will be sure you get more information on that.

So again, John, thank you so much for your time. This was again the biggest call at Network for Good. I have got "thank you" notes pouring in for the quality of information you provided and we are most grateful to you.

John: Excellent Katya. Well, thank you for having me and yeah, please feel free to keep in touch with me at johnkenyon.org and I will continue to put up articles of learning as I have them and share what I know.

Katya: Terrific. Well, thank you everyone and best of luck in your fundraising and online outreach efforts. We are here if you need us and we hope you have much success this year. Thank you everyone. Bye-bye.

John: Thanks, bye-bye.

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