Online Resources

See the fundraising technology chart (PDF) listing products from more than 50 companies on the May/June *Advancing Philanthropy* page on the AFP website, **www.afpnet.org**.

Tech Talk, TRENDS, Tips... + more

Much like the nonprofit sector, technology is rapidly changing, often in new and unexpected ways. Concepts that were considered leading-edge just a few years ago—mobile fundraising, integrating social networking into campaigns and reporting on outcome metrics alongside bottom-line fundraising results—are commonplace today.

These changes affect nonprofits differently, and organizations in different situations will have various technology needs. A start-up looking to build an initial donor base needs certain solutions, while a direct-mail shop looking to diversify into a multi-channel fundraising approach needs others. What technologies will your organization adopt in supporting its fundraising goals? >>

Deciphering Trends in Technology

BY BO CRADER AND KRISTEN FULKS

Expanding Networks and Platforms

Online presence. Your online presence—your website, its visual design and its self-service features, as well as extensions to media, social and other third-party sites—has become a nonnegotiable brand cornerstone. Supporters will often interact with your organization online more than they will with staff directly, meaning that an online presence needs to be considered a central part of the overall constituent experience with an organization. Whether you like it or not, the public is benchmarking your online presence against other nonprofits, as well as commercial sites and social tools.

Social networking. Starting or building a social program is a top priority for many nonprofits, but a lot of uncertainty remains in the community about how to get started: Do you do it yourself, hire a specialist or get a college intern? Is a Facebook page enough? What about Twitter or social bookmarking? How much is enough or too much? The reality is, this area is a still-emerging field with significant potential for engaging constituents in new and exciting ways. Furthermore, there is a significant and growing community of nonprofit social experts available and open to sharing practices.

Mobilization. Smartphones have quickly become the norm for a highly mobilized workforce and are increasingly preferred over laptops by younger generations. Incorporating this trend into fundraising programs has become imperative over the past year. The ability to incorporate video or tweets from a fundraiser's event directly into solicitations has become a great way to supplement event-day activities and stimulate extra donations out of fundraising efforts. Look for the proliferation of apps for consumers to catch on in the nonprofit space as well, with mobile major giving and reporting tools to empower fundraisers on the run.

Diversifying Fundraising Efforts

Peer to peer. Team-based event fundraising has exploded over the past few years due to the availability of affordable technology, allowing participants to form teams, recruit members and manage fundraising efforts online. Progressive organizations are looking to take this trend a step further by tracking new, nonfinancial metrics, such as new constituents acquired, year-over-year participation and lifetime value of acquired participants and teams. Fundraising is built on relationships, and progressive organizations are seizing the excitement and emotion of a physical event and connections with participants to build and deepen these longer-term constituent relationships.

Donor empowered. When supporters are engaged and ready to do good work on your behalf, they need to have immediate access to the tools to do so. Independent fundraisers have proven to be an emerging, if unexpected, trend, leveraging peer-to-peer tools for raising funds without being tied to a specific event. In many cases, organizations have found that tapping into this underlying enthusiasm can augment staff capabilities, especially when organized around campaigns or crisis fundraising.

Interactive stewardship. Wouldn't it be great if your constituents could be acknowledged and appreciated for their support online? What if they could see the results of their donation in action—whether it was a media piece showcasing a naming opportunity on a campus, a weekly e-mail report on the results of sponsorship or a social feed on the impact of a donation—directly from the program services staff? Donors have come to expect feedback and detailed information on the designations they choose for their gifts, and online communications should reflect this experience.

Enriching the Composition and Meaning of Data

Single-supporter database. The idea of a single repository of all data with different overlays to filter and provide staff the appropriate information needed to do their job has long been a "holy grail" for nonprofit technologists. The proliferation of technologies and diversification of fundraising programs and initiatives makes this trend more important than ever. Advocates for an organization are seven times more likely to give than nondonors, meaning that organizations with no integration to advocacy systems have a rich and latent prospect pool that is completely segmented from their fundraising programs.

Data enrichment. Similarly, data-enrichment tools have long been used by large organizations to supplement in-house data with information from public and third-party sources on donor capacity, gifts to other organizations or other indicators of giving to help determine the best approach. However, enhancements and ongoing improvements have made these more cost-effective and easier to implement than ever. Thus, these tools readily scale down to smaller nonprofits and are not just for those large enough to have a research department.

Reporting and accountability. Technology has redefined reporting in the past few years, moving from a pull model to a push model. Data are pushed out onto mobile devices, dashboards or desktop widgets and put into the hands of users and decision makers faster. The information is made more actionable and enables more agile responses to data trends.

Program Management and Evaluation

Ease of access to information is an indirect effect of the Internet, and donors today increasingly expect easy access to information on the effectiveness of fundraising. Changes in donor behavior (looking for more information on programs and effectiveness prior to giving) and funders (requiring detailed reporting on outcomes) have made ready access to this information a strategic fundraising advantage, not just a once-a-year activity for the annual report.

Organizations leading the way in quantifying how their efforts have affected mission—such as how fundraising dollars specifically translate into putting food on plates in shelters or books in libraries in Third World countries—have a significant advantage in "telling their story" to donors and demonstrating accountability.

Getting Started

There are many approaches to adopting technology. Some organizations view it as central to their organizational strategy, while others see it as a requisite for competing in the 21st century. Look at technology in the context of your organization's mission and view the organizational strategy as its approach for fulfilling that need.

Authenticate your mission statement. Forget about technology for a moment and think about your organization's purpose. Closely aligning a technology project with your organization's mission will help build the support you need to get the project started, as well as provide focus on your project when competing initiatives and other priorities distract your team.

Consider your key constituencies. Take time to determine whom you are trying to serve. This can bring clarity to desired outcomes and next steps in a project. For example, when designing the architecture of a website, consider the users of the site, their specific goals and desired behaviors, as well as your goals for them. This is a great way to tease out previously unknown issues or flaws in design.

Look at peer organizations. Look at groups, both within and outside the nonprofit sector, that have implemented similar strategies. What worked well and, perhaps just as important, what did not?

Define your metrics and priorities. The most important (and often overlooked) step of collaborative projects is clearly defining and setting expectations, both about the desired results of the project and the responsibilities of those involved. Putting in extra work early to define a program for evaluating progress can provide a baseline for justifying investments in the project after its completion—the return on investment, or ROI.

Ultimately, the success of new technology is based in large part on human variables, such as the perception of its value, ease of use and adoption by peers. Take an approach appropriate to both technology and your organization, one that factors in the culture and emotion of change, as well as the goals of the project.

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Back to the Basics

BY MATT McCABE

There has never been a more exciting or a more daunting time to be a professional fundraiser. The proliferation of technologies, the increase in donor awareness and the emergence of new generations of donors create an atmosphere where opportunities abound. At the same time, these are the times when focusing on core operational principles can both lay the groundwork for exciting new strategies and ensure current donors remain not only engaged but also more deeply committed to your organization. It is a cliché because it is true: Greatness begins with the basics.

In fundraising today, social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook are sexy. Gift processing, donor tracking and the data that drive it all are not. However, you cannot get the big gifts if you don't have the operational basics in place to ensure accurate data and timely, tailored engagement with donors.

There are four key fundamentals that drive any successful program and lay the foundation for innovation and success in fundraising.

Capturing the Data

This is the first and most overlooked step in any program. How are you capturing your data? There are many channels your organization can use today, including mail, phone, online and even mobile. Regardless of the channel, there are two essential requirements:

Ensure all the data end up in a single master database. Having data spread among multiple systems paralyzes your ability to get a holistic view of your constituents and ultimately leads to donors' frustration as they perceive a disregard for their preferences and interactions with your organization.

Standardize your data wherever possible. If you want to report on and analyze your donors, you cannot do it without standardized data. Simply put, this means eliminating free text entry fields wherever possible and using predefined fields instead. It makes sense to ask your donors' interests, but give them predefined choices because you cannot analyze a comments box.

For your internal data entry, all key fields should be selected (not freely typed) when capturing data. Otherwise, human error will result in variations on such things as designation and motivation codes, not to mention invalid dates. Once this happens, it is literally impossible to obtain an accurate view of campaign performance and donor behavior.

Processing the Gift

Gift processing for the fundraising professional is like electricity—you don't think about it until the lights won't turn on. It should just work. However, it is important to ensure you are doing this in a timely and effective manner because the impact on donor confidence is tremendous.

Gifts should be processed the same day. Affordable technology exists to ensure that every gift, regardless of payment method, is processed the day it is received. Credit cards, ACH (automated clearing house) and other electronic payment methods can easily be processed in real time within your donor system. Checks can be processed the day they are received, using remote capture and deposited through check-scanning methods. All this is crucial to ensure that acknowledgements to donors are out the door first thing the next day.

Donor levels and giving summaries should be updated immediately. You should not have to wait days or weeks to know that you have a new major donor or major-donor prospect. If a large gift comes in, your system should notify you immediately. If a gift comes in that changes a donor's status—to a club, a monthly or a major giver—anyone who opens that donor's record should clearly see the new gift recorded, even if it is minutes after it was processed. This automation is widely and inexpensively available to all nonprofits.

Acknowledging the Gift

You know that strategic donor acknowledgement is both timely and tailored. This often breaks down, however, because you are relying on manual processes and staff to generate receipts and tailor them to different types of donors. Simply put, setting up four to eight templates targeted to donors of different giving levels (first time, frequent, monthly, major, reactivated, etc.) and profile types (board member, special friend, volunteer, activist, etc.), can save your staff tremendous time and headaches in getting personalized, timely receipt letters out the door. These templates can automatically generate PDF letters overnight for the previous day's gifts, so each morning staff simply print the PDFs in their e-mail inbox and mail them.

Managing the Donor Life Cycle

The preceding three points all coalesce into the strategic goal of any fundraiser: effectively managing the donor life cycle to grow funds to achieve your mission. Ensuring your data are accurate, your donors are well cared for and you have a transparent view of program performance allows you to do what fundraisers do best: design and execute the strategies that will fund your organization's needed programs and services.

Matt McCabe is vice president, community for Dallas-based Orange Leap (www.orangeleap.com).

Friend-to-Friend Fundraising

BY ROB STRICKLER

When you communicate with your constituents and the public, your organization's mission is the centerpiece of the message. Whether the reader or viewer is motivated to respond depends on how well you communicate the value of your mission. If you make them care about your mission, you have a much better chance of gaining their support.

According to news reports, those viewing your messages are also bombarded with 3,000 to 5,000 advertising, media and news messages per day. A portion of those are from the 1.5 million other nonprofits in the United States, each asking for support. So how can you ensure that your message gets through this barrage of information?

Cutting Through the Clutter

Studies show that consumers and donors are relying more and more on word of mouth from friends, family and colleagues. When it comes to movies, restaurants, vacations and charities, people want to make sure that their hard-earned dollars will be well spent. When someone they know and trust makes the "ask" on behalf of your mission, it carries a lot more weight than appeals made directly by your organization.

Also, when the fundraising goal is associated with your supporters, their friends, family and colleagues want to help them succeed. So instead of "Help support our cause," the message becomes "I'm walking to support this cause. Can you help me reach my goal?" In other words, your supporters, not your mission, are now the primary message and motivation for action. The likelihood and degree of response is based on the personal relationship the readers have with your supporters. When it comes to the constituents of your constituents, your mission is secondary because many times they know the individuals who asked them better than they know your organization. People care very much about what your constituents have to say. It's not spam, it's not a commercial and it's not junk mail. It's a sister, a son, a neighbor or a friend.

Using Twitter, Facebook, blogs and e-mail, your supporters also can extend your reach far beyond your own website. Better still, when the tweets, posts and blogs are from your constituents they are much more likely to elicit a response and be passed along.

One way you can help support your constituents is to have a vigorous Internet presence, not only on Twitter and Facebook, but also YouTube, flickr and other social media. That way, you will provide content that your constituents can promote, and they can write on your Facebook wall, "like" your postings and retweet. They can help you build "social capital" and spread awareness for your cause.

Although social media sites like these are free, they still require a substantial investment of time and effort. How can you get a return on that investment, beyond spreading awareness?

Friend-to-Friend Donor Web Pages

There's a well-established marketing axiom regarding the importance of promoting and continuing your brand throughout the entire cultivation process. This simply means that the message and visuals in all your communications for a particular campaign should be consistent. So if your constituents are willing to make the "ask" for you, using their own preferred social media, you should consider providing a way for them to collect donations on their own personal fundraising page. A donation page that has your supporter's photo, name and personal story telling why he or she cares about your cause will have a higher rate of conversion, as well as higher donation amounts, than your own general-purpose donation page.

In addition, by providing friend-to-friend donor pages you give your supporters more ownership of the fundraising process, making them feel even more appreciated and connected to your organization. Helping your constituents become fundraisers is a great way to reduce new donor acquisition costs.

Of course, this does not mean that your organization's own branded fundraising efforts become secondary to supporter-driven social networks and friend-to-friend fundraising sites. However, developing your supporters into a supplemental army of fundraisers and promoters can only increase your development efforts, and perhaps decrease your costs. So empower and encourage your constituents to be fundraisers today!

Rob Strickler is the DonorPages product manager at Horsham, Pa.-based SofterWare Inc. (www.donorperfect.com/donorpages).

Mashups and Fundraising

BY DAVID TINKER, CFRE

Mashups—the combination of two or more sources of data to create new services or analysis—are a technology tool that you should be using in your everyday efforts. They allow you to make smart decisions faster, delivering immediate insight directly from live sources of data.

You may already be using mashups without realizing it. Some fundraising software programs have dashboards that allow you to view different data and charts on one easy-to-read page. You may have already posted your organization's Twitter feed on your Web page, or you may be combining addresses with pins on a map. However, using a full mashup may take external data and mix them with your fundraising data.

The ability to read data that are saved in a universal format is a key to mashups. Many Web applications publish an API, or application programming interface. APIs allow the integration and mashing of data, services and hardware. Data can include service numbers or fundraising numbers from your organization and outcomes of actions and projects. There are also many sources of data sets, such as socioeconomic data from the U.S. census, that you can use to mash up with your own data. The U.S. government has a website (**www.data.gov**) that is dedicated to the sharing of governmental information to drive innovation. Many other foreign governments have set up or are in the process of setting up similar open-government data initiatives. You can take that information and mash it up with your own information and create new and useful ways to interpret it.

A nice aspect of mashups is that you don't need to be a programmer to use them. Mashup composition tools are usually simple enough to be used by end users. Tools such as Yahoo Pipes (**http://pipes.yahoo.com**) allow you to click and drag items to create mashups. Generally, they support visual mixing of graphical user controls, services and components. Therefore, these tools contribute to the Web 2.0 vision, where users are able to contribute to the greater good of the Internet.

So how do mashups help fundraisers? There are three main types of mashups that can help you: dashboards, widgets and overlays. A dashboard is a single Web page containing various panels, each displaying a different object that may be a graph or chart, a website, etc. This can include various sources of data, not just fundraising data. In the for-profit world this is often called a business intelligence dashboard. An example of using a dashboard is combining the data from your website with your fundraising solicitations to project revenue by appeal and or campaign. These dashboards can be real time and interactive, and they allow you to drill down.

Widgets are small computer program chunks of a third-party site that are embedded and executed as elements of another. For example, you can embed a YouTube video on your website or blog, and the website visitor can watch it without leaving your Web page. You don't need to know the code to be able to embed it on your own site because YouTube provides it for you. You are better able to share your story because of this type of mashup. You also can embed your social media feeds onto your website.

Overlay mashups are a combination of two or more data sources for use in a single Web-based feature or application. The most popular use of overlays is using fundraising or sales data and maps. In the U.K., Jeans for Genes (**www.jeansforgenes.com**) put together a mashup for a fundraising event using Google maps and donor addresses. The event was a day when people could make a donation, benefiting seven medical charities, and wear jeans to work. Donors could add their addresses to the website, marking where they were located on a Google map on the charities' website. The map indicated all of the donors' addresses so the donors could see others supporting the same cause in their area. Using maps in this fashion is very helpful to a fundraiser because an overlay of addresses of donations on a map can visually demonstrate concentrations of donors and areas that may need to be targeted for solicitation. Others have used map mashups to show program locations and volunteer opportunities.

As more data become available and more information can be shared in more universal formats, interpretation of data will increase. Dashboards will allow you to make informed fundraising decisions. Widgets allow you to share information from various sources on your own Web pages. Overlay mashups, like maps, give you a visual representation of your data on a map. All three can be beneficial to you and your organization.

Want to learn more about mashups? One key online resource is Programmable Web (**www.programmableweb.com**). It is a catchall for APIs, mashups and information about both. It has information about 5,700 mashups and almost 3,000 APIs. It has how-to videos and plenty of information to teach you the basics of mashups without needing a tech background. The Case Foundation (**www.casefoundation.org**) and NetSquared (**www.netsquared.org**) also have resources on mashups specific to nonprofit organizations.

David Tinker, CFRE, is director of development of ACHIEVA in Pittsburgh (www.achieva.info).

Online: The Fastest Growing Fundraising and Engagement Channel

The appropriate metrics for evaluating the success of your online marketing programs vary depending on your program's primary objective. What should you measure when your objective is to raise money, drive website traffic, build an e-mail file, drive response to an advocacy appeal or prompt some other action? Even when you know what metrics are important and how to measure them, how do you know if your results are good? The only way to do this objectively is to compare your results with those of your peer group.

The Convio Online Marketing Nonprofit Benchmark Index™ Study is designed to help nonprofit professionals evaluate beneficial online marketing metrics, determine the effectiveness of their organization compared with similar organizations with a common mission (vertical) and plan strategies for future success.

At a macro cross-segment level, the study revealed that online is the fastest-growing fundraising channel for nonprofits. In 2010, Convio's clients raised more than $1.3 billion online, up 40 percent from 2009. Furthermore, online giving is growing fastest for small organizations. Organizations with fewer than 10,000 e-mail addresses saw a 26 percent increase in online giving.

The median growth rate in online giving was 20 percent. This compares with a median growth rate of 14 percent in 2009. Overall, 79 percent of organizations raised more in 2010 than 2009, while 21 percent saw a decline in their online fundraising. All but three verticals (association and membership, public broadcasting stations and team events) had a growth rate greater than 10 percent.

Other key findings:

- An increase in the number of gifts drove fundraising gains. Of those organizations that saw fundraising grow in 2010, 88 percent reported an increase in the number of gifts.
- Median donation size increased from $83.44 in 2009 to $91.94 in 2010. This statistic is based upon 430 organizations fundraising continuously during 2009 and 2010. Fifty-six percent of the organizations sampled increased their average gift amount in 2010.
- Online legislative advocate counts grew 20 percent. The total number of advocates on file increased by 20 percent, and almost 60 percent of the organizations sampled that use Convio's advocacy module saw their number of advocates increase by more than 10 percent.
- Advocacy continues to influence online donations. In 2010, 6.42 percent of advocates on file were also donors, compared to 5.97 percent in 2009.
- E-mail files continued to grow strongly. The median total e-mail file grew 22 percent to 48,700 constituents.
- Web traffic growth continued for most, but at a slower rate. Fifty-five percent of organizations grew their website traffic from 2009 to 2010. Web traffic growth in 2010 was 2 percent. This was the second consecutive year that this growth rate has been in the single digits.
- Website registration rates continue to decline. The rate at which the organizations included in this study converted website visitors to their e-mail file in 2010 was 2.0 percent, a decrease from 2.2 percent in 2009.
- Open rates continue to decline. Open rates for fundraising appeals were down from 18.5 percent in 2009 to 17.6 percent in 2010; and newsletter open rates declined from 20.4 percent in 2009 to 19.2 percent in 2010.
- Fundraising appeal effectiveness increased in 2010. Click-through rates improved to 1.76 percent in 2010 from 1.72 percent in 2009 and response rates were 0.16 percent in 2010—up from 0.15 in 2009—helping to offset the continuing decline in overall e-mail open rates.
- Haiti relief played a strong role in growing aggregate online fundraising. The 430 clients that fundraised continuously through 2009 and 2010 grew funds by 63 percent, from $483 million to $785 million, with Haiti relief playing a large role in aggregate growth.

The study analyzed data compiled from nearly 600 nonprofit organizations that have at least 24 months of data to compare and that collectively raised more than $1.15 billion in 2010. The study aggregated results into benchmarks that nonprofit organizations can compare against their peer group and the industry as a whole.

The full study is available at **www.convio.com/2011 benchmark**.

Online Advocates Help You Raise More

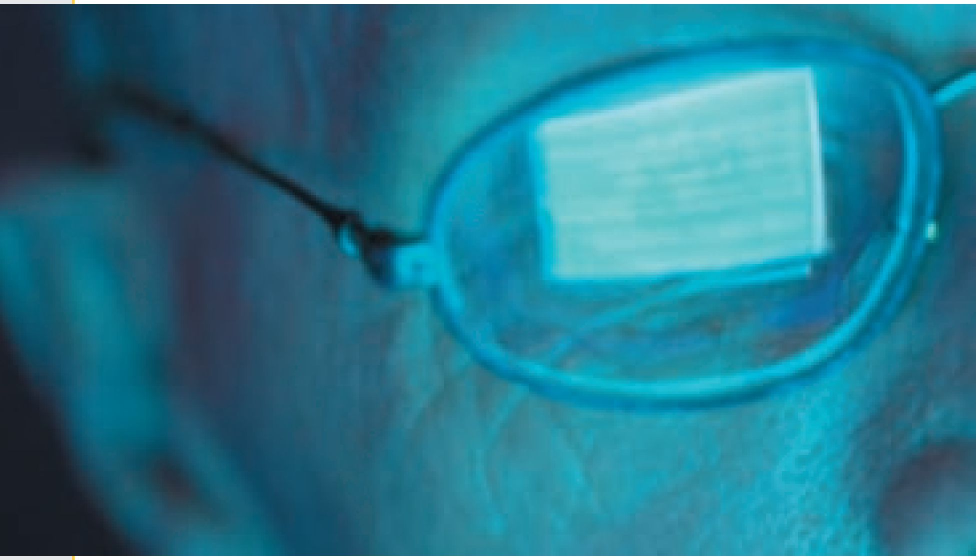
BY STACY DYER

Humans are social creatures. We are more likely to support a cause when asked by friends or family. Make the most of people's social nature by empowering those who are most passionate about your cause to share their passion and solicit support on your behalf.

It's about more than just getting people to sign online petitions. Encourage your raving fans (you know who they are, right?) to ask their own social networks to support your cause online. There are several ways to encourage personal advocacy online.

1 **Peer-to-peer fundraising.** This happens when a donor or supporter shares a link to your donation form on their personal e-mail or Facebook, Twitter, or blog page, encouraging their friends, colleagues, and readers to visit your website and make a donation.

Make it easy for supporters to share your organization's donation forms on popular networks by embedding "share" links on every donation and event registration form you create.



2 **Personal fundraising pages.** To engage your supporters even more, allow individuals and partners supporting your organization to host personal fundraising pages on their own websites or blogs. Maximize distribution with a portable virtual form. Advocates will be more willing to host a form on their site if it does not require visitors to leave the site in order to complete the form.

Make sure you address security issues relating to the form. Credit card transaction security is crucial. Allow advocates to host your form without worrying about security or having to configure their own blog or website. Sponsors and other organizational partners will find this particularly helpful and will be more likely to not only sponsor your organization or special event, but also fundraise and advocate on your behalf on their own websites.

Ideally, the fundraising form you distribute will be easy for you to update at any time. Otherwise, the wider your distribution, the more difficult it will be to contact each advocate and ask him or her to manually update it. Create a form that you control, so that if you need to update your message for an urgent call to action, or any other reason, your changes will be immediately reflected anywhere the form is published.

3 **Personalized advocacy center.** Bring e-advocacy even further by allowing supporters to create their own personalized fundraising page, tracking the donations they have raised for your cause, on your site. This type of advocacy is often used by registrants of race events, as they ask their friends to sponsor their participation in your run, walk, or ride. But you don't need to host a race to encourage advocate fundraising; it can be used in any type of fundraising campaign.

Create widgets online that supporters and participants can customize and share with their own peer-to-peer networks. Make it fun and personal: allow advocates to upload an image and share a personal statement about why they are supporting your cause.

Encourage your advocates to thank their friends and family who donate or pledge their support. Collect and share the e-mail addresses of donors with the advocates, so they can send a thank-you message to each of their personal supporters.

Competition can be a great motivator, too. Set clear goals for each advocate, and allow advocates to increase their goal to keep the support flowing after the original goal is met. Be sure that any donations your advocate collects offline are counted, too. Use visual progress meters to publicly track progress and allow others to share their success.

You rarely get anything you don't ask for, so ask for it! Your network of supporters, participants, and donors are your greatest asset when it comes to expanding your organization's reach. Ask your most motivated supporters for help and make it easy for them to give it. You'll be pleased by the results.

Stacy Dyer is a marketing manager for Sage North America's Austin, Texas-based Nonprofit Solutions business unit, stacy.dyer@sage.com.

'Free' Changes Everything

BY KAMI RAZVAN, PH.D.

The human brain allows us to comprehend almost anything, but when it comes to certain concepts we freeze and behave irrationally. One such concept is zero—or free. We have no problem understanding a value of one or two, but not zero. We are accustomed to a rigid definition of a world where everything has value according to its weight in gold or other monetary representation. The more you spend on a product, the more you receive. Conversely, the less you spend, the less you receive. And if you spend nothing, you get nothing, or as the saying goes, "You get what you pay for."

So is your free experience on Facebook worth nothing? Do your free searches on Google return no value? Are your free Firefox browser and tools worthless? Hardly.

Today the world is governed by bits and bytes—a product's utility is not directly proportional to its cost. Value is inferred from the number of people using a product, even if it is free. It is a new economy with a new set of measurements for value. Think of it like this: Because you use Facebook for free, like millions of others, you create its value because it enables you to easily communicate with others and because it is delivering you to advertisers who want your attention.

Facebook is now valued in the neighborhood of $50 billion, yet you use Facebook products for free. Why is this important to nonprofits? It's not business as usual anymore, especially in the world of technology. There are numerous free, world-class applications available that will drive down your cost of technology ownership, increase the value of your IT (information technology) investment and simultaneously increase your effectiveness and efficiency in fundraising.

For nonprofits to take advantage of this new economic model they must rethink and re-evaluate their existing practices. The question is no longer how to find funding resources to purchase expensive software, but how to operate with an effective cost that approaches zero.

You now operate in a Web-centric environment where approximately 90 percent of your time is spent with a browser. You do online banking, purchase tickets, register for a class, manage a database and accept donations. You communicate worldwide with friends and network for business.

Some have said that in five years the computer, as you know it, will no longer be around. Your tools will be tablets, smartphones, etc. All you will need is a browser-powered monitor and your office will be complete. As a matter of fact, many of you can do most of this today on the cloud of your choice.

Moving forward, you need only a browser. How is that possible? Here are some browser-centric suggestions to consider.

Step 1: From now on, say no to buying more hardware and software. If an application requires installation on a local PC or network, it will be another commitment of time and expense for a long time. Do some research and find a comparable product available on the Web. If a compromise needs to be made, evaluate it against the total goal and where the platform will be in a year. Buying a new PC will tie you down for the next three to five years.

Step 2: At the earliest opportunity, move all of your computing to the Web (cloud). From e-mail to productivity applications, all are available on the Web. Already free applications such as Zoho (**www.zoho.com**) and Google Docs (**www.google.com**) allow you to work from anywhere. Base your decisions on becoming a browser-centric organization.

Step 3: Research open-source applications and operating systems (OS). You can easily install an open-source OS on existing hardware without any loss of productivity. For example, installing Ubuntu (**www.ubuntu.com**) can offer a large number of advantages to existing systems at absolutely no cost.

Remember, moving forward you need only a browser.

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