



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Why nonprofit groups need to be online

By Barry VanderKelen

Nonprofit groups are exhorted regularly to increase their online presence. Staff and volunteers are already stretched with current activities and might be resistant to adding technology to the workload.

After all, even technology that enhances services or effectiveness costs either staff time or money to acquire and operate.

Today's column focuses on why online presence is important. My next column will focus on how a nonprofit organization can adopt new technology in a sustainable way.

The Pew Charitable Trusts—www.pewtrusts.org—has an ongoing project that studies how people use the net and how that is shaping society. Recent findings include:

- The typical American home has 26 electronic gadgets — TV, computer, telephone, etc.
- Americans spend more time during the day using electronic gadgets than anything else.
- As people's use of the Internet grows, so does their demand for services; more than 73 percent of Americans use the Internet regularly.
- As people gain experience online and the online world becomes more useful, people become more serious about what they do online — more financial trans-

actions, more work-related uses, and more online activities.

Increasingly, people are using the Internet to conduct the business of their lives.

A recent study conducted by Convio, Sea Change Ventures and Edge Research of 3,500 affluent donors found that more than half preferred to make their annual gifts online. Online giving is convenient and efficient. Too often, though, a nonprofit group relies on a "Give Now" button on their Web site as the only means to solicit online donations.

Nonprofit organizations need to find ways to draw people to their Web sites so potential donors can find the "Give Now" buttons. Strategies to do this include:

- referencing the Web site on all printed materials;
- refreshing Web content regularly to give people a reason to visit it;
- using e-mail and electronic newsletters with links to the site to draw hits;
- recruit representatives to promote the organization or Web site in social networking communities such as Facebook or MySpace (Facebook reported that donations from its 12 million users totaled \$2.5 million last year); and
- use text messages to cell phones to draw people to a Web site.

What also must be considered is use of technology to report back to donors

about the use of their gift.

Donors report that fear that their gift will be squandered is a major reason for not giving more. Donors also report they stop giving because a nonprofit group does not provide enough information about how their gift has been used.

Not every change needs to be large and expensive; small changes can produce large results. For instance, a study done by Donor Digital —

www.donordigital.com — found that making it easier for people to find a "Give Now" button increased online donations by 25 percent.

Also, when unnecessary information was removed from the donor info form, donations increased 31 percent.

Donors are spending more time online and are expanding their online activities.

Nonprofit groups need to keep current with the evolving behavior of donors. My next column will focus on ways nonprofit organizations can adopt new technology effectively and in a sustainable way.

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Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.