

Fundraising with a Blog

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What is a blog?

A blog, or a weblog, is sort of an online journal or diary. For a nonprofit, it's an inexpensive way to communicate with lots of people and open up dialog with supporters. It offers a quick way to provide timely and regularly updated information. Blogs usually feature short entries of just a few paragraphs. Most blogs feature links to other resources or blogs. Updates are usually added at the top, and proceed in reverse chronological order.

Why you should start a blog?

Blogging is a great way to get attention for your cause. It's a timely way to share information about your organization and your mission. You can get lots of people involved (staff, Board, and volunteers can all participate). It's easy to do and doesn't require a technological genius. You can not only share stories about your work, but post photos, video, and audio fairly easily. This gives your readers a multimedia experience with you! If your mission has an emotional edge to it (saving the environment for example), it gives supporters a place to voice their concerns and opinions. Best of all, it's a tool for cultivating donors and supporters.

What's involved in setting up a blog?

You need a place to host your blog (just like a website), a plan for promoting it, and a commitment to keeping content added. There are a couple of blogging software packages out there that are most used: TypePad, WordPress, and Blogger are the most popular.

Three blogs every fundraiser should be reading. These are my absolute favorite blogs and I encourage you to visit them, read them, and subscribe to them if you like them!

Donor Power Blog. Written by Jeff Brooks, Creative Director at Merkle, Inc., this blog "calls a spade a spade" when it comes to fundraising. It's fresh, it's timely, and it's the stuff we need to be reading to keep us sharp and on task. www.donorpowerblog.com



Don't Tell the Donor Blog. Written by an anonymous person, this blog tells it like it is in the world of fundraising. You'll get the inside scoop on all the latest in the industry. www.donttellythedonor.blogspot.com



Extreme Fundraising Blog. Fundraising Coach and my friend Marc Pittman writes this blog and shares his wisdom about all things nonprofit. www.fundraisingcoach.com/blog.



Okay, I lied. Here are a few more blogs that are really worth reading.

Sandy Rees, CFRE
www.sandyrees.com

Katya's Nonprofit Marketing Blog. www.nonprofitmarketingblog.com



And here's mine - Get Fully Funded Blog. www.getfullyfundedblog.com



Ten reasons to have a blog. From the Wild Apricot Blog (<http://www.wildapricot.com/blogs/newsblog/default.aspx>), here are 10 reasons why your nonprofit should have a blog:

1. Search engine optimization. Keywords and website design are important to search engines when calculating a search result list. A focused, well-written blog on your website will contain several keywords which improve the site's search ranking. Additionally, if the blog has useful content, other sites will want to link to it, improving your website's level of importance.

2. Expert in the field. Nonprofit organizations have a wealth of information on their specific area of focus. This information is highly desired in online blogging communities. By posting regularly in blogs focused on similar issues, your organization will gain a reputation for being an expert. Bloggers want to read more postings by experts and will follow links to your organization's website.
3. Credibility. It is more important today than ever before for nonprofit organizations to be trustworthy in the eyes of their contributors. One of the best ways to establish this relationship of trust is to make events and projects as visible as possible. By having weekly updates on projects and the projects' successes, users will know exactly what difference their donations have made (or will make if they donate).
4. Awareness. The beauty of the “blogosphere” is that almost all blogs are linked to one another. This creates a useful network of information that bloggers have access to. Of the estimated 57 million bloggers today, more than 17 million of them are information-thirsty bloggers who desire the kind of content your nonprofit blog could provide. In addition, having a blog allows you to create your own media and bypass traditional media channels which are often expensive and limited in frequency.
5. Negative Comments. People are talking and probably writing about your nonprofit already. Hopefully, the majority of what is said is positive, but almost inevitably there will be some negative commentary. A blog provides a median to field complaints or concerns and defend the decisions the organization has made. Be sure to keep the tone of the commentaries professional and respond promptly.
6. Events. A regularly maintained blog will attract loyal readers who can easily be informed about upcoming events. To incentivize new subscribers, or to increase the loyalty of existing subscribers, consider having special promotions on the blog before events. It is important to note, however, that a blog should serve to work in conjunction with the traditional channels of marketing already in place, not to replace them.
7. Annual Report. Many nonprofits are required to compile an annual or semiannual report. By working smarter and creating a blog, you will have most of the content for the report already completed before you even begin compiling it. Furthermore, many supporters feel that blogs are more honest and accurate than formal annual reports, so the effort required to create the content will be more cost effective.
8. Information. One of the most difficult aspects of any nonprofit is gaining an understanding of its supporters. A blog can help tap into this resource of information and more. Two major information-related benefits include:
 - a. Allowing users to create. A blog encourages involvement in the organization. A blog allows readers to create entries about what issues they feel are important and receive feedback from these entries.
 - b. Provide information to supporters. If a picture can convey a thousand words, then a blog on your website will have a lot to say. So much of the success of a fundraising campaign (whether you like it or not) comes from its emotional appeal. By having a blog that contains pictures and stories, viewers will become more emotionally involved with the cause or service.
9. Fundraising. By using charity badges on your blog, you can get your supporters to help with fundraising efforts. A charity badge can be set up quickly and allows people to share the small graphic image you create to make donations. [ChipIn](#) and [Network for Good](#) both have charity badges available for a small fee. There are countless examples of blogging communities that have worked together to raise money using charity badges.
10. The “Heart” of the Organization. A blog gives you the unique opportunity to show the organization in a totally new light. While blogs are beneficial for marketing and fundraising purposes, their most important function should always be to convey interesting and compelling stories about the organization.

How to Raise Money with a Blog

First, understand that a blog will be a communications tool and must fit into your overall communications and fundraising plans.

1. Know your donor audience. Do they hang out online or will you have to help them find you?
2. Know your edge and your key messages. To find your edge, figure out what is the controversy in your mission. For example, a food bank can use “People right here in our community are going hungry” as its edge. Key messages might be “That’s not okay with us” and “we’re going to do something about it.”
3. Drive traffic to your blog. Post the link to your blog everywhere. Gather email addresses from your donors and send them email invitations to join in the blog conversation.
4. Tell your stories in your blog. Share your statistics and facts. Help your donors see firsthand the work you are doing and the results of your efforts.
Fundraising is emotionally based. What better way to convey the emotion of your cause than to show photos and videos, and have testimonials of your clients played in audio on your blog?
5. Invite your donors to share their opinions and views in your blog. Engage them in conversation. Give them opportunities to give you feedback and advice.
6. Ask your donors to support your work with a gift. Offer an online donation mechanism that they can use to make a gift right away.

You’ll get a good idea of the time you’ll need to sustain a great blog and ideas for publicizing it once you have it up and running.

Here are a few tips for writing content.

- Keep it conversational. Write like you talking to a specific donor.
- Tell stories. They’re much more interesting to read.
- Find a specific time of day to write and make it a habit to post as often as you can (at least 3 times a week).
- Ask a volunteer to help you write. (Great way to engage a volunteer!)

Want to see samples of nonprofits who are using blogs? Check out the Nonprofit Blog Exchange at <http://nonprofitblogexchange.blogspot.com/>.

Here’s a good one: <http://www.aspcablog/index.html> and another one: <http://weblog.greenpeace.org/> and one more: <http://understory.ran.org/>.