

E-Philanthropy & Your Annual Campaign: Incorporating Technology Into Your Annual Giving Program

ePhilanthropy

ePhilanthropy leverages the impact of your fundraising activities by using the internet, a tool that is very budget-friendly and should be fully integrated into all your marketing and fundraising endeavors.

ePhilanthropy (like Social Media) can also create an expectation of great and instantaneous financial rewards; in reality, it's a cost-effective tool that greatly enhances your ability to build effective relationships with your constituents, which in turn brings better financial (and other) rewards.

And in this economy, building and maintaining those relationships is more important than ever, so when you plan your annual giving campaign this year, find ways to increase your level of involvement with your constituents by involving your website in all your transactions.

Build your email list

At every event, every form or direct mail piece that leaves the building should have a space for your constituents to add their email address. Use your "offline" marketing and fundraising efforts to help build your list and draw people back to your website. Tell people you are updating your mailing list to include email addresses and you need their help to be able to communicate with them more cost-effectively. Add an email signup form to the main page of your website.

Adding the form can be as simple as creating a form that sends info to a staff email address to enter manually in your offline database or you can create a form that sends data directly to an online email management service like Constant Contact, or to a comprehensive CRM software (Constituent Relationship Management)

ePhilanthropy is not some separate process that you add on to your usual fundraising activities as an afterthought, nor is it reserved only for nonprofits with larger budgets and in-house IT staff.

Communicate regularly with your donors

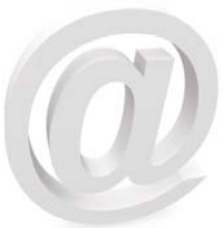
If you have been communicating with your donors regularly throughout the year, when it comes time to do your annual campaign you and your good works are already their minds. Current and potential donors want to know how the nonprofit is doing and how their funds are (or will be) put to good use. Providing monthly email updates and/or newsletters are essential; the goal is to send out brief news items that direct readers back to your website where they can find out more wonderful information about your progress toward your goals and your success stories. You can send out your own text emails with links back to your site, or you can use an email list management service that helps you create newsletters from templates like Constant Contact or you can use your CRM software (or some other content management software) to send your own custom newsletters.

Allow people to donate online

If a donor wants to use a credit card to donate, it's actually safer to donate online (in a properly secured area) than it is to send your credit card number written out in its entirety in a little, clearly marked, donation envelope. Always give people multiple options to donate and include the ability to donate through your website. Your website should also show people how to donate offline with a printable application that can be mailed or faxed. The online form can be as simple as a Donate Now button directing people to a donation service like Network For Good, or a simple form connected to PayPal or a more complex form connected to a payment gateway like Authorize.net.

Launch your annual campaign piece from your website

Banks and other corporations are offering paper-free options in an effort to "go green" and save money at the same time and nonprofits can follow in their footsteps! Be careful about going completely paperless with your annual campaign – make sure your constituents will all appreciate the online-only aspect of your campaign – or you can just do portions of your campaign online. The simplest way would be to repeat your campaign online by creating a pdf version of your print campaign and posting it to your website or pulling out content from your campaign piece and placing it on your site in html with direct links to the donation page. You can also use your print piece as the "teaser" piece with just enough content to encourage people to go online to find out more; with this approach you save on printing costs with a smaller mailer and leave the majority of the information on your website. You can also use your website and email communication to send a follow-up to the annual mailing i.e. a reminder to people who did not respond to your initial mailing or a special thank you and link to a recognition page for donors who responded to your annual campaign.



Examples of Online Campaign Pieces

These are great examples of campaign pieces that other nonprofits have created and placed online - either as their entire campaign or as supplementary materials for their campaign.

University of Alaska
webpage / brochure

YMCA of Greater Vancouver
webpage / brochure

Diocese of Trenton
appeal website

South Bay Family YMCA
webpage / brochure

Simsbury Land Trust
webpage / brochure

Lake County Charter School
webpage / brochure / letter

Downtown YMCA
webpage / brochure

Virginia Athletics Foundation
webpage / brochure

ePhilanthropy Best Practices

- Make your identity clearly known on your website including name, all affiliations, full address, phone number and email address (showing!) and history, board of directors and key staff.
- Allow people to easily opt in and opt out of all email communications.
- Make sure your online credit card transactions are done on a secure server through a well-known payment gateway provider and that you never store credit cards on your server.
- Make sure you have a privacy policy.
- Allow people to donate both on and off-line.
- Ensure the funds will be used for what you say they will be used for.
- Don't use intermediaries that take a percentage of each donation (other than what is reasonable for credit card fees).
- Provide appropriate tax disclosures/disclaimers.
- Prominently display your latest Form 990 and IRS tax-exempt letter on your website.

