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Donating Goes Digital: Enhancing Giving Through Online Options

For Catholic schools to be relevant in today's competitive philanthropic environment, it is imperative to provide donors with online donation options and opportunities. There are many ways to provide these philanthropy channels, and many Catholic schools are reaping the benefits by enhancing their digital presence. This letter will explain why Catholic schools should enhance giving through online options and how to make this option available to key stakeholders.

This CSML includes the following topics:

- Who – Who is giving online?
- What – What platforms can be used to promote online giving?
- When – When are the busiest times for online giving?
- Where – Where can donors be recognized online?
- Why – Why organize online platforms to be donor-friendly?

Who – Who is giving online?

A wide demographic of Catholic school supporters is donating online and this source of fundraising continues to broaden every year. The ability to donate on a mobile device and the option to provide monthly pledge options are becoming essential (upleaf.com).

Who Are Your Future Donors?



According to M+R's 2015 Benchmarks Study, there was a 13% increase in the number of people who donated this past year in 2015. It was also noted that smaller organizations continued to see the largest growth in online giving. Consequently, forming a comprehensive Annual Fund Plan with both online and offline giving strategies will work to improve donor engagement. People who give both online and offline are more likely to keep giving than those who donate exclusively online or offline (upleaf.com).

When deciphering who the target audience will be for building donation platforms online, generational trends should be assessed. For example, the millennial generation (those born from the early 1980's to the early 2000's) tend to genuinely care about specific causes and seek ways to make the world a better place. To this point, the millennials are growing up in a digital world and using sites like Kickstarter.com and Change.org to marry these two premises. Millennials are today's youngest parents and soon will be the dominant generation of parents in the elementary and secondary school markets.

Donor Facts and Figures:

- Donors 66 and older are just as likely as younger donors to make their contributions to charities online;
 - 59% of donors 66 years and older give online, an increase from 29% in 2010;
 - 60% of donors under 65 years of age gave online this year and in 2010.
- (US Dunham+Company/Campbell Rinker 2014 Study)

What – What platforms can be used to promote online giving?

Identifying the proper online platforms for an organization, and continuing to build and engage a community on these sites, are both of paramount importance. Cross-promoting platforms will also help showcase the availability of donating online.

1. Website – It is critical that school websites are equipped to receive donations, and that the process be simple. Having a clearly defined section of the site dedicated to receiving gifts and emphasizing the mission of the organization is essential. Once a donor clicks on the donate button, establish drop-down options to channel gifts for specific purposes. Immediate email acknowledgement that a donation has been made is a best practice, followed by a proper “thank-you” note delivered via postal mail.

2. Facebook – Promotion of requests for donations and publication of how to give and where to go to give are items that can be “shared” easily through Facebook. Stakeholders can also engage and “like” posts referencing philanthropy. Donors and friends can also post comments about the gratification received from giving.

Event pages can also be created to promote specific fundraisers or parties. Facebook has also announced that it now has a “Donate Now” call-to-action option on both “link ads” and “Pages.”

3. Instagram – This online mobile photo and video-sharing site enables users to share content easily on other social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr. Because of the ease with which posts on Instagram can be shared with other sites, posting an infographic featuring donation requests enhances reach and increases efficiency. Additionally, using a hashtag is an ideal way to query posts for donation options.

4. Twitter – This social networking service, established in 2006, enables users to send and read 140-character messages called “tweets.” When promoting donation options through Twitter, plan the message carefully due to length restrictions. For example, use “https://bitly” to shorten and customize links. Services are continually evolving to make donating easier on Twitter. One service that allows charities to receive donations is called “#Donate.” Users create a campaign hashtag and share it on Twitter with a message asking their followers for donations for their cause or organization. Those who wish to donate must link their Twitter account with PayPal, and then reply with a tweet of support.

5. E-Newsletters – Electronic newsletters are a great way to promote donation requests. Establish a well-worded and organized e-newsletter to be sent to a comprehensive and regularly updated mailing list. Include links that feature a “donate now” button, surrounded with white space to enhance visibility. Credit card logos can be placed below the donate button to help subscribers gain trust that transactions will be safe and easy.



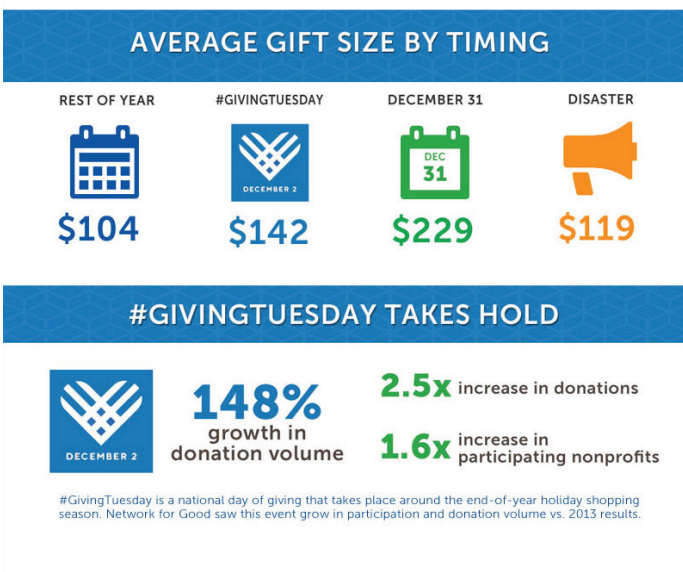
6. Giving websites – Giving online is now available through many websites that specialize in promoting non-profits with the capability to receive gifts and channel them to the designated charity. These sites enable all types of donors to quickly and conveniently find worthy causes to support.

7. Apps – Apps such as “ChariPick” help people find charities and donate to their favorite causes with the touch of a button. Each day users open the app to discover three new featured charities, learn a little about these causes, and make a donation to a favorite. The app integrates with social media to allow donors to share their impact with their Facebook friends and Twitter followers. A giving history shows users the causes to which they have donated most often.

Don't forget:

- It is ideal to use online communications to support tried and true fundraising strategies;
- Don't change what already works, but enhance it through online presence;
- Incorporate social media and online giving resources into the school's Comprehensive Advancement Plan before launching new initiatives.

When – When are the busiest times for online giving?



1. End-of-year/late-December is currently the busiest time for online giving, with 17.8% of 2014 giving happening during this month. Catholic schools should make a concerted effort to request donations at this time, noting year-end tax credits.

Yet, recent research indicates this trend may be decreasing as nonprofits continue to diversify the timing of their campaigns throughout the year (Blackbaud, 2014).

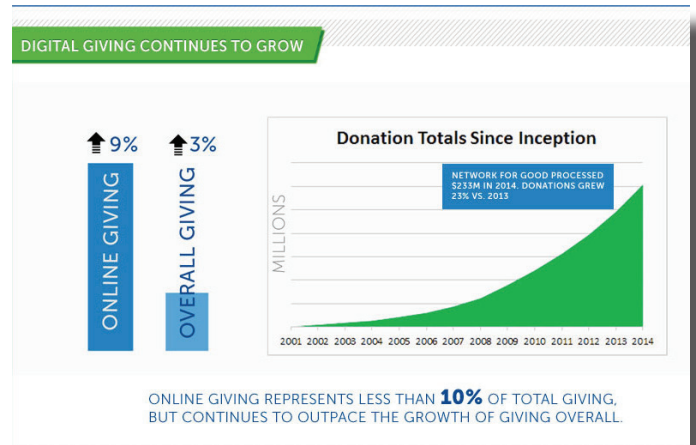
2. Giving Tuesday – 2012 saw the launch of the Tuesday after Thanksgiving as #GivingTuesday. This day has become an international day of giving in response to commercialization in the post-Thanksgiving season, particularly Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Many Catholic schools have taken advantage of this platform and coordinate their own successful #GivingTuesday initiatives.

3. Campaign beginning – When schools launch Annual Giving Campaigns, the initial month after the launch tends to bring success. After the first request for funds is announced and the related collateral is visible, donors are apt to give.

Where – Where can donors be recognized online?

Donors love to be recognized. Don't forget to promote the names of donors on the school's website, in the e-newsletter, and on social media sites. After confirming those who wish to remain anonymous, recognition can be easily achieved by publishing a list of current donors by gift size or recognition level.

Donor profiles can be created and shared online by posting a photograph and “tagging” the individual. These posts can serve as gentle reminders and eye-catching marketing tools to encourage additional donations. Also, copies of “donor proof” letters can also be shared on websites and social media sites as a cost saving measure and a way to promote giving before the conclusion of a campaign.



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Edward Barrett is the Director of Institutional Advancement for Providence Catholic High School in New Lenox, Illinois, where he has built a successful comprehensive institutional advancement program, including extensive communications and marketing programs, coordination of all fundraising programs, student enrollment, annual giving and endowment growth programs, as well as conducting a successful \$3 million capital campaign

Why – Why organize online platforms to be donor-friendly?

What makes online donations so effective is the convenience offered. The easier the donation process is, the higher the yield in contributions.

Statistics for online giving clearly show that trends in giving through digital resources are increasing. Additionally, the benefits of “sharing” such information include the potential virality of promoting philanthropy options, a desired outcome that continues to grow in frequency.

To be competitive in fundraising, it is critical that Catholic schools learn and adopt online giving practices and protocols. Establishing a well-organized, comprehensive social media plan will ensure that special events, friend-raisers, and fundraisers leverage online giving options.

As schools transition to optimize their online platforms for these initiatives, sites should be tested internally first. Have trusted friends walk through the process to test for errors prior to publically announcing online options. Confirm that there are proper security measures in place for accepting credit cards and that the school’s gift crediting policy is utilized. Coordinate the cross-promotion of philanthropy options using communication outlets. For example, announce on Facebook that donation options are on the website, and post on Instagram which hashtags to use for fundraisers.

Once the school “goes live” with digital donation initiatives, continue to monitor and track results. Social media sites and websites provide data tracking tools that make this efficient. Learn which posts, tweets, hashtags, and announcements are the most successful and viral. Resources abound to assist with online giving options, and such services are now a key component of CSM’s consulting work in establishing and enhancing programs and plans for social media and overall institutional advancement.

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