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CENTERPIECE

FOCUS ON: DEVELOPMENT

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ONLINE FUNDRAISING: MOVING BEYOND THE “GIVE NOW!” BUTTON ON YOUR WEBPAGE

BY DAWN RAINS

How many of us have had this experience? Anxious to begin raising zillions of dollars via the Web, our development department got to work: we read up on best practices; we wrote a bunch of bite-size, compelling annual fund copy; we developed, tested and tweaked an easy-to-use giving form to take every possible situation into consideration; and we made sure our secure server and privacy policy were in order. We even put an article in the theatre’s newsletter about the new opportunity to give via the website. Finally, after months of anticipation, the “Give Now!” button was activated — and we sat back and waited for the money to start rolling in. We checked every day to see whether we’d received any gifts...for about two weeks. In the first nine months of online giving at Seattle Repertory Theatre, we received four gifts totaling \$410 — and two of those were from development staffers. (The other two, however, were from first-time donors, and averaged \$175...maybe there is hope!)

Based on an informal poll of a handful of our theatre colleagues in TCG Budget Groups 5 and 6 around the country, Seattle Rep is not alone. While most of the theatres surveyed have websites, many of us are still not able to accept contributions via a secure server. Those of us who have the capability to accept contributions are only receiving a handful of gifts via the website, far less than one percent of total donations. Almost none of the organizations surveyed send email newsletters; of those that do, few cover issues related to development. And while several of us are on the verge of integrating the use of technology into our overall development plans, none of us are there yet.

Mired in my frustration about how far Seattle Rep has yet to go in terms of using technology to raise contributed dollars, and inspired by the incredible outpouring of online gifts following September 11, the idea for this *Centerpiece* was born. As I delved into the topic a bit more, I realized there are several aspects of an integrated approach to online fundraising that needed to be addressed: the state of online giving nationwide; building an effective online presence via an organizational website; email newsletters; proactive and “viral” email campaigns; and resources that might help all of us take the next step. I hope you will view this collection of articles as just a beginning.

Development *Centerpiece* Curator: Dawn Rains, Director of Development, Seattle Repertory Theatre. Copyright © 2002 by Theatre Communications Group, Inc. All articles reproduced by permission of the authors. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher or author. Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 355 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, telephone (212) 697-5230, fax (212) 983-4847, website: www.tcg.org. Ben Cameron, Executive Director; Joan Channick, Deputy Director; Christopher Shuff, Director of Management Programs; Rachel Ford, Management Programs Associate.

THE STATE OF ONLINE GIVING

Many nonprofit organizations across the country are dipping their toes into the world of online fundraising. In the wake of the unprecedented online giving after September 11, there would seem to be no better time. Neilsen/Netratings reports that 174 million Americans, or 55 percent of U.S. households, now have internet access at home. Consider these statistics about online giving after September 11:

- ❖ More than \$215 million of the \$2 billion collected was given online — nearly 11 percent of total gifts.
- ❖ More than one million donors made an online contribution to the September 11th Fund alone — accounting for roughly one-third of the total gifts to the Fund.
- ❖ Average gifts from online donors were higher than gifts received in more conventional ways — September 11th Fund reported average online gifts of \$103 versus \$93 via mail and phone, and AOL Time Warner Foundation received average online gifts of \$75 while mailed donations averaged less than \$25.

Many of the online donors in the wake of 9/11 appear to be new donors. As with early e-commerce adoption, it is likely that many of these “first-time” e-philanthropists will continue to give money online now that they’ve discovered how easy and convenient it is.

Yet, a recent *Chronicle of Philanthropy* article points out that the extraordinary outpouring of support raises as many questions about the future of online giving as it answers. The biggest question, said David Eisner, senior vice president of the AOL Time Warner Foundation at a recent E-Philanthropy Conference in McLean, Virginia, is how the nonprofit world can move online giving from crisis giving to more normal day-to-day giving.

A key to the immediate future of online giving may lie in the behavior of current online donors. The Virginia-based fundraising consulting company, Craver, Mathews, Smith & Company, conducted a survey of 733 people who had made an online contribution to a large international advocacy organization and found the following:

- ❖ Of the donors surveyed, 80 percent go online every day; and 56 percent do their banking or pay bills online.
- ❖ Thirty-six percent have high-speed broadband access at home.
- ❖ A little more than one-fourth of the respondents said they would have considered making a monthly pledge if that

option had been available, and 70 percent indicated that they had taken advocacy action online.

- ❖ More than 40 percent of those surveyed made their donations on their *first visit* to the organization’s website, and another 39 percent made their gifts within their first five visits.
- ❖ Of the respondents, 44 percent said that they used a search engine to find the organization’s website address; 20 percent said they guessed the organization’s website address; and 12 percent saw a link on another website and followed it.

While not surprising, these statistics have some important things to teach us. First, these donors are what Mark Rovner, senior vice president of Craver, Mathews, Smith & Company, calls “Internet superadopters, not early adopters.” These contributors are people who are highly comfortable using the Internet to conduct the daily business of their lives, and as such, probably have fairly high expectations regarding ease of use and information security. Second, these donors sought out the organizations on the Internet, indicating that a news report, printed piece from the organization, or some other communication probably pointed them in the right direction. Third, an organization’s website needs to be compelling, convincing, and simple to navigate — these donors are likely to make their gift in the first several times they come to a website, and they need a reason to keep coming back.

According to an annual survey conducted by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, the percentage of large nonprofit organizations that are raising money online increased from 36 percent to 55 percent between 1999 and 2000. The survey shows, however, that many groups are still in the early stages of crafting their online giving programs, and online gifts still account for less than one percent of all money raised from private sources. The study also suggests that many organizations have not mounted online campaigns with the same degree of aggressiveness that they might use in direct mail or telemarketing campaigns. Of the organizations raising money online, 72 percent did not send email solicitations to prospective donors. And only 11 of the 41 groups that send electronic newsletters to donors include fundraising appeals in them.

There is no doubt that there exists a direct relationship between the amount of time and effort that we spend on online fundraising and the results we achieve. Until online tools, in the form of websites and email, are fully integrated into our development plans, we will likely continue to see lackluster financial results.

Information gathered from:

Hruby, Laura. “All Aboard: More and More Large Nonprofit Groups Are Raising Money Online, New *Chronicle* Survey Finds,” *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, June 14, 2001. www.philanthropy.com.

Wallace, Nicole. “Outlook for Online Donations Is Cloudy, Experts Say,” *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, March 21, 2002. www.philanthropy.com.

Walters Group, USA: Michele Lynn and Susan Walters. “A Snapshot of Internet Innovation: Using E-Philanthropy to Expand Volunteering, Giving and Community Building,” March 2002. www.independentsector.org.

ONE THEATRE'S VENTURE INTO PROACTIVE FUNDRAISING VIA THE INTERNET

The path to fundraising via the Internet was a long and winding one for Seattle Repertory Theatre, at least in the age of information technology.

First, we built our website in order to promote our productions, which basically amounted to an online version of our season brochure and other publications. Our next priority was to develop the ability to sell single tickets online — which now regularly accounts for 10 to 15 percent of total single ticket sales. Then, we added information about how to give to the annual fund that included a printable pledge form that people could mail or fax back to us. Finally, we added a secure server that allows people to make contributions on our website with just a couple of clicks. As a final step, Seattle Rep began supporting the website with a full-time staff person last year. As a result, we started to use our site for online subscription renewals in March 2002. At the same time, Seattle Rep launched its first foray into proactive fundraising via the Internet.

We had a relatively new major donor who was specifically interested in using his philanthropy to leverage generous and new giving from other people. As we had been thinking of trying a more proactive approach to online fundraising for some time, we asked our donor to consider providing a matching gift for Seattle Rep's first online campaign. He agreed, and our campaign was propelled by his offer to provide a dollar-for-dollar matching gift for all online gifts given in a specific three-week time period, up to a maximum of \$10,000. Developed by Seattle Rep annual fund manager Lisa Schachter, the goal of the campaign was not only to raise money, but also to increase awareness among our audience about the opportunity to give online.

The campaign was launched in Seattle Rep's email newsletter, which goes out to our house email list of about 4,000 households every four to six weeks. The newsletter is primarily a marketing vehicle, but includes development content as well. The online campaign was the first item in the newsletter, and we provided a link for people to make their gift instantly via Seattle Rep's website.

In addition, the campaign was supported by several offline efforts, including signage in the theatre lobby, an informational flyer in our theatre program, and costumed volunteers passing out handbills in the lobby and answering any questions. We also sent information about the campaign, along with "forwardable" copy, to our board of trustees, and we had a short article in our volunteer newsletter. The staff member who oversees the website was so inspired by our teamwork on the online giving campaign, that she wrote an email to the full staff of Seattle Rep encouraging them to participate. At the beginning of the final week, we sent an additional, single message email about the campaign to spur final gifts before the deadline.

At the close of the campaign three weeks later, we had

—Dawn Rains is the Development Director for the Seattle Repertory Theatre and the new curator for development topics in the Centerpiece. She can be reached at dawnr@seattlerep.org.

received 48 gifts totaling \$11,493. Of these gifts, 48 percent were from first-time or lapsed donors, including nine first-time gifts from Seattle Rep staff members. In addition, several renewing donors were encouraged by the opportunity to get their initial contributions matched and made a second gift for the season, made an increased gift or made their gifts earlier. The average gift to the campaign was \$239. When we remove two large major gift renewals that skew those results, the average gift to the campaign was \$119, markedly higher than the average gift via direct mail or telefunding campaigns.

This is what we learned (and suspected all along):

- ❖ **Relationships are of the utmost importance.** People generally aren't going to give, online or otherwise, if they don't have some kind of relationship with your organization. We received the most results from Seattle Rep staff and volunteers, who have a significant relationship with the organization and were asked in a more personal way than the email newsletter. Even the other new donors were subscriber non-donors or multiple single ticket buyers.
- ❖ **You still have to ask.** It is the oldest fundraising rule in the book: the number one reason people give is because they were asked. It isn't enough to put a "Give Now!" button on your website. You need to ask people for their support and allow them to make their gift in the way that works for them — and for some people, that way is the Internet.
- ❖ **Integrate online and offline strategies.** The integration of both online (email solicitations, information on the website) and more traditional approaches (program stuffer, newsletter articles, board contacts) seems to have yielded the best results. Unfortunately, we will never know whether information provided via the online campaign resulted in a gift by mail, or vice versa — but all of these efforts built on one another. In a larger context, we now put our web address on every piece of printed material that comes out of the organization, including the development materials. All of our fundraising pieces profile the website as a quick and easy way to make a gift, in addition to phone and mail.
- ❖ **Provide an incentive.** In our campaign, we offered a Seattle Rep mouse pad for gifts above a certain level. However, the powerful incentive of the one-to-one match was what really did the trick.
- ❖ **Urgency is key.** International relief organizations have had extraordinary success with online fundraising — urgency and timeliness built on current news reports have demonstrated that need is key. In a smaller way, we found that making a compelling case and providing a deadline for the match was critical. We received most gifts within three or four days of sending the email solicitation.

ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE ONLINE PRESENCE

BY ANDRE LUECHT

For the nonprofit organization, creating an effective website can be a daunting challenge. Too often, the websites created by nonprofit organizations are merely online versions of brochures. It is surprising how little most organizations know about their site visitors. A site that successfully appeals to a teenager has obviously different design features than a web presence that targets senior professionals.

Once your target audience has been selected, it is necessary to concentrate on the site's purpose. Is the purpose to lower direct marketing costs by actively increasing donations? Or is the purpose to recruit an untapped donor base by reaching a new audience?

It is no longer enough to simply present passive information. Because of financial constraints, many nonprofit organizations don't have the ability of for-profit sites to drive traffic. If an interested user locates your website, make sure they find everything they expect in terms of content and functionality. In those cases, the accidental user who found your URL on a letterhead or poster better have the chance to make a one-click online donation, purchase a ticket online or leave an email address to request your newsletter. If the site makes

it impossible to completely satisfy all the user's needs at once, more likely than not, they won't return!

To maximize your site's effectiveness:

- ❖ **Construct measurable goals.** When planning your site, clearly identify your marketing goals. Often websites languish because there is no one directly accountable.
- ❖ **Evaluate your technological capabilities.** A key decision is whether or not to outsource the design of your site to a professional design studio. For a nonprofit with a limited budget, using a program that provides a predesigned template may be an attractive alternative.
- ❖ **Be consistent.** Whether you use an off-the-shelf product or a design professional, keep your site simple. Make sure you use the same color palette and fonts your organization uses in other communications.
- ❖ **Keep it simple.** Test your pages to make sure they're not too overloaded with graphics that slow the time it takes a page to load. Many people looking for information will leave a site if it takes too long to download information.

- ❖ **Present information clearly.** Include your organization's contact information, including phone number, email address and fax number prominently. Also make sure that there is a privacy statement that clearly states your organization's policy for protecting any personal information that might be exchanged.
- ❖ **Provide donor security.** If you are going to handle financial transactions, make sure that your web server uses secure methods. With the advent of online shopping, many donors are becoming accustomed to transacting business over the Internet. The Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) protocol has become the standard for authenticating websites to web browser users and for encrypting confidential financial information.

While the technological challenges of establishing a web presence can seem daunting, there are more and more resources available to help nonprofit organizations. While we have passed the "if we build it, they will come" phase of the Internet, the events of the past year have proven that an effective web strategy must be a part of a successful overall communications strategy.

—Andre Luecht is president of the Target Advisory Group, which advises nonprofits on creating effective online communications.

E-PHILANTHROPY RESOURCES

BOOKS

- ❖ *The Fund Raiser's Guide to the Internet* by Michael Johnston. Discusses how nonprofit organizations can gauge the market for online fundraising, set up and promote a website, use email and websites to solicit contributions and deal with online security issues. Published by John Wiley & Sons, www.wiley.com.
- ❖ *Fundraising and Friend-Raising on the Web* by Adam Corson-Finnerty and Laura Blanchard. Offers advice on how to build and maintain a website, how to use websites to raise money and identify major donors and profiles effective websites created by nonprofit organizations. Published by American Library Association, www.ala.org.
- ❖ *Fundraising on the Internet: The ePhilanthropy Foundation.org Guide to Success Online*, 2nd Edition, by Mal Warwick, Ted Hart, and Nick Allen. In this second edition, experts in the field have completely rewritten the first-ever, hands-on guide for navigating the ever-changing world of fundraising on the Internet. This no-nonsense book takes into account the new realities of the post dot.com crash marketplace and offers advice on how to use technology to raise funds. This resource will be kept current with frequent email updates from the authors. Published by Jossey Bass, www.josseybass.com.
- ❖ *The Wilder Nonprofit Field Guide to Fundraising on the Internet* by Gary M. Grobman, Gary B. Grant and Steve Roller. Offers advice on how to conduct prospect research on the Internet, use email to attract donors and employ an organization's website to solicit donations; summarizes more than 70 websites of interest to fundraisers. Published by Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, www.wilder.org.

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS: ETHICS AND STRATEGY

BY TOM WATSON

Ethics are a key component to successful long-term fundraising and development. Establishing clear rules for online fundraising and your email outreach effort is vital if you hope to gain and keep the trust of your online community of users. Here are a few suggested rules of the road and tips of the trade for nonprofits.

- 1. Gain permission over time.** Debates over online privacy and so-called “spamming” on internet marketing messages are raging in state houses around the land. Regulations for taking information from users are being written now. It’s clear that the nonprofit world has a huge stake in this policy battle: Nonprofits who get wide latitude offline — telephone calls during dinner, mail solicitation, door-to-door fundraising — are not likely to fare well online. I’m not sure why, but there is a clear double standard developing for online marketing; the

bar on privacy and unsolicited marketing is being set much higher.

Therefore, it’s important to be careful. And there are good ethical and business reasons for gaining your users’ permission to send them information and ask for donations. Now, I’m not an absolutist from the “opt-in” side of things; I believe it’s perfectly acceptable for an organization to use its email list to get the message out or to send a one-time offer to a targeted group of people. But I do believe strongly that you must provide an easy, prominent and clear method for folks to opt out of your mailings. And after your publishing operation is up and running, it’s probably a wise choice to stop sending any unsolicited newsletters and switch to a pure opt-in system.

By gaining your email users’ permission over time, you’ll be

assuring only the best, most motivated users are in your system. That will save a little bandwidth, and maximize your percentage results. And, it will preserve your organization’s reputation.

- 2. Answer every email.** There’s no rule more simple to follow than this: If you’re sending your messages out, distributing information and asking for information, you owe it to readers to respond. Again, the blend of ethical and business reasons for this makes it a no-brainer. Your readers want to know you’re there, that you’re reachable and that you really do care about the cause you’re representing. A good, two-way flow of email can make that happen.
- 3. Let them call you.** Whether they have a question about your group’s privacy policy or a suggested feature story for your next email issue, it’s important to post your telephone

E-PHILANTHROPY RESOURCES

WEBSITES

❖ **Online Fundraising Resources Center**

Developed by Adam Corson-Finnerty and Laura Blanchard, fundraisers at the University of Pennsylvania Library, this website includes articles that discuss how to use email and the Internet to raise money and build relationships with donors. www.fund-online.com

❖ **Socially Engaged Internet Users: Prospects for Online Philanthropy and Activism**

This survey asked 800 adults who spend time on the Internet and who donate time or money to charities and public-interest groups about their attitudes toward online giving and advocacy. This survey was commissioned by marketing and fundraising consultants Craver, Mathews, Smith & Company, in Arlington, VA, and conducted by the Mellman Group, in Washington, D.C. www.craveonline.com

❖ **A Snapshot of Internet Innovation: Using E-Philanthropy to Expand Volunteering, Giving and Community Building**

Prepared for attendees of the 3rd E-Philanthropy Conference, this report highlights how nonprofit organizations and foundations are achieving results by using online technology strategically. The report also profiles 27 nonprofit charities and foundations that have integrated the Internet into their work in innovative ways. www.independentsector.org/PDFs/ep philanthropy_report.pdf

❖ **The Chronicle of Philanthropy**

www.philanthropy.com

❖ **Independent Sector**

www.independentsector.org

❖ **Internet-Fundraising.com**

www.internet-fundraising.com

❖ **Convio**

Provides case studies of e-philanthropy work Convio has done with Planned Parenthood, Austin Children’s Museum and others.

number on your website. This is especially important in online campaigns (for a point of reference, we post two contacts on each and every giving page: our own coordinator and the organization's key development contact). If someone's considering a gift, he or she should have the right to call you.

- 4. Be brief, but tell the story.** I'm not a huge fan of email newsletters that merely send users back to a website for the actual information. I think it's asking readers to do too much. I also believe that email itself is a perfectly good medium for publishing. I've also found that if you place most of your content in the main body of a newsletter, the "viral effect" is stronger — that is, your readers will forward it to other people more readily, increasing your reach and your response.
- 5. Don't sweat the technology.** Unless you run a major organization with a large in-house I.T. department, it doesn't make sense to spend resources figuring out how to make email work well. There are many companies who specialize in running email lists, handling subscriptions, unsubscribes and bad addresses. They do this for small fees, based on a per-thousand count of emails sent, and you can access their services through a website.

If you're going to run a list of less than 500 people, by all means, use an in-house email program like Outlook

or Eudora. If your list is larger than that, it just makes sense to outsource. Your time is best spent on making sure the content is as good as it can be, and in being responsive to your community of users.

- 6. Style counts.** You've got the best copy for your audience, because you have experts writing it. Take the extra time to create a simple, straightforward format: title, intro, table of contents, articles and copyright notice. Then stick to that style month after month. Readers react favorably to a predictable format, and they'll come to recognize your product as the result of professionalism.

Finally, have fun with it. Don't be afraid to let a little "attitude" sneak into the copy from time to time — after all, the best-paid newspaper writers are columnists; readers identify with the personal approach. Respond to readers and invite experts to contribute guest pieces. Don't shy away from all controversy, but take pains to portray each side fairly.

I think you'll find that email publishing will be some of the best marketing your organization can do. It will increase awareness and, over time, fundraising success.

As often as you can, work email products into your interactive campaigns. Custom email newsletters with both content and links back to the giving opportunity work well over time. Another method is similar to direct mail, but much less expensive:

direct email, usually with an "opt-in" feature. This means that we obtain the user's permission to send him or her email messages in the future.

This works well when a nonprofit client already has an email list, but what happens when they don't? Companies often employ a technique known as the email append — the existing offline database is matched against large national online databases and a percentage of valid email addresses is obtained — usually 20 percent or more. Then, working with your vendor, send a "soft" message from the nonprofit asking direct permission to send further messages in the future. When a percentage of those come back positive, you've got the beginning of an email marketing list.

Most important, consider your online fundraising strategy as part of your overall development efforts. Make sure your message is consistent and that the technology works from front end to back. Don't unwittingly create an interactive ghetto — where the Internet is a poor stepchild — but don't unleash a Wild West attitude among your dot-commers either; make sure that what you do online reflects what you do offline.

Whether you call them e-campaigns, email campaigns or just online fundraising campaigns, it's key to treat them as real fundraising campaigns. Follow the rules you learned the hard way — make it easy to give, treat your supporters well and reward them and make a convincing case.

—Tom Watson is president and CEO of *Changingourworld.com*, a division of *Changing Our World, Inc.*, a consulting company that does e-philanthropy work.

VIRAL EMAIL CAMPAIGNS: IMPORTANT TOOL FOR NONPROFITS

BY VINAY BHAGAT

Forward to a friend” email campaigns, also known as “viral marketing,” can help a nonprofit organization attract new supporters efficiently, fundraise and engage in advocacy. In a viral campaign, an organization sends an email with a call-to-action to its email house file or to selected groups of constituents in the file. The call-to-action can be a solicitation for donations, an invitation to an event or a plea to communicate online and/or offline with lawmakers and other leaders on specific issues. The call-to-action also asks recipients to forward the email to friends, relatives and co-workers so that they, too, will get involved. Imagine the effect of one person sending 10 emails and then each friend forwarding another 10 and so on. If this happens five times, a single email would reach 100,000 people.

A number of nonprofits are achieving great results with viral campaigns at a fraction of the cost of offline marketing and communications activities that traditionally have been the mainstay for charitable organizations (e.g., direct mail,

telemarketing). Viral campaigns also move quicker than their offline counterparts, which can take weeks and even months to plan, prepare, execute and measure. Consider the successes of the following organizations:

- ❖ **Planned Parenthood Federation of America**
(member.plannedparenthood.org/site/HomePage) waged a President’s Day campaign in February 2001. Planned Parenthood set up an area on its website so donors could give in honor of President George W. Bush and also send a message as a protest against his position on reproductive rights. In addition to news coverage driving participation, supporters emailed people in their personal networks, encouraging them to participate and then forward the email to their contacts, asking them to take action, too. The campaign raised approximately \$600,000 in a matter of weeks, with close to two-thirds of those funds raised online, mostly from people who had not

previously given to Planned Parenthood and who were new additions to the organization’s house email file.

- ❖ **The Alley Theatre**
(www.alleytheatre.com) tapped into the power of cyberspace in June 2001 after Tropical Storm Allison flooded the facility, causing extensive damage and disrupting performance schedules. Through its website, Alley updated patrons, area residents and news media on performance schedule changes as well as how to help with clean up and recovery, including donations. The theatre also emailed its house file about the disaster and ways to help. In the initial two weeks, the campaign generated \$6,100. The average donation was a healthy \$125, with 10 percent of the donors contributing \$500 each.
- ❖ **The Austin Children’s Museum**
(www.austinkids.org) conducted a viral fundraising campaign — a

E-PHILANTHROPY RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE USING TECHNOLOGY IN INNOVATIVE WAYS

- ❖ **Guthrie Theater**
The Guthrie Theater is using its website to encourage its patrons to advocate for its \$35-million capital bond request for the new Guthrie on the River, including a legislative district finder, suggestions on how to craft a message to the Governor and legislators, and an economic impact statement. Check it out at www.guthrietheater.com/act_II/newguthrie.htm#appeal.
- ❖ **Intiman Theatre**
Intiman Theatre in Seattle has recently updated its website, and it has a clear, compelling statement, making the case for support, rich content in the artistic and organizational areas, video of artistic director Bartlett Sher talking about the season and all of its Community & Education pages include a prominent “Support Our Community and Education Efforts. Become a Donor” text graphic that links directly to the one-click contribution form. Check it out at www.intiman.org.
- ❖ **Metropolitan Museum of Art**
The Metropolitan Museum of Art wins my award for the most comprehensive content on giving and membership information; the site allows patrons to join a donor group, profiles “Areas in Need of Support” and enables patrons to direct their support to a specific area, links all of their public and school education pages with their donation form, and it is overall so rich in content that you could spend days there — and want to. Check it out at www.metmuseum.org.
- ❖ **Heifer International**
Heifer International has gained international recognition for their innovative “gift catalog” approach to online fundraising. While their mission lends itself to the catalog approach, many organizations can learn from how easy and tangible they make it to consider a meaningful gift from \$10 to \$5,000. Check it out at www.heifer.org.

friend-to-friend “click-a-thon.” In July, the museum emailed its house file, asking supporters to donate through its website and also forward the email to ask friends, family and co-workers to do the same. In the first two weeks of this six-week campaign, the museum raised \$3,375, or nearly 94 percent of the goal.

To wage a winning viral marketing campaign, bear in mind the following tips:

- ❖ **Incentives are effective.** Offer discounts, premiums and sweepstakes entries to motivate people to forward the message on to others. Consider offering constituents a prize if they refer a certain number of people to participate or if their referrals actually take action. Also, appeal to constituents on an emotional level to motivate them to forward the message. An intangible benefit — such as knowing the cause is good, especially in cases of advocacy — can be just as motivating as offering a prize-type incentive.
- ❖ **Keep the message short.** Include important details about the

organization’s mission and the action requested of constituents, but keep the email short — to about half a page or so. For example, a viral marketing campaign related to a membership drive should include the campaign’s goals and an explanation of how supporters will benefit (i.e., how the funds will be used).

- ❖ **Include related links.** Include related links that take the email recipients directly to the webpage(s) cited in the message. This makes it easy for constituents to go directly to key information and/or forms for taking action.
- ❖ **Pay attention to the subject line.** If offering an incentive, call it out in the email’s subject line. If not offering a tangible incentive, consider promoting an intangible benefit (e.g., “Save the Children Now!”) or consider using a question that will entice recipients to read the email (e.g., “Who Will Save the Children Now?”). Keep it short and test its appearance in an email browser.
- ❖ **Target board members.** Consider including board members or peers in the viral marketing campaign. It

might be appropriate to conduct a separate campaign with targeted copy to this group. This often works best for fundraising and/or membership-related campaigns.

- ❖ **Remember to close.** Close the message and use a scanned signature. The message should come from the person in the organization closest to the cause or issue.
- ❖ **Don’t consider referrals as opt-ins.** Include text in the email asking the recipient whether he or she would like to receive future communications (include a link for becoming a registered user). Some recipients will become referrals because someone in the organization’s house file forwarded the email to them. Only capture information from referrals as they visit and interact with the organization’s website.
- ❖ **Record and analyze results.** Email campaigns yield results quickly, typically within five days. Understand the response rates of the house file recipients as well as potential constituents who received the forwarded email.

—*Vinay Bhagat is the founder and CEO of Austin-based Convio, the leading provider of internet software empowering nonprofits to efficiently manage relationships with constituents. Contact: Susie Tull, (512) 652-2662, stull@convio.com.*