

Social Giving Days

Create and execute a successful strategy.

next in
nonprofits

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Introduction

We are more connected than ever before and are doing things collectively that used to be nearly impossible.

The adoption of the Internet surpassed the speed of any previous technology coming into our lives, and is only now being surpassed by the adoption of smart phones and tablets². Those devices are only getting to more consumers faster because of the rapid adoption of the Internet, as they are only really useful because they access the Internet. We are more connected than ever before possible, and we are now doing things collectively that would have been nearly impossible just a decade ago.

People have given to charities since the dawn of organized religion, and probably before that. Giving small amounts locally continued for centuries, but as the tools have caught up with our social nature, it may have been inevitable for someone to think, what if we shared our giving with others? Would it encourage them to become involved? Could a little friendly competition make this a bit more fun to go around changing the world?

Collaborative, online giving days are still a new concept, beginning as state-wide and national efforts within just the last five years. As a percentage of all charitable giving, it's still a fairly small slice, but if we remove giving to churches (which don't fit this model in the same way as other charities for several reasons) the percentage is significantly higher, and growing. Overall charitable giving grew 4.9% in 2013, while online giving grew 13.5%³.

Five Factors of Social Giving Days

Five critical components nonprofits should engage in their social giving strategy.

Teams

This is the single most important factor for a successful giving day. Planning well ahead of the event (six months or more) allows an organization to recruit and train teams to amplify the giving. This was an important facet of the successful Give to the Max Day⁴ 2013 effort for Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity. The case study presented by John Haydon⁵ notes the improvement in year-over-year giving when implementing trained team leaders as an outreach force. In the case of Twin Cities Habitat, that impact was a nearly four-fold increase over the previous year. Nothing about the Habitat mission changed in that time. That growth was the result of social fundraising strategies.

Beginning months out, nonprofits should recruit well-connected – or just hard working – people to help carry the message beyond the reach of the organization’s email lists and social accounts. Teams should be trained in setting up many separate pages which target the message to their social networks. The plea is no longer “support Habitat” (though of course that is the end result) but rather “support Team <Your Name Here> in our goal for Habitat.” Team leaders need to know how to upload pictures to show familiar faces to their donors, and how to monitor success in reaching their contacts. 100 teams raising \$1,000 each is serious money, but getting to that goal means starting early so teams are ready to hit the ground running with a functional donor page and plan many weeks ahead of giving day.

Gamification

Traditional nonprofit fundraising includes key messaging about the importance of the mission and the reasons that particular nonprofit is best-suited to accomplish the mission. Giving days have added a level of competition to this equation. Many charities will be trying to reach the same donors with compelling messages about mission and effectiveness. The ability to capitalize on this energy by embracing the game⁷ will make a difference in capturing the attention of donors amid a sea of good causes.

Setting goals and rewards (or consequences) can help spur your teams beyond the good work of your mission. A matching gift from a large donor or the board of directors is a tried and true strategy. Some giving days come with rewards independent of any single organization. Give to the Max Day in Minnesota offers a chance at a “Golden Ticket” — a bonus donation picked at random from all the charities which receive donations during a given hour. This incentive, especially during odd hours like 3:00 AM, provides an element of strategy to giving, increasing the game-like quality of the social experience. The game rewards don’t have to be a financial benefit to the nonprofit. The end result is increased giving, but a way to encourage participation may be awarding “take over our Twitter account for a day” if your organization has a large Twitter following; or giving your top donor a Key to the Mission award. Creative thinking will distinguish your nonprofit from the crowd.

Integration

The first few giving day plans may have been just tacked-on to the fund development plan. This type of social giving is only going to increase, so it's time for nonprofits to integrate giving days as part of the plan for the other 364 days a year. Nonprofits which do a year-end fund drive (which is most charities for many of the same reasons most should plan for giving day) should talk about the successes of their giving day in that messaging, and why year-end giving is still important despite that success. Charities with a spring gala should use the opportunity to recruit team leaders for the fall giving day, and get those supporters on the calendar for training. The same is true for the 5K race, or the pancake breakfast.

Messaging calendars can start teasing specific rewards for team captains and donors early, so when giving day approaches those supporters are already thinking about how they can get in line for those elements before another charity even sends the first email. Those early messages should be soft sells, reminding people about your unique fun on giving day as a part of your serious mission work, not a hard sell reminding people to open the wallet.

Giving day is a great way to keep in touch about the rest of your year, as well. You can use future events as a reward on giving day, both as incentive to givers and as reminders of the other ways people can engage with your cause. Reward team captains with free tickets to the gala next year if they reach their \$1,000 goal. Tell giving day donors they'll be listed on posters at the 5k race, and then of course encourage them to sign up to see their names. Giving day will help introduce you to new audiences through the social connections of your supporters, so integrating to the rest of your calendar will help some of those donors find a new way to connect to you outside of giving day.

Flexibility

There are many reasons your donors may be uncertain about giving day. Online donations are increasing dramatically, but not everyone is ready to give this way. Some people may not want to be public about their giving for many good reasons, including a legitimate fear they may be somehow "scraped" from a social stream for a prospect list. Whatever the reasons, it's important to make this part of giving day accessible to all audiences and not feel like it is an event for the technology set because it uses online tools.

Nonprofits need to give up on the idea that the only donation worth having is one that comes with a prospect attached to it. First, some of these folks may choose to give anonymously and that money still spends. Second, some other donors are coming in because of social connections to the person asking, not a mission connection to the nonprofit. Those folks are not real prospects, at least not in the traditional "engagement ladder⁸" approach to fund development. The best course is to thank them for the donation and let them opt out of communication if they'd like. Those who stay are the true prospects.

Those who prefer not to give online should still be encouraged to participate. Designate an office phone number where people can call in – either in advance of giving day or on it – to make a donation or pledge to a specific team. Those off-line pledges may not show up on the giving day total outside the organization, but they should be an important part of the communication before, during and after giving day from the nonprofit. Publish reports with “Total giving of \$XXX,XXX including phone and mail support” and giving day social posts like “leaderboard shows us at \$XX,XXX so far, but thanks to our offline supporters we’ve collected another \$XX,XXX toward our goal!” can help keep the tone inclusive and tell all supporters they matter.

Redundancy

The organizational cousin to flexibility, it is important to understand the infrastructure that supports your efforts and be ready to switch gears when (or maybe if) something goes wrong. Nonprofits often use third-party email services for large messages, like MailChimp and Constant Contact. What happens if that service is inaccessible on the big day? What is the plan to be sure there is a back-up list off that service? Is there a plan in place to re-direct the organizations web address to somewhere else if the hosting provider goes down?

Give to the Max Day 2013 saw the backbone for most organizations’ online donations, Razoo.com, crash for hours during the key day⁹. Charities that had alternative methods of accepting donations kept the momentum going, and perhaps even gained a few extra gifts because they were prepared. Something is likely to go wrong, the big question is where and what can be done to make lemonade from those lemons? Planning for a back-up doesn’t require teams of people or loads of cost – it can be as simple as having a PayPal link set up to post on social media, or perhaps a crowdfunding site ready as an alternative means of collecting contributions¹⁰.

Why your organization should participate

Weigh the costs of participating
- and the costs of sitting out.

There are many good reasons why a chosen giving day for a specific nonprofit's community/state/cause may not work best of its schedule. It could interfere with staff time for other important work that can't be moved, such as an out-of town-conference. It may be too close to a long-standing annual gala or other event and can split donor attention at the wrong time. Each charity must weigh the costs of participating, and be equally aware of the costs of sitting out⁶.

Giving days change the playing field in access to donations. Many nonprofits still operate on the assumption that if they demonstrate a strong value proposition, they can earn contributions. This is clearly an important part of getting a gift, but it is only one part in the world of social fundraising. The case should be compelling to both the head and the heart, and now a charity must also leverage the social aspects of giving. Failing to participate on that day – when social connections to giving are strongest – has opportunity costs. Charities seeking support later may hear the “I gave back on giving day” instead of “I gave at the office.”

Online giving on #GivingTuesday 2013 was

up 90%
compared to 2012.

Blackbaud processed more than

\$19.2 million
in online donations.

The average online gift was

\$142.05
up significantly up from

\$101.60
in 2012³.

(Based on Blackbaud's online giving data from more than 3,800 customers who received an online donation Tuesday, December 3, 2013.)

The media are the messages

The message to donors: We need you. Not just we need people, we need you.

Marshall McLuhan said it first¹¹, and it certainly applies to giving day channels. Where and how you choose to communicate about giving day is part of the message, and each major channel offers something specific and unique based on the audience engagement for the specific charity.

Print

Print is not dead. Yet. For now, it still has a limited role in a giving day campaign. It reminds people to connect on other channels, or to accept the mailed donation for those which chose that option. Print can remind supporters to go to the web site to sign up for a giving day team, or remind connections to plan a pledge for giving day, or remind people to call the office with questions.

If the organization sends postal mailings for whatever reason, include a web link and a phone number. If there are posters in a lobby, include that information there as well. Print a banner for your 5K run with that same information. Remember, too much detail in print will not convince people to join the effort. It will more likely show the charity lost the message in favor of the medium.

Telephone

A phone bank at strategic times can be a great use of resources, especially if organizational email to team leader recruits may not be seen because of filtering (see Email below). Plan your phone calls to make a personal ask to supporters to lead or join a team to raise a goal for giving day. Many good candidates for this work won't answer a phone call, but making one is the modern day equivalent of a hand written note. It shows the need for that person in particular to participate, and that the nonprofit will support them in the process.

Phone calls won't end with the team leads, however. Part of team training will be to make some select calls to people who have received a team fundraising request but who haven't responded. This should come from the team member who asked this person to give, but if that team member is unwilling or unable to call, then a phone call from someone else mentioning the original social contact is valuable. It reinforces the social fundraising request, and is one more differentiator. The message: we need you. Not just we need people, we need you. And we called you to prove it.

One phone call is nice. Leave a message with a call back number. Be brief, in either a message or in a conversation. A second reminder is okay if you still don't hear after a respectable amount of time (say, one week). A third call on the same subject is telling many users that this nonprofit can't take a hint, and is prepared to waste time.

Email

Email is the most important channel for planning and executing a giving day campaign. Whenever possible, emails should come from people to people, not from institutions to people. The message to recruit team members should

come from a personal connection. It's nice to have a board chair or executive director sign things, but if the social connection really belongs to the volunteer coordinator and the person being asked has never met the board chair, then skip the big name in favor of the one the person actually knows. This may mean several people in your organization are sending emails. This is a more effective strategy and does not take a great deal of time to execute.

When the time comes to request donations for giving day, trained team members should be ready to send personal emails directly to people in their address book. Many popular email services are sorting messages from organizations into "promotions" tabs¹², or worse still, spam filters. It's very possible your supporters won't see much of this. MailChimp shows industry average open rates from nonprofits at 25%¹³. Mail from friends to friends gets opened. And that is the best kind of mail.

TL:DR means Too Long: Didn't Read. As with phone calls, provide something short and compelling in the first email and then link to the web for the details should people want them. A photo, a quick message, and the rest elsewhere has a much better chance of success than trying to put it all into a single message.

Facebook

Facebook is going to work better if people post to their own timelines or send their own friends messages. It's absolutely fine to post organizational updates on the giving day efforts, but most will never be seen¹⁴. The message here is to help remind people to share their choices for giving day to reinforce the email they got, not to be the sole channel for distribution. Teams should be sharing the link to their specific page with their specific photo on giving day, because pictures and social stories are what Facebook is about.

Twitter

Twitter is a great way to motivate social shares for people who have given, and to share your smart approach to giving day with influencers. This can boost strategic planning by getting endorsements from people who back the way the nonprofit is approaching social fundraising, and people want to be part of a winning team. Twitter isn't as likely to spur a donation, but the medium does lend a message of leadership. This channel will be short by definition, but try to keep messages to 120 characters so it is easier for supporters to retweet.

Google+

Creating an event on Google + around giving day creates "hooks" into other Google products which benefit your work. People invited to a giving day event on Google + will have the event show up on their Google Calendars in many cases, whether they accepted the invitation or not. This provides a reminder again in one more place where potential donors may be active without extra action. This also makes the special parts of your giving day searchable. Google

indexes these actions, where it can't see most Facebook posts and so will miss those. If someone is searching for a related issue and learns of your giving day, it builds upon the credibility of the work in the same manner as Twitter posts.

Organizational Blog

There are supporters who still like the long form. Your charity's blog can provide those potential donors with the fuel they seek to support your work, and the ability to share a link for others that also want more detail. This, too, will help in social sharing, as more people like to share a blog post even if they themselves haven't read all the way through.

Last Words

Establish your organization as a leader.

Giving days won't bring in exclusively "new" revenue. Some of these donations will be redirected from other efforts of the charity, so a big bump on giving day may well come with a slight reduction in the rest of your calendar.

Collaborative giving is in early days, but growing at a pace that matches the speed of tools like smart phones and tablets². Nonprofits have a chance to establish themselves as leaders moving forward, or to be lagging adopters. Planning earlier for a giving day is the best way to demonstrate care for the mission and public engagement. Not every charity will generate large volumes of donations, but all can improve their outreach by participating in the conversation.

Getting started

Learn how online giving can help your organization reach its goals.

We serve the specialized fundraising and communications needs of nonprofit organizations interested in finding new ways to support their missions.

Our services include

Content marketing to create community advocates and supporters who understand your mission and impact.

Business management to employ new tools for tracking outcomes, reducing costs and increasing revenue.

Training to help nonprofits embrace the benefits of new practices and how they can bring stronger results to the world.



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Endnotes

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