

How to increase giving through your charity's website

By Redina Kolaneci, Senior Consultant, McConkey • Johnston International

Over the last few years online giving has become an increasingly significant source of new donors and income. In the current financial climate, when most charities are constantly revising their fundraising budgets, strengthening your charity's online giving functions might be one of the best ways to reach your fundraising targets.

Here are some practical steps you can take to ensure that you are encouraging donors and making it easy for them to support your cause online:

1. **Make sure your website has a fundraising ask.** Having visited several Christian charity websites in the last few months I was surprised to discover that most of them did not have a compelling request for donations in their homepage. This is not the time to be shy about *asking* for donations. If you consider your charity's website as a tool for engaging with potential donors then you should be inviting them in clear and inspiring ways to support your work.
2. **Put the "Donate Now" option in a prominent place in your charity's homepage.** It is a known fact that your website visitors are often people in a hurry – they are not likely to navigate your charity's website in a logical way reading all the information first, looking at the photos next and then trying to find your donate button.

Internet users are quickly becoming savvy browsers, learning how to ignore advertising banners or cluttered layouts. But, a big, bold 'Donate Now' button is likely to get their attention. Research shows that charities which put their 'donate now' button in the centre of their homepage have seen a 30% increase in donations.

3. **Make a compelling case for support online.** Once a website visitor clicks on the 'Donate Now' button, more often than not, a page opens up with a standard giving form that the donor is invited to complete. In most cases there is no information in this page as to why the donor should be giving, what would their gift make possible and why is the money needed now.

In direct mail fundraising we wouldn't dream of sending donors a response form in an envelope without a fundraising letter. So, why do we ask them to simply fill in response forms online?

One ministry impact story, some information about a project and an outline of various reasons why your target audience (potential donors) should make a gift now should become integral parts of your charity's giving page. Dry financial information or direct debit forms without any explanations are not likely to motivate a person to make a gift to your charity.

4. **Show potential donors where the money goes.** The current recession is forcing many donors to tighten their purse strings. Those wanting to give want also to make sure that their gift will be used effectively. So, now more than ever, is the time to be clear and transparent about where contributions are going and how they will impact beneficiaries lives. The more honest and open your charity is, the more new donors and gifts are you likely to attract.
5. **Explain the *how* of your mission (not just the *what*).** Charity executives often spend a great deal of time crafting mission statements, as if these two or three lines of text are the lifeblood of a great organisation. Concise mission statements are important in that they respond to the question: How will you make a difference in the world? But, sometimes they are not enough to differentiate your charity from others.

Saying that we are out there to '*preach the gospel*', '*end poverty in Uganda*', '*support poor children*' etc without painting a picture with words and images of how your charity is getting the job done is not likely to get new donors interested in your cause.

6. **Appeal to the ideals and values of your potential donors.** If you are clear about the type of donors that you want to attract through your website (*e.g., young people under 35s, families, over 65's, etc*) then try to put yourself in your target donor's shoes.

Ask yourself: If I was the target donor what's most important to me? What would I be looking for if I wanted to support a charity online? Am I looking to be part of a community? What would give me a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment? Do I want to make a difference to people's lives in a particular part of the world?

Your charity's work will not motivate every single visitor to support your work but you should make sure that it resonates with your target audience/s.

7. **Show gratitude and appreciation to your online givers.** Once a person has made a donation online make sure you send them a 'thank you' email straight away. Because email communications can be put together easily and cheaply you have an opportunity here to show your online donors how their gift will be put to work by incorporating beneficiary stories, comments and even photos in your 'thank you' e-mails.

Finally, make sure that you have included 'thank you' messages and feedback from beneficiaries in different parts of your website too - so that your web visitors can get a strong experience of how donations to your ministry are being put to work.