

# Social Butterflies Can Raise Money

*These days, online is all about the newest widgets*

BY MICHELE DONOHUE

Leah Jones created a personal fundraising page last year when she decided to participate in the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer 3-Day. She invited her friends to support her – including between 800 and 1,200 Twitter followers and the few hundred visitors to her blog, Leah in Chicago – Accidentally Jewish.

Jones wanted to see how she could leverage her online community for a good cause. She surpassed Komen's \$2,300 fundraising minimum and her personal goal of \$3,200 to reach more than \$5,000. She raised about \$2,500 just from her Twitter community and an additional \$2,500 through her blog, email solicitations and selling the right to wear jeans at work.

"If I'm connected to all these people online, what is the value of that community? Can I actually do anything through that community?" Jones said she asked herself. "And, I did. It was phenomenal."

Jones said she had several reasons for joining the 3-Day – one of them was seeing if she could raise money from her online community. She also started seeing the devastating effects of cancer in her personal life.

"I did it when I was 31. I already have girlfriends having breast cancer scares and people who have lost parents, grandparents. It doesn't run in my family but it runs in all

the circles I run in," Jones explained.

Jones plans to walk again in May and reached out to her blog visitors and her Twitter community, which has reached nearly 6,000 followers.

Fundraising is all about going where the people are – and right now many are networking online. The reach of member communities, which includes social networking and blogging sites, increased 5.4 percent in active reach in the past year, according to a Nielsen report. Nielsen Online has NetView panels in the United States, Brazil, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Australia.

From these countries, time spent online increased 18 percent between December 2007 and December 2008. While that's a nice increase for a maturing channel, time in member communities rocketed to a 63 percent increase – to 45 billion minutes. Time on Facebook increased by a mammoth 566 percent, from 3.1 billion minutes in 2007 to 20.5 billion minutes in 2008. Member communities even beat email in active reach by December 2008, according to the survey.

In addition to staying on top of every Tweet about burping after eating a sandwich or Facebook status update about how many times someone got up in the middle of the night to hit the bathroom, donors are leveraging their

social networks to fundraise. And some nonprofits are more than happy to help give supporters the necessary tools to fundraise on their behalf.

"I think what we are learning is that when you are working in online, you need to sort of speak online," said Melissa Temme, public relations director at The Salvation Army. "The people who are going to use it are already using the Web in other ways and those are the people who will be most successful with the tools. We tried to target those people where they are already."

## IT'S CALLED WHAT?

In addition to personal fundraising pages, some organizations are harnessing the fundraising power of widgets, code that people can embed into their Webpages. Most widgets are already formatted so it's as easy as copying and pasting code to display on pages like Facebook profiles, blogs and any other sites.

Web sites, like ChipIn.com or SixDegrees.org, require just a simple registration form. The widgets are then generated by the given information. For example, the ChipIn widget will have a fundraising meter based on the amount set by the user. The Six Degrees widget allows space for an explanation about why the cause is important, video and

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picture, which the user inputs into the form.

The sites can then create a widget code unique to the information given. The user then can copy and paste the code into a personal site, allowing users to post widgets where they already have an online presence instead of creating a new fundraising Web page.

Organizations that prefer homemade content can create their own widgets. Search engines, like Yahoo and Google, offer tutorials and templates to start out, along with a myriad other sites. For widget novices, Widgepedia.com offers extensive widget tutorials, forums and code samples for free. Nonprofits that want the ultimate customized widgets should consider hiring a professional developer.

The Online Red Kettles fundraising campaign, launched in 2005, created several widgets that are branded with The Salvation Army's iconic red kettle in options for a fundraising meter look, banner ad or Facebook application.

The Online Red Kettle fundraising campaign during the 2008 holiday season raised \$931,684.05 – just short of the \$1 million national goal. The average online gift reached \$78.34, down nearly 12 percent from 2007, but the campaign still had a 59 percent increase from the \$585,150 raised in 2007.

Temme explained that creating a specific online tool for fundraising, like the online kettles, could be more effective than just establishing a social networking presence.

"I think it's important to keep in mind that Facebook and others like it have not been proven to be strong fundraising tools," she said. "They are relational tools at this

point and that has to be at the forefront of your thinking when you decide to put any sort of investment, time, money, into using these tools."

**DONORS DO IT THEMSELVES**

There are a few jobs that are better left up to the professionals, like plumbers or nuclear physicists. Yet fundraising amateurs are successfully using their web of personal connections and online tools to raise money. Social networks allow people to effectively build on a fundraising cornerstone – one-to-one appeals.

"Personal fundraising pages are really analogous to the person-to-person appeals that go on every day in these fundraising campaigns. It's really just an extension of that. It really comes down to person-to-person asks," said Frank Days, chief operating officer of FirstGiving.

FirstGiving, a personal fundraising site, boasts that more than 1.5 million people helped raise nearly \$86 million for 21,784 nonprofits. More than 3,000 nonprofits have established their own presence on FirstGiving by directing donors to create their own sites through the organization.

"When you think about, even in tough economic times, if your next-door neighbor or friend from college is doing a breast cancer walk in memory of a late aunt you're generally going to give because that is someone near and dear to you. At the end of the day it comes down to a compelling story and that one-to-one ask from someone you know and care about," said Days.

People who are passionate about a cause are creating fundraising pages with ease through these various Web

sites – even if the nonprofits aren't dishing out the tools.

Sandra Brudnick wanted to raise money for the New York Says Thank You Foundation, which sends volunteers from New York to help rebuild different communities across the country each year on September 11, the anniversary of the terror attack that felled the World Trade Center towers in Manhattan.

She created her own fundraising page with GiveForward.org, just one of many sites where individuals can fundraise on their own, and surpassed her \$500 goal to raise \$750.

"Using the site was an absolute pleasure. They were completely legitimate, helpful and easy to use. I set up my page with ease and was able to include all the important information in an organized way. I followed the instructions step-by-step for setting up the page and was able to benefit from all the perks they offer – uploading pictures, writing my own message to potential donors, etc. I sent out an email to my friends and family containing the link to my page GiveForward.org and they did the rest," said Brudnick.

She explained that her friends and family found the site was simple enough to use and Brudnick liked that she didn't have to play the middleman with money. She also received a donor list to personally thank those who supported her cause.

CURE Childhood Cancer in Atlanta proactively directs supporters to fundraising pages through the organization's site. The organization used fundraising pages for the first time last year in conjunction with its annual Lauren's Run event. The event registration page led participants to First-

Each July, many of the biggest names in fundraising and direct marketing gather in Washington, DC for the annual **Bridge to Integrated Marketing and Fundraising Conference**. This popular event combines the educational resources of two highly respected organizations: the *Association of Fundraising Professionals*, Washington DC Metro Area Chapter and the *Direct Marketing Association of Washington*.

Held in the city that boasts the largest number of associations, fundraisers, non-profit organizations and marketing industry leaders in North America, the Bridge Conference is expected to draw 1,700 influential attendees. It will attract people from around the world, promising to become the second largest fundraising conference in North America and the second largest conference for direct marketing professionals. Here you'll find nationally and internationally renowned speakers, offering some of the finest cutting-edge educational programming available to fundraisers and direct marketers.

Organizations actively searching for their next great promotion idea can learn the secrets to attracting more members, getting bigger gifts, and lifting response rates from many high volume, high profile, highly successful industry experts. Abundant, innovative and cutting-edge ideas, tools and examples can be found in the Solutions Showcase that features 100 response vendors, consultants and specialists eager to share ways to further your cause or boost your efficiency and your revenue.

This is the event of the year that can't be missed if you are a fundraiser, direct marketer or association professional! For more information or to register for this event, go to: [www.bridgeconf.org](http://www.bridgeconf.org) or phone 703-547-1907.



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Giving.org, where they could register, join an existing fundraising team or create their own page.

The 2008 event raised nearly \$85,000 more than the year before, mostly due to the 108 personal fundraising pages created, according to April Voris, a member of CURE's board of directors.

"I think it worked great because people could email to their own networks and get the word out faster and to a broader audience," said Voris.

Fundraising pages have a wide array of personalization and functionality. Jones said she enjoyed using the Komen pages because it allowed her to post pictures, update supporters on her training progress and a scrolling donor honor roll.

The CURE fundraising page features space for a fundraising thermometer, pictures, video, personal message space and a donor list with enabled comments, which participants can email to friends or create a Facebook application.

Nonprofits discussing personal pages, either through the organization's online platform or third-party sites, should keep users in mind. Most pages will allow users to describe in their words why they chose the cause. Think about expanding functions to include personal pictures and customizable colors to draw in users. Donors will want pages that speak to who they are - and that personal flair might hook friends and families into the supporting the cause.

Nonprofits should compare third-party site fee structures and usability before launching personal fundraising or widget campaigns. Third-party sites have an array

## DO IT YOURSELF FUNDING



| SITE  | COSTS   |
|---|---|
| Sixdegrees.org or Change.org (via Network for Good) | Network for Good transaction processing fees are 4.75 percent of transactions.  |
| Firstgiving.org                                     | Firstgiving charges 5 percent fee on each donation, plus a 2.5 percent credit card processing fee.  |
| GiveForward.org                                     | Charges fundraisers \$1 to create a fundraising profile and 3 percent of total donations. Credit card processing fee 2.6 percent plus \$0.20 per transaction.                 |
| Chipln.com  | Chipln does not charge fees for payments to PayPal accounts. PayPal Premier or Business accounts may be subject to 1.9 percent to 2.9 percent fees, plus \$0.30, from PayPal. |
| ChangingThePresent.org (via ImportantGifts, Inc.)   | ImportantGifts, Inc. transaction fees are 3 percent, plus \$0.30.   |

of different fees - from credit card processing to charging per donation. Try to find a balance between transaction fees and what features are necessary to fully engage donors.

### LACK OF CONTROL

Organizations that promote donor fundraising via social networks should expect to lose a certain power over the brand. A nonprofit can't control the content on the sites where widgets end up or the personal messages on fundraising pages, explained Temme.

"I think we are all sort of grappling with where do we draw the line, and is it possible to draw a hard and fast line?," she said. "I think there is a lot to be said on the organizational side. Branding is much easier to control when we give them a template to be able to work within. But you also run into the same sort of issues where you open up this tool and say 'post it wherever you would like to post it' and, again, you don't have control over where that message goes."

Organizations should keep in mind that donors take a nonprofit's brand and run with it outside of social networking to raise money. In March, a student group from The University of Iowa hosted a Nearly Naked Mile, where runners took off layers of clothes for an area Salvation Army and collected nearly 2,000 pounds of clothing. The Army wasn't involved in the event planning but the charity was still associated with the fundraiser.

"I think, in the same way, we are not here to police our donors," said Temme. "That's not our job and we're grateful for the support that they give us." *NPT*

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