



A Walk Through a Web Site Audit

BY RICHARD DEVEAU

Today, Web sites are like opinions — everyone has one. This is certainly true for just about every nonprofit organization in the country.

But it's one thing to have a Web site that tells the world who you are and what you do, and quite another to have one that invites and facilitates online gifts. In the course of conducting many audits of nonprofit organizations' Web sites, I've found a surprising number are simply not fundraising-friendly. And I've found a couple that are downright hostile toward donors who want to provide online gifts.

Ridiculous, you say. Why would any nonprofit do that? In most cases, it's unintentional and simply a matter of not knowing any better. And in one instance it was because the objectives of the organization were in direct conflict with applying the kinds of practices that enable donors to give online quickly and easily. Even though there was a solution to meet those same objectives while still making it easy for donors to give online, this organization simply was insistent on continuing its confusing and cumbersome online giving process.

While I can't do anything else to help organizations like that one, I do know I can help you evaluate your Web site to make certain it's doing all the right things to be as fundraising-friendly as possible. So, to that end, I thought it would make sense to walk you through much of the process I use when conducting a Web site audit for my nonprofit clients. This should help you evaluate where you are and address any areas that may be hindering your donors from giving online.

Keep it friendly

In order for a Web site to be fundraising-friendly, it first has to simply be friendly. Is it easy to read and easy to navigate? Do the design, color palette and layout support these essential functions? If not, then it doesn't matter whether you've made it easy to give an online gift, because visitors to your site won't be around long enough to make one.

That's why I begin a Web site audit by first looking at overall content, design and navigation. Does the site use minimal copy and short paragraphs? Does it use easy-to-read fonts? Is it graphically designed to lead the eye to key information and images? Whenever possible, does it enable content to be "above the fold," which means visible and readable without needing to scroll down the page? Is the main navigation bar clearly visible? If so, are all the site's primary content pages clearly and logically ordered on the navigation bar? Does the site employ pull-down menus on the homepage's navigation to facilitate viewing primary- and secondary-page content headings without clicking to the pages? Does the site's navigation employ the "three-click rule," meaning can you get to any page on the site by making no more than three mouse clicks?

While the "three-click" rule is more of a guideline, adhering to it as closely as possible will force you to prioritize and edit your site's content and the navigation of that content for more clarity and ease of use. Let's not forget that the attention span of most of us on the Web is like that of a caffeinated finch.

Keep it quick and easy

After answering the preceding questions covering content, design and navigation, I then move on to reviewing the Web site's fundraising elements themselves.

On the homepage, is there a highly visible "Donate Now" (or some similar phrase) button that is separate from the navigation bar and residing in a prominent place on the page itself? Is this button replicated on each and every page throughout the site, preferably in the same location on each page? The reason for this is primarily due to the fact that you'll never be able to predict what pages and in what order people might view your site. And search engines might link a visitor to any internal page, not just your homepage. Once a visitor makes the decision to become a donor from whatever page she might be on, you want to make it as easy as possible for her to start the process. >

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Fundraising 101

Keeping your Web site friendly and making it easy to navigate and donate are essential. Let's not forget that the attention span of most of us on the Web is like that of a caffeinated finch.

Are there text links to the donation page within the copy wherever appropriate? This is a simple way to capitalize on an opportunity for a potential donor who might be moved to give while reading about your worthy mission and wonderful stories to do so right from the content itself, particularly if you make a direct ask within this content.

Does the donation page have minimal copy? Now's not the time to go droning on about your projects or mission. Simply make your case for giving, and let the donor do the rest.

Does the donation page facilitate a credit-card gift using no more than three simple steps? Does it use pull-down menus to provide donors with options such as gift designations or credit-card types without the donor leaving the donation page? Making the donor go somewhere else on your site to designate a gift or find some other information is a huge mistake. Anytime you do this, you place a barrier in front of the donor and run a very high risk of losing that gift right then and there. Remember, caffeinated finch.

Is the credit-card form donors fill out as simple and minimal as possible? This is not the place to ask donors to sign up for your newsletters or how they found you, or any other question or request not directly related to the

donation process itself. This form should ask the donor to fill out only the information you need to receive the gift.

Is the site secured by a reputable SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) service provider, and is this company's logo prominently visible? Even if you write your own SSL code, make certain that you have language asserting the complete security of donors' vital credit-card information. Donors need to know your Web site is safe for them to give. Seeing the VeriSign or other security company's logo provides this assurance quickly.

Lastly, once a donor has provided an online gift, is there a heartfelt, automatically generated thank-you e-mail? This e-mail should not only thank the donor, but mention that she will hear from you very shortly. Within a day or less, you should send another personal, warm and gracious e-mail thanking the donor and providing a receipt. This should not feel like a form e-mail, but an actual note from someone in your organization. Many of the principles of writing direct mail also apply to e-mail, and the way you thank donors is certainly one of them.

If your Web site is already doing all of these things, congratulations, you have a donor-friendly site. If not, then I hope this bit of friendly advice helps you and your organization. **FS**