

A USELESS PLANNED GIVING WEBSITE?

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If you think everyone will visit your planned giving website just because it's there, think again. That approach is as passive as printing a thousand newsletters and then not placing them in the mail. That's the way to create a useless planned giving website.

Development of an effective website, on the other hand, begins with planning how to promote it. Because aggressive promotion of your site will extend your marketing reach far beyond that of newsletters, ways-of-giving brochures, or any other printed materials alone.

Here are 12 *power tips* from VirtualGiving that will help you promote your website more effectively:

Tip 1: Get prospects to your website fast with an easy-to-remember Internet address (URL) like "http://www.yourname.org/plannedgiving" instead of "http://www.yourname.org/alum/dev/planned.htm."

Tip 2: The more links to your site from your organization's website the better. A link on your organization's home page would be ideal.

Tip 3: Experiment with different wording on your links. Replace "planned giving," for example, with a more informative and compelling alternative like "creative ways of giving."

Tip 4: Advertise creatively with postcards. The Lawrenceville School, for example, mails teasers like: *Did you know there's a charitable way to lock in the gains on your securities and receive above-market fixed income? Visit our website to find out how.* Notice the card raises an important question but *withholds* the answer, referring the reader to the website instead.

Tip 5: Place display ads prominently featuring your URL in publications such as newsletters, alumni magazines, church bulletins, theatre programs, etc. When possible, include a donor testimonial.

Tip 6: Complement these print ads with editorial copy such as feature articles describing your new Internet resource.

Tip 7: Mention your site at planned giving seminars and meetings. These events offer you an opportunity to give attendees hands-on tours and demos of the site. Also, give your planned giving advisory group a demo of the site and its features.

Tip 8: Don't limit yourself to marketing by regular mail alone: Collect email addresses of site-visitors (with their permission) and communicate via the Internet.

Tip 9: Tell callers about your website as part of your voicemail message.

Tip 10: Advertise your site at reunions and other social gatherings.

Tip 11: Display your URL every place you list your name and phone number... in newsletters, on business cards... everywhere.

Tip 12: Be patient. New sites require a few months to gain traffic. Which is why now is the time to start developing your website and the marketing plan to go with it.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

◀ You can find more FAQs at <http://www.virtualgiving.com/faq.html>

What are the advantages of having a planned giving website?

The Internet represents a novel, engaging resource enabling you to reach out to prospects. Increasingly, seniors trust it as a source of information and means of communication. And to those in the generations of donors following today's seniors, information that does not exist online does not exist at all.

Prospects visit a planned giving site at their leisure, in a positive frame of mind. They are receptive to learning about creative ways to support your organization.

As your prospects become increasingly Web-proficient, this online planned giving resource expands your marketing reach, increases your gift activity, and helps you close more and larger gifts. Also, the website provides an excellent forum in which to showcase your donors.

Are my prospects actually using the Internet?

The answer is yes. You can find out more by reading the article *Seniors on the Internet* on our website (www.virtualgiving.com).

How can I increase traffic to my website?

Keep reading *PGClick*. You can find 12 good ideas on the first page of this issue. And you'll find more in future issues.

Can I count on prospects finding our planned giving website through search engines?

Search engine optimization should be on your list, but not as a top priority. Most people do not know how to search the Internet wisely. A general search term such as "planned giving" can easily locate tens of thousands of pages. So concentrate first on advertising and marketing your website to your constituency.

Is there a way to find out how many hits we get?

Yes, but the issue remains complicated and controversial. Basically, don't focus on hits. Your goals should be to market your site and use it to gather information and dialogue with your prospects. *PGClick* will address the issue of hits in greater depth in a future issue.

How should we respond when we receive an email or personal illustration request from a prospect?

Respond within a day by phone or email, saying you have received the message. Your submission form can be equipped with an autoresponder that automatically acknowledges receipt of your prospect's request. Be sure to make these automatic messages sound personal and friendly.

What is the best way to capture email addresses?

The best way – the only way – is with your prospects' permission. You can use a log-in button, or a request-more-information section (like the personal illustration form), to capture these addresses.

Is there a way to secretly capture email addresses from site visitors?

No. Your prospects will appreciate respect for and protection of their privacy.

How do my prospects know that they are visiting my site in privacy?

Simple: You tell them, right on the website.

Can I, and should I, use direct mass-emailing to let prospects know I have a planned giving website?

It depends on your organization, its size, and its policies. If you are a small local organization like a theatre or a church, your members and friends will likely welcome your emails. If you are a large university, you will encounter countless different temperaments on your list. Use direct email thoughtfully. Avoid spamming. Make sure all your emails are personalized. And ask recipients if they wish to be removed from your email list. The more personal your email sounds, the more likely recipients are to remain on your list.

Should I feature my donors on my planned giving website?

Read what Adam Corson-Finnerty, author of *Fundraising and Friend Raising on the Web* has to say: "The Web allows for new forms of recognition, and new ways to honor or memorialize a special friend or benefactor. There isn't a term for this yet, but we have been calling it Electronic Recognition, or sometimes cyber-plaques. Your planned giving website is a wonderful place to recognize major donors to your institution. It is also a wonderful way to involve major donors and major prospects with your institution in new and compelling ways. Donor recognition can lead to second-time gifts, and inspire new first-time gifts." You can also read Adam's *Dinosaur Development* at <http://www.virtualgiving.com/resources.html>.

I have seen some sleek calculators for present value, compound interest, mortgage amortization, life expectancy, etc. Should I add them to my planned giving site?

While many sites offer these calculators, it's easy to overdo it. Don't dilute your message. Keep your prospect focused on making the gift.

Can planned gifts be completed online?

Yes, but it isn't happening yet. Plans like gift annuities can potentially be set up through an online transfer of cash or stock and an execution of the agreement, but planned giving officers are wary of losing their personal involvement in the gift process.

Please address your comments and questions to:

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