

Web-Based Marketing

BY VINCE FRAUMENI

To Web or not to Web is an important question if you are considering an expansion of your planned gift marketing plan. Estate-planning newsletters, seminars, and printed brochures have been the foundation used to educate donors for over 35 years. Using the Internet, by adding a planned giving page linked to your organization's Web site, is still relatively new by comparison.

Some of the earliest planned giving Web pages began to appear in the mid 1990s as Web sites were being introduced and developed. They were self-written and in most cases designed by the nonprofit agency. Many still exist in their original formats.

As recently as 10 years ago, publishers began offering nonprofit organizations the service of creating and maintaining planned gift Web pages. This has proved to be more cost-effective than doing it yourself. A most important factor beyond the original layout and design is the service provided by these vendors to keep the Web page up-to-date.

Web Page Effectiveness

Well over seven years ago, I learned that anyone can have a Web site. What matters most is how you attract people to the site. A planned gifts Web page will only be as useful to your organization as your effort to promote and attract visitors.

Every article of communication should drive the reader to the Web page. This includes personal letters, published articles, email, newsletters, brochures, seminar materials, annual reports, and business cards, among others. All of these should include a tagline that suggests to the reader, "Visit our Web site at www.yourorganization.org/plannedgifts," for example. Failure to do so leaves a Web page unused and a waste of expense.

Many agencies have begun to include links to their planned giving Web page at the end of e-newsletter articles. This drives a reader directly to the Web page or to a specific section for additional information. For example, an e-newsletter might include an article that promotes gift annuities.

At the end of the article you can link directly to the gift annuity section on your Web page. Here your pro-

spective donor can acquire more specific information and in many instances perform a simple calculation that displays an illustration of a gift model that includes income and tax-saving benefits.

Most Web pages offered by publishers include an opportunity for interested donor prospects to communicate directly with the planned giving officer by simply clicking a "Contact Us" message link that is sent directly to the PGO's mailbox. This enables you and donor prospects to communicate efficiently with each other.

You don't have to worry about missing calls. You can send a message to donor prospects at any time of the day or night. Donors in turn can respond when it is convenient for them. Applications, instructions, and disclosure statements can all be sent to the donor using email.

Important Web Page Features

Perhaps the most important factor when selecting a Web page for your Web site is donor ease in navigating the site. Ask yourself, "Can an 80-year-old find information easily and read the text on the screen?"

Articles should be brief, and the font large enough to be read by an aging senior citizen. Can a senior easily perform a simple gift calculation, and contact the PGO from the Web page?

Visit nonprofit Web sites and look at their planned giving page. Contact the PGO and ask about results they have experienced since installing their Web page. Ask how they promote the page.

You will likely discover that the nonprofits realizing the most success are aggressively marketing their Web pages. The reverse should also be true. No great surprises here.

The fastest group of individuals using the Web to collect information are over the age of 55. Give planned giving Web sites serious consideration. Equally as important, be prepared to market like crazy!

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