Digital Fundraising Playbook Series:

Overview

Introduction: Why Digital? Why Now? Why You?

The portfolio of proven fundraising tactics is very large. You have many choices, and a truly great fundraising program is diversified. It makes use of many different tactics, pairing them with the financial capacity and communication preferences of diverse audiences in your community.

With all that variety to choose from, why does Best Friends suggest that you make learning about digital channels a priority as you expand your fundraising program? Four reasons:

1. Donors expect you to be digital. Americans are doing their charitable giving online in increasing numbers, and many no longer depend on desktop computers. Instead, they are turning to mobile devices like phones and tablets. If you do not offer digital giving options and you are not at least working toward mobile options, you will be leaving significant sums on the table that could have been used to save more lives.

2. Most animal welfare organizations (ranging from large brick-and-mortar municipal shelters to tiny community-based rescue groups) have already dipped their toes into some degree of social media and/or website creation, if only for adoption promotions. While your group may not be using digital channels for fundraising at this point, you could. Start where you are and learn how to build on what you have.

3. The initial investment in upgrading your website or social media usage for fundraising is not nearly as large as the investment required to launch a direct mail program, build a robust membership benefits program or produce an event. Digital fundraising requires thoughtfulness about goals and excellent writing, but it does not require the advanced interpersonal skills or technical knowledge needed for major gifts, bequests or gifts of assets other than cash. Donor database and email companies are providing training that is increasingly user-friendly and affordable. While it takes money to make money, aspects of digital fundraising can be launched without major investments.

4. With digital channels, you can cross-promote, increasing the impact of any one channel; for example, social media posts can promote your Amazon wish lists. Your website can link donors to your various forms of giving so that they have the choices that donors expect in the twenty-first century. Even if you already raise money via print mail, you can integrate digital fundraising with your mail campaigns, reinforcing calls to action and increasing your audience by communicating through multiple channels.

Program Overview

You may have heard the term "digital fundraising" and thought it meant only social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram, but that's not the case. Digital itself is multi-faceted. It includes your website and any giving channels such as texting, emailing, mobile phone apps, online sustainer (usually monthly) giving programs, crowdfunding platforms (Kickstarter, GoFundMe, etc.) and anything else that relies on an internet connection to connect a donor with a charitable organization.

In addition to the front-end issues (marketing strategies, content creation, image selection) that you create for each channel, there are back-end issues such as payment processors (how that donor's gift actually gets into your organization's bank account), business continuity across channels (so you can function without disruption regardless of changes in your team or the environment) and vendor relationships.

Digital fundraising also includes special state and national campaigns (e.g., Arizona Gives or Giving Tuesday) and other events for which you want to work across all your digital channels, synchronizing content and calls to action. The very fact that such events now exist demonstrates the degree to which digital now dominates fundraising where the objective consists of raising a large number of small to medium-sized gifts.

Program Composition

Our series of digital fundraising playbooks provides quick high-level insights. Since digital fundraising is always changing, there will always be more to learn. However, if you commit to implementing the tips in each of these playbooks, you will have covered enough major bases to provide sustainable streams of income throughout the year.

As you steward the donors who have entered your organization through the digital portal, you'll learn who has capacity and interest for larger gifts. For some, you'll use more personal tactics such as phone, personal mail and in-person visits. Others may prefer to remain engaged solely through digital channels. Be guided by the donor's preference and make no assumptions other than this: Digital fundraising excellence is a requirement for lifesaving in the twenty-first century.

The digital fundraising playbook series covers the following topics, emphasizing those that Best Friends has encountered most often when working with partner organizations.

- Social media channels:
    - Principles for creating meaningful content on any social media channel
    - Facebook (the 2021 landscape and what you should know now)
    - Instagram (what animal welfare organizations are experiencing)
    - Managing negativity in social media

- Email:
    - Marketing (five fundamentals for a strong email program)
    - Writing a great email appeal
    - Ensuring email deliverability

- Website:
    - Creating a compelling website giving experience
    - Where to start if you need a refresh (and everyone will need a refresh at some point)

- Choosing technology to support animal welfare nonprofits and nonprofit allies of municipal shelters

- Business continuity in digital (what it means and why it's important)

- Syncing across channels and why multi-channel efforts are important

- Choosing images for digital fundraising

- Metrics worth measuring

There's a lot to consider, but you can eat this elephant-sized block of tofu one bite at a time. That's why Best Friends has created a series of short playbooks on digital fundraising instead of one long one. You can treat these as digital bites, digesting each one as you have the appetite and moving on to others as you have the bandwidth for executing them. Regardless of where you start:

- [Join](#) a community of learners (with pros at all levels) such as the Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network (NTEN). The NTEN membership fee is modest compared to that of most national organizations, and the resources and networking are worth far more than the membership price.

- If you need hardware or software at an affordable price, check out the discounts that come with a free [TechSoup](#) membership.

- Remember that no digital channel works well unless it's built on an understanding of proven fundraising principles. If you're new to fundraising, check out our [Fundraising Fundamentals](#) course, the only one of its kind created specifically for the animal welfare community. Digital fundraising is especially tied to lesson 3 ("Organizing Internally") and your choice of donor database.

Conclusion

Digital channels and devices, including mobile ones, are how people connect today. They're already a primary entry portal for anyone who wants to adopt, foster or volunteer to help save the lives of companion animals. Using these channels for fundraising (and using them more effectively, if you've already begun) will help ensure financial sustainability and the opportunity to build donor relationships and attract ever larger gifts.

Great digital fundraising is both an art and a science. The good news is that you can master both by breaking down this multi-faceted topic into digestible bites and building your digital program in stages. Success in digital fundraising is based not on following the latest app trends, but on applying proven fundraising principles and learning what works for the people in your community who care most about your lifesaving work.

Resources

- If you're so new to digital that you're struggling with terminology, check out this [link for beginners.](#)

- This beginner's [guide](#) from MobileCause is downloadable as a PDF that you can print and share with others in your organization.

- If you want a summary of what the major components of a digital program can be, check out TechSoup's discussion [here](#) and then return to the playbooks that cover your interests.

- If you're action-oriented and want to know what you can do this week (or this month) to get going, start small:
    - Scan our playbook list and select a topic you already know something about.
    - Commit to taking one action on that topic that will move your organization forward.
    - Add a second topic once you have your first channel up and running.

- If you're a "big picture" person who has some digital fundraising knowledge and you're ready to develop a strategy and/or a plan, this [workbook](#) is made available free of charge by NTEN.