

Technology

Industry leaders discuss the Internet's impact on philanthropy

How is the world of the Web affecting the worlds of philanthropy, advocacy and politics? To find the answer, Convio and ViaNovo hosted a panel discussion in May at the National Press Club. The discussion, "Converging Campaigns: How the Internet is changing philanthropy, advocacy and politics," addressed how the Internet, social media and technology are creating change in the nonprofit, advocacy and political arenas. Top executives and strategists from Facebook, Rock the Vote, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, ViaNovo, Convio, and the online strategists for the Howard Dean and Bush/Cheney '04 presidential campaigns discussed the ways online communications and campaigns in all three worlds are converging in appearance and success. Panelists also shared lessons learned to help organizations and campaigns better engage supporters.

In setting the context for the discussion, moderator Tucker Eskew, founding partner of ViaNovo, commented that, "Philanthropy to me...can sometimes mean 'donations' and certainly that is a major factor, but not the only one. It is clearly a broader term in our view; involving all that human activity meant for the betterment of mankind. So we'll talk about the ways organizing philanthropy, advocacy and political campaigns can drive that kind of action."

Key topics from the 90-minute discussion included the following:

- Engaging current and potential supporters.
- Need for micro-campaigns/micro-targeting.
- Importance of an effective online presence.
- Use of multichannels.
- Empowering constituents and volunteers.
- Value of mobile technology.
- Power of young people.

Driving fundraising efforts

According to the panelists, while the Presidential Election of '04 set new standards for using the Internet to raise funds, engage and empower constituents, and drive advocacy, those standards are being crushed by the success campaigns and nonprofits are having in 2008. By embracing new technologies, as well as new and proven strategies, nonprofits, advocacy organizations and political campaigns are having more success online than ever before. Just as important, that online success is helping drive even more success for the

traditional offline channels for engagement. Many current peer-to-peer fundraising tools, social media utilities like Facebook, mobile technologies like text messaging, and the iPhone did not exist in 2004, but each is playing a key role in engaging constituents of all ages in 2008.

In addressing the concept of empowering people to make a difference, Vinay Bhagat, Chief Strategy Officer and founder of Convio, explained the social fabric of the Internet. "This concept of constituent empowerment is incredibly important, because the Internet is really all about a social fabric where people can communicate with each other. Savvy campaign organizations have realized that there is this social energy they can harness by empowering their constituents to reach out and create more support."

The power of youth

Heather Smith, executive director of Rock the Vote, shared insight into different ways her organization reaches people now that today's youth are changing the face of politics and advocacy through their engagement, as well as their expectations for communication. The lessons could be applied to any organization or campaign looking to engage new constituents.

"They (young people) are incredibly connected with each other because of new technologies and digital media," she said. "This allows organizations like Rock the Vote to actually find young people where they are congregated, in an online setting, through their telephones, and give them the information so they can mobilize and engage their peers."

Volunteer engagement and empowerment

Brian Rubenstein, associate director of Nationwide Grassroots, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, spoke about how his organization is using online technologies and resources to drive offline actions to support a broad volunteer structure and engagement.

"We empower ordinary people to do extraordinary things in the fight against cancer. So we are empowering our volunteers using these tools to reach them so they can begin to do the offline things that we believe still have a lot of influence with members of Congress," he said.

Participants in the discussion acknowledged that the swift
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pace of technology and opportunity often causes organizations and campaigns to wonder which applications and technologies to use.

“Convergence is confusing; four years ago on the Dean Campaign, YouTube, Facebook and podcasting did not exist,” pointed out Nicco Mele, online strategist (Dean for President '04). “The dramatic change in media consumption and communication habits over the last decade, especially the last four years, feels like it is accelerating and reaching more and more people in weirder and odder ways. For any nonprofit, political campaign [or even] corporation, you have to figure out who is your audience; how do you reach them; engage them; advance the goals of your organization?”

While many people see the highly visible political campaigns and believe they are leading the convergence, political campaigns are actually following nonprofits' lead, suggested Patrick Ruffini, online strategist (Bush/Cheney '04). “What we are seeing is that we have to keep people motivated for the long haul. Campaigns are trying to tap into this sense of belonging, trying to tap into a sense that I am

part of something larger than myself, part of a movement,” he explained.

One thing the event panelists all agreed on: The basic e-mail marketing and a strong Web presence are no longer just “nice to have” — they are “need to have” for all campaigns and organizations. However, with limited dollars and resources, organizations need to partner with vendors and strategists to engage constituents and create a movement around their candidate, cause or mission.

“While celebrating world-altering communications technologies and success, we must also strive to share lessons learned and expertise as a country so that together we can change the world,” said Convio CEO Gene Austin.

For more information

Convio is a leading provider of constituent relationship management software and services to nonprofit organizations. Visit www.convio.com. ViaNovo is a leading management and communications consultancy that specializes in positioning corporate and not-for-profit clients from a branding, sales, crisis, regulatory and legislative perspective. For more, visit www.vianovo.com. For a replay of the Converging Campaigns event, www.visualwebcaster.com/converging. ■

New application helps nonprofits get started online

You know your nonprofit needs a strong online presence but you've been concerned about staff knowledge level, internal capabilities and costs. Good news: In June, Convio Inc. announced the availability of a new program called Convio Go!™, designed to help resource-constrained nonprofits achieve online fundraising and outreach success. The program combines a mix of software and services to help users grow their e-mail lists, launch fundraising campaigns, and maintain regular communications with constituents.

“Executives from many organizations have told us that they see the results that Convio clients are having on the Internet and want to share in that success, but have been reluctant to invest because they have not felt confident they had the technology resources, technical savvy or marketing strategies to use the tools effectively,” says Gene Austin, CEO of Convio. “Convio Go!™ addresses their concerns by offering a lower-priced subset of our full suite, with a prescriptive set of services and practices that help ensure the organization achieves results.”

The Convio Go!™ program includes the following capabilities:

- **Results-focused constituent marketing.** Convio's account service professionals work with clients as a “virtual campaign and technology staff” to execute and measure marketing campaigns.
- **Collaborative peer interaction.** Convio Go!™ cli-

ents participate in quarterly consultant-led, peer-group calls to learn key practices, review results, and share lessons learned.

- **Coaching.** Intensive coaching on practices to ensure that clients can be successful when they graduate after one year in the program.
- **Refined deployment process.** Convio Go!™ clients benefit from a simplified deployment process refined over the last several years by working nonprofit organizations of every size.

“As a small nonprofit, we know that the Internet is the best way to build community and connect people with our mission,” says Cristy Balcells, Executive Director of Mitochondrial Disease Action Committee. “Convio Go!™ provides us with not only world-class tools at a reasonable price, but we have a virtual team to support our online success, access to a community of peers to share ideas and solve problems, and the ability to grow into the full Convio solution.” Mito Action joined with several other nonprofits to pilot the program through the first quarter of 2008.

For more information

Convio is a leading provider of on-demand constituent relationship management software and services to nonprofits. Products are designed to enable organizations to more effectively raise funds, influence public policy and support their missions. www.convio.com. ■

Internet most popular way for major donors to engage with nonprofits

To tap into the considerable resources of the wealthiest prospective donors, look no further than your computer, concludes groundbreaking analysis. The results of a national research study into the online behaviors and attitudes of the "wired wealthy" were recently released by Convio, Sea Change Strategies, and Edge Research. The study surveyed more than 3,000 donors from 23 major nonprofit organizations to determine the online behaviors and preferences of one of the nonprofit sector's most important constituents. The wired wealthy are identified as individuals who donate a minimum of \$1,000 dollars annually to a single cause and give an average of \$10,896 to various charities each year, with a median gift of \$4,500.

"The main theme that jumped out at us is that major donors — or the wired wealthy as we call them — are very active online with the intention of becoming even more so when it comes to their philanthropic support," says Vinay Bhagat, founder and Chief Strategy Officer for Convio. "Based on what these important donors told us, we believe a tremendous opportunity exists for nonprofit organizations to better leverage their online presence to improve the online experience of the wired wealthy."

The research study, which began in fall 2007, covered a variety of nonprofit sectors, including: advocacy/public affairs, animal welfare, Christian ministries, environment, health, international relief, development and public television. The constituency surveyed represented approximately one percent of the participating charities' e-mail files, but accounted for nearly 32 percent of their annual gifts.

"This was a very exciting project to be a part of," says Pam Loeb, principal for Edge Research, which donated its services to conduct the research. "Never before has the sector pulled together to study this donor segment. Until this time, there has been little research done on the online behaviors, experiences and expectations of major donors and the role the Internet and electronic communication plays in their giving process. We believe the results of this research will shed some light on key strategies nonprofits can implement to better serve their constituent base."

Key findings

The study yielded the following major results:

Major and mid-level donors are generous and online.

- 80 percent of those surveyed made donations both online and offline.
- 72 percent of those surveyed said donating online is more efficient and helps charities reduce administrative costs.

- 51 percent of those surveyed said they prefer giving online.

- 46 percent said that five years from now they will be making a greater portion of their charitable gifts online.

Most charity Web sites are missing opportunities to fully engage wired wealthy with their organization.

- Only 40 percent of those surveyed said that most charity Web sites made them feel personally connected to their cause or mission.

Only 40 percent of those surveyed said that most charity Web sites are inspiring.

48 percent of those surveyed felt most charity Web sites are well designed.

E-mail shows signs of lost opportunities to connect with various donors.

- 74 percent of those surveyed said it was appropriate for the charity to send an e-mail reminding them to renew an annual gift.

- 74 percent of those surveyed said that an e-mail from the charity about how their donation was spent and what happened as a result would make them more likely to give again.

- 65 percent of those surveyed said they always open and glance at e-mails from causes they support.

Three distinct groups of donors emerged based on the extent to which the donor sees the Internet as a source of connection between themselves and the causes.

- Relationship seekers (29 percent), which are those donors most likely to connect emotionally with organizations online.

- All business (30 percent), which are those donors not looking for a relationship or emotional connection, but a smooth and simple donation process.

- Casual connectors (41 percent), which are those donors that occupy the middle ground, showing some interest in sustaining an online relationship, but also wanting a smooth and simple process.

"We believe this research will fundamentally shift the way some nonprofit organizations approach their relationships with major donors online," asserts Mark Rovner, principal of Sea Change Strategies. "Because these constituents have high expectations for their online engagement, the research provides important insight into the ways nonprofits can better connect, motivate and retain these donors. The results of this research will provide a variety of different nonprofit organizations — both large and small — the tools to assess their online strategy and make adjustments where necessary to better capture big opportunities." ■