

Fundraising online

Social media fundraising for the arts

This short paper explores the expanding online world of fundraising and what this means for the arts and cultural sector. How has the 'networked society' changed attitudes and the interaction between cultural organisations and their audiences (including prospective donors)? What are the social media opportunities and risks for fundraisers in the arts? Drawing on the experience of online and social media fundraisers and Arts & Business experience of philanthropy, this paper seeks to offer advice on how, and why, social media fundraising should be integrated into the overall fundraising mix and our five top tips for getting started.

Introduction

Growing numbers of people are becoming more active and more confident online. Around 70% of the UK's 18.3 million households have internet access and 63% of the adult UK users made purchases and payments over the internet.¹ These types of figures about the scale of the audience and income potential online are well rehearsed, but turning these numbers into action is what really matters to a fundraiser. It is, therefore, startling to think that **a visitor from a social media site is ten times more likely to make a purchase than an average visitor (7% compared to 71%), and 70% of the internet population would trust online recommendations from a stranger.**² Audiences and consumers are being turned into action and income generation. Social media certainly seems to have the potential to be a very effective tool.

With so many people making purchases and payments online then there must clearly be significant potential for online donations. Between March and May 2010 Blackbaud³ reported that US online giving to non-profit organisations had grown 23% in comparison to the same period in 2009.⁴ The

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¹ Office for National Statistics, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=8&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=374>, accessed July 2010. Figures relate to internet access and usage in 2009.

² Simply Zesty, 'Social media in the UK 2010' on *YouTube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZHSZY8S9mA&feature=player_embedded, accessed July 2010. Stats in the video are based on research by the Oxford Research Agency (TORA), UK partner of Simply Zesty.

³ Blackbaud is an international software developer for non-profit organisations, specialised in fundraising, www.blackbaud.com

⁴ Steve MacLaughlin, 'The Blackbaud Index of Online Giving', http://www.blackbaud.com/files/resources/downloads/bb_online_index_report.pdf, accessed July 2010. This growth was

Blackbaud research shows that people are willing to donate online, so how can UK arts organisations take advantage of this?

Art audiences online

Social media is not an emerging technology – it has already arrived and changed how audiences want to engage with arts organisations and commercial brands onsite and online. This means an integrated strategy between offline and online is needed so they can cross-promote one another. About 60% of all internet users in England have a social media profile (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc).⁵ We commonly assume they are male, young and probably a bit geeky too, but actually social media users are older than we think (with an average age of 37 years⁶) and are more female than we think.

With **65% of internet users sharing information about cultural activities online, and 53% actively using social media to find out about cultural events and organisations**, this is a prime and ideal audience for cultural organisations to be engaging with. These numbers make it hard for cultural organisations to ignore the impact of social networks. Whether your organisation is aware of these conversations or involved in them - the question is: can you really afford to not be listening and engaging with them?

Demanding donors

It is not just that the way in which you talk with and engage with audiences that has changed, but philanthropy and individual giving is changing too. Donors to the arts tend to come from among an organisation's committed audience base, so audience development/engagement and fundraising from individuals go hand-in-hand anyway. This no less true for online activities.

Fundraising specialist Bryan Miller⁷ explains the concept of the 'networked age'. People from the Baby Boom generation, downwards, are not 'networked' because they are *digitally* connected with each other; **they are 'networked' because they have lost trust in traditional institutions (such as government, church, political parties, traditional media) and they attach far more importance to their personal networks instead.** These age groups value the opinion of their peer groups more, no matter if they are communicating online or offline. Combine this with both an increase in wealth and the easy accessibility to a range of publicly available online data, and one understands that

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partially due to an influx of online donations towards the Haiti earthquake relief. Nevertheless, these figures demonstrate clearly that people are getting increasingly more comfortable with online and mobile donations.

⁵ Joint research with Arts & Business, Arts Council England and the Museums Libraries Archives Council, to be published September 2010. http://www.artsandbusiness.org.uk/Central/Research/Digital-creative-futures/culture-online_and_mobile.aspx, accessed July 2010.

⁶ Rachel Beer and Nathan Waddingham, 'The role of Twitter in fundraising', Presentation, Institute of Fundraising National Convention 2010. <http://www.fundraising.co.uk/blog/2010/07/07/collected-resources-national-convention-2010>, accessed July 2010.

⁷ Bryan Miller, 'Community fundraising 2.0 – The future of fundraising in a networked society?', in: *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* (2009). <http://www.interscience.wiley.com>, accessed July 2010.

fundraisers nowadays deal with a more informed, more critical and more demanding generation of prospective donors online and offline.

*'Dorothy Donor' gave to charity because we asked. That was all she needed. She believed in what charities stood for and that they would spend her money wisely. Not so her sons and daughters, the Baby Boomers. They're far more demanding... and they just love ear-marking! They want to know what their gifts will achieve, preferably something tangible which they could even visit one day!*⁸

Consumers, audiences and donors in the networked society should be approached in a manner that takes this renewed critical awareness and revived confidence in peer groups into account. Miller sees the following quote as *the* motto of future fundraising: **'stop interrupting what people are interested in and [...] be what people are interested in.'**⁹ This is where social media starts to play a very powerful role.

Social media provides vast public discussion platforms where real people can interact with each other. It gives plenty of opportunities to both organisations and audience members to talk and listen to each other, in a non-hierarchical way. As opposed to the traditional ways of communicating, there is no controlled content or messages arranged by institutions, and there are a lot of occasions for peer recommendations.

Social media and fundraising for the arts

So this is the context for philanthropy in our digital and networked age. We now need to turn this into actual giving occasions. Social media presents particularly interesting opportunities for the cultural sector, since culture has always been interactive at heart:

*Before they [non-interactive media] came along all entertainment was interactive: theatre, music, sport – the performers and audiences were there together, and even a respectfully silent audience exerted a powerful shaping presence on the unfolding of whatever drama they were there for. We didn't need a special word for 'interactivity' in the same way that we don't (yet) need a special word for people with only one head.*¹⁰

Social media fundraising, especially as part of an integrated campaign, is not a radical departure from traditional fundraising methods, it is another tool which requires some tweaks to the fundraising approach. It also gives the arts and cultural sector a distinct fundraising advantage. Arts and cultural organisations can explore and enhance the 'powerful shaping audience presence' they have offline and apply it to the online and social media world. **The characteristics required for good social**

⁸ Steve Andrews, in: Megan Griffith, *ICT Foresight – Charitable giving and fundraising in a digital world*, NCVO Third Sector Foresight, 2007, p. 19.

⁹ Bryan Miller quotes JWT Advertising Agency, in: Miller, 2009, p. 3.

¹⁰ Douglas Adams, quoted by Jason Potts (Think) and Paul Lewis (RSPB), 'Mainstreaming Social Media with Your Organisation', Institute of Fundraising National Convention 2010, <http://www.fundraising.co.uk/blog/2010/07/07/collected-resources-national-convention-2010>, accessed July 2010.

media fundraising are: creative responses, imaginative minds and convincing communicators – these are already in place in the cultural sector.¹¹

Since *the* major motive for individual giving to the arts is the personal connection donors feel for ‘their’ cultural organisation,¹² **one should see the social media as an additional tool in the fundraiser’s toolkit** to intensify these personal connections.

Given that 65% of the online population in the UK are talking about culture anyway, there is a real opportunity to create that personal connection using online and social tools.

Ideal tools for smaller organisations

Another reason for arts organisations to engage with social media, is that the web has helped level opportunities for smaller organisations. Firstly, there are a lot of free and low-cost fundraising tools already ‘out there’; there is no need to re-invent the wheel. There are currently more than 200 online giving markets that have been developed,¹³ with a few of them aimed specifically at the creative sector e.g. the US site Kickstarter.com and Arts & Business’ initiative with Alec Reed, the Big Arts Give. Most of these markets are free of charge or charge just a small percentage of the funds raised; some of them also offer free training or online advice.¹⁴ The number of fundraising apps and widgets for Facebook, Twitter and mobile phones are also growing rapidly. Facebook Causes may be the best known application, but there are lots of effective alternatives such as the JustGiving app (connecting giving markets to Facebook and Twitter), ChipIn, Razoo and Twitpay.¹⁵

The tools are there and free to use (technically known as ‘cloud computing’); all you have to do is select the right one for you. Small organisations can have an equal online presence to the likes of the Tate and ‘punch above their weight’ online. The only thing that is required is staff time. Although it is not as easy as it sounds to reallocate staff duties and time, while fundraising is a growing priority for arts organisations taking this type of approach and reallocating some staff time to it can actually be very cost effective.

¹¹ ‘The arts world needs to think about the big shifts which will affect us all – climate, global financial stability and how we find new ways to connect and communicate – and what the arts’ response to all this is. We need new models and ideas and, as a creative sector, we are well placed to be able to do this.’ Marcus Romer, ‘A meeting of minds’, in: *The Stage*, 15 July 2010, <http://www.thestage.co.uk/features/feature.php/28925/a-meeting-of-minds>, accessed July 2010.

¹² Anna Gaio, Joanne South (Ed.), *Local Pride: Individual Giving to the Arts in England*, Arts and Business & City University London, 2009.

¹³ Christine Egger, ‘Breakthrough in Online Fundraising – designing & aligning for the emerging philanthropic web’, Institute of Fundraising National Convention 2010, <http://www.fundraising.co.uk/blog/2010/07/07/collected-resources-national-convention-2010>, accessed July 2010.

¹⁴ Exemplary is the UK initiative www.SeeTheDifference.org, a giving market that offers mentoring to charities who want to make and showcase fundraising videos; JustGiving has a good section with resources on <http://justgiving-charity-support.zendesk.com/categories/1264-justgiving-resources>

¹⁵ Geoff Livingstone, ‘5 Social Fundraising Alternatives to Facebook Causes’, <http://mashable.com/2010/08/04/social-fundraising-alternatives-facebook-causes/>, accessed Aug 2010.

Global to local

One interesting phenomenon of the web is that its initial selling point was access to global audiences, but in recent years filtering through all of this information has become more and more important. So while it still offers this global reach, it provides a great platform for engaging in local activities and talking to local audiences. The same is also true for niche activities and audiences; the web provides a way for niche groups to come together and share their joint passion and interests. These communities frequently already exist online – the task is to find them.

Social media networks are groups of real people with real interests, ideas and inspirations. This means that arts organisations – however small, however specialist – now have additional opportunities to find those niche communities, specifically interested in what you have got on offer (e.g. via Facebook groups, Ning groups¹⁶ and Twitter hashtags #). In a time when the new fundraising motto is ‘to be what people are interested in’, social media offers an ideal platform to engage with and enthuse prospective donors and audiences who have already expressed an interest in your organisation’s activities.

Integrated social media strategy

Building relationships with audiences and bringing people into your organisation’s family fulfils an audience development and marketing function which are the fundamental first and second steps to fundraising from individuals. All these strands – **fundraising, branding, audience research, marketing and donor care – deserve an institution-wide, integrated social media approach so that they can feed off of one another and cross-promote.** In the end social media is a means for an organisation to communicate its messages:

A useful metaphor [for the amount of hits on websites, followers on Twitter, members of a Facebook group etc] is standing in the high street with a bucket. Lots of people will see you and your bucket, but most will walk past. The bucket is not the best way to raise money. Whether anyone stops depends more on what they already know about you, your public profile, and their experience of you, than with what they see on your bucket today.¹⁷

Individual giving in the arts, on the contrary, is far less effect and time driven, it is more of a conceptual ask. Most donations in the cultural sector are not pressured by urgency. Hence arts organisations should have realistic expectations when it comes to fundraising.

Art donors often donate because of their long standing relations with, and their creative appreciation of, cultural organisations.¹⁸ In this context, the importance of an institution-wide commitment to clear and convincing communications (both onsite and online) becomes clear. Prospective donors should be able to see creative outcomes, hear success stories as well as understand how to donate, otherwise they will not be prompted to give.

¹⁶ Ning is an online platform for people who want to create their own social networks, see www.ning.com

¹⁷ Andy Dearden, in: Megan Griffith, *ICT Foresight – Charitable giving and fundraising in a digital world*, NCVO Third Sector Foresight, 2007, p. 13.

¹⁸ Gaio & South (ed.), 2009, p. 30.

Artistic and organisational staff (marketers, events managers, fundraisers, etc) should therefore collaborate to get the word out. Internal divisions and boundaries are irrelevant to audiences and donors. The exact same rule as with print and offline activities, donors do not want to be 'bombarded' with materials from the marketing, sales and fundraising departments: communication needs to be co-ordinated, and the same applies to social media. Social media provides you with additional online platforms for storytelling, and can deepen relationships with new and existing audiences, possibly inspiring them to donate.

Five tips for fundraisers using social media¹⁹

1. Design online content to facilitate connections. For a fundraiser, the ideal user journey is flowing from one point of online engagement from another e.g. twitter, website to facebook, eventually turning into giving a donation or making recommendations to their peers. At all of these online touch points, the ask for donations and support needs to be made clearly and through compelling communication. Online fundraising tools are designed for social media users to act and share effortlessly. The more links, signposting and content to keep users on your sites/platforms (which they can share) the more likely they are to be encouraged to donate.

- *Step 1:* Create and facilitate multiple links to fundraising projects e.g. Facebook groups, create paths with shortened links on Twitter; showcase events (Youtube, Flickr) and communicate stories
- *Step 2:* Link the above to mechanisms for online giving (e.g. giving market web pages), platforms for online discussion, recommend to friends and volunteering opportunities
- *Step 3:* Embed fundraising widgets in all communications e.g. e-newsletters so readers can respond 'in the moment', when they are enthused by online content. Facilitate sharing and forwarding to peers through just one-click (via Twitter, Facebook, email and so on).

2. Invest in relationships, both onsite and online. To use the bucket on the high street metaphor again, it is not about what sticker is on the bucket, it is what the sticker stands for: the organisation's mission, its achievements and the relationship you have with your audience members (onsite or online). If people cannot 'feel a sense of pride and belonging'²⁰ about the cultural organisation they will not feel inspired to give, whether onsite or online. Therefore, it is essential to combine offline and online efforts in order to create various points of contact and involvement with audiences, thus investing in (prospective) donors throughout a possible visitor experience.

- *Step 1:* Clearly communicate online what developments are taking place onsite. Communicate stories and positive developments both face-to-face and online and (perhaps most importantly) link between the two so they can cross-promote

¹⁹ The following tips are based upon several resources (see bibliography). However, the following presentation was particularly helpful and deserves mentioning at this point: Christine Egger, 'Breakthrough in Online Fundraising', 2010.

²⁰ Tina Mermiri, *Market trends 2009 – Summer/autumn edition*, Arts & Business, London, 2009, p. 50.

- *Step 2:* Appreciate enthusiasm; acknowledge current donors and make very clear what roles donors and supporters can play in your organisation e.g. what actions or events they can take part in, what value for money they will see in return for possible donations etc
- *Step 3:* Once prospects have reached your home page, donations will ideally only be one or two clicks away. However, don't let people experience 'giving fatigue' by making intrusive, nonstop online donations requests. Do make clear what other ways there are to help the organisation besides contributing financially, e.g. volunteering or recommendations to friends via social media.

3. Know who to talk to, what to talk about and listen. In a networked society communication is not so much about getting your organisation's message out to a large group of people, but about finding the right context to talk and engage with the right group of prospective donors. Social media gives art fundraisers new tools to find niche communities online that are already interested in similar subjects to your own organisation's remit. Members of these groups are already actively involved with culture, and share ideas and interests with peers. The trick is to find these groups and be part of the conversation, offering your views, news, stories, links and insights. Listen to what these audiences and prospective donors have to say. Listening is certainly one of the most important communication tools needed for managing social media.

- *Step 1:* Check what topics are popular amongst your twitter followers, for example use GoogleStats to see which websites active donors were referred from to your organisation's website. What possible partnerships and links could you develop?
- *Step 2:* Publicly respond and follow up on comments and reviews written by social media users, so that people know the organisation is involved and committed to connecting with its audiences. But ensure you do this in a human and personal way not with the official 'organisation's voice'. In terms of dealing with negative comments and feedback, a case-by-case decision needs to be made as to the best way to respond to it (whether to take it offline, use social media or not respond at all).

4. Acknowledge open source characteristics of the web. Social media consists of peer-to-peer networks. Where traditional communication was one-direction, and frequently top-down, communication – with controlled content being transferred from the organisation to its audiences – the current digital and networked climate is more suitable for truly involving enthusiastic audience members. This open approach may sound daunting, but it does allow organisations to have genuine conversations with their audiences in a quick and easy way, and to encourage 'shared ownership'. Arts organisations can invite motivated individuals to become more actively engaged with the cultural organisation and their fundraising: creating a culture of shared ownership and trust. Such a culture will only ease fundraising in the future, because decisions were made in a transparent way and the interactive process will be inviting to a new generation of more critical and involved donors.

- 5. Don't be afraid.** There is undeniable growth and movement on the internet: in the next five years there will be 2.2 billion people using the internet around the world.²¹ These online users will spend an average of at least 25 hours online, and social media accounting for more and more of this time. Social networking now is the most popular UK pastime with a monthly average of 6 hours and 8 minutes spent on social media platforms per head.²² The average online donor is said to be more generous and a lot younger than the typical philanthropist (with 38 years).²³ Take part in the developments, and make use of the digital, social opportunities that are on offer to multiply and intensify relations with potential donors. This is new territory for everyone so don't be afraid to experiment, be playful and seek feedback and support. By taking this approach you will learn quicker how to improve and deliver a powerful social media fundraising campaign.

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²¹ Chapman, 2010.

²² Simply Zesty, 'Social media in the UK 2010' on *YouTube*,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZHSZY8S9mA&feautre=player_embedded, accessed July 2010. Stats in the video are based on research by the Oxford Research Agency (TORA), UK partner of Simply Zesty.

²³ Chapman, 2010.