

## I – Using The Internet in your Nonprofit Organization

For more information on using technology in your organization link to:  
[www.charityvillage.ca](http://www.charityvillage.ca)

## **Treat Technology As The Nervous System**

Information technology is servant, not master, but it is an essential servant. If we view information technology as the central nervous system of an organization, it becomes the core around which all other systems and processes must be organized. The for-profit world understands that the Internet is not separate from this, and that Web-based programs must be fully integrated with other information systems. Inquiries should automatically add information about the inquirer to the organization's database to better serve the client/inquirer in future and ensure that the information is available for communications, client service and fundraising purposes. Discrete databases maintained by fiefdoms within an organization are time-wasting, costly anachronisms. If any item of information is being entered more than once, expensive resources are being squandered, and the organization is not enjoying the potential power and efficiencies of its technology.

The Internet has, in automotive terms, just produced the Model T. It will become ubiquitous in the next five years, as Internet technology becomes embedded in the full spectrum of devices and software used in the normal course of business and personal life. There are already kitchen appliances that are Internet-capable. Web-based processes will be largely transparent --- people will not consciously launch an online connection as most do now. When devices need information that is not resident locally, they will invoke a connection to remote information sources in order to deliver their services to the user.

The full impact of these changes for non-profits is impossible to forecast, but it is likely to be very significant. Whether a charity serves a local, regional, national, or international constituency, both internal and external communications, (voice, text, audio and video) will be Internet- and Internet-based. Database-driven, interactive technology will enable organizations to deal with donors, volunteers, clients and staff on a personalized, as contrasted with mass, level, heightening the potential for relationship-building, while reducing staffing requirements and the cost of management processes.

One consequence of all this will be the requirement for more sophisticated management and marketing processes, in order to satisfy constituencies' appetites for deliverables while successfully competing for scarce resources. Perhaps partnerships, co-ventures, and other relationships among non-profits, government departments and for-profit corporations will aid this transition.

As information becomes more readily available and deliverable, calls for increased accountability are likely to become louder. Organizations will be expected to provide online information that substantiates their worth for those making decisions to give dollars and time, and those that fail to pass accountability tests may Jeopardize their continued existence.

In addition, the stateless world of cyberspace surely will lead to increased levels of cross-border fundraising. Insightful fundraisers will increasingly appeal to international communities of interest as the real world begins to emulate the virtual world in some respects.

### ***How to get started***

To reiterate, it's all about relationship-building, and that starts with defining the organization's audience and its information needs, then articulating communications objectives. The latter might include increasing membership, recruiting and managing volunteers, advocacy, media relations, team building, opinion-sampling, public education, various dimensions of fundraising, service delivery, and any of a hundred other possibilities specific to an organization.

The Internet presence must:

- Attract people who share a common interest or need.
- Help visitors become community members with a feeling of shared ownership of the Web site and, by extension, of the organization.

- Help members of the organization's online community develop a sense of membership through information-sharing and help-sharing relationships with each other.
- Build on the sense of community membership to attract support for the organization.

***Each new visitor must be helped through a 5-step progression:***

- a. Attract attention with a focused, exciting, well-promoted Web site.
- b. Invite a relationship by resonating with the visitor's interests and beliefs.
- c. Engage in a dialogue about issues that are important to the visitor.
- d. Earn the right to ask for support, by delivering valuable information, services or assistance.
- e. Facilitate action in the form of a join-up, purchase, donation, or some other behaviour that implies the visitor has become a community-member.

Online fundraising fundamentals focus on connecting with individuals, and then converting the connection into action. Revenue is an outcome of successful community-building, and online fundraising can go well beyond just asking visitors to make a donation by cheque or credit card.

People must become personally involved in the online experience of the Web site before they are prepared to give or buy, and then they must be presented with a range of ways to give, or to buy something to benefit the organization.

