# Boosting funds online

## Nonprofits are taking cues from consumer marketing and beginning to implement online tools and practices to help raise awareness and money

By David Ward

Non-profits have been considered slow adopters of new direct marketing strategies and tactics, opting for tried and true channels and targeting older people who may be intimidated by new technology. But increased competition for donors as well as opportunity to leverage the Internet to educate consumers are leading non-profits to adopt tools and practices from consumer direct marketing.

"After several years of non-profits talking about new things, I'm seeing a lot more doing in the past 18-24 months," notes Michael Mathias, SVP and group leader of agency Merkle|Domain. "You now see [many] of the same best practices in the nonprofit and consumer space."

Bethany Little, Convio's director of client success services technology, says that sophisticated clients understand that online programs can augment compelling direct mail programs. Little recently worked to create a compelling program for a nonprofit dedicated to finding a cure for Trisomy 18, an often fatal genetic disease that impacts infants.

"We develop[ed] this peer-to-peer fundraising angle that allows parents [of] children with the disease to set up their own pages with compelling content," she explains. "Friends or family go to that page and make donations in the [child's] name."

Little is also leveraging social networking sites by allowing constituents to grab virtual "widgets" at a nonprofit's Web site and put them on their social network page. "People click on the widget, learn about the cause and make donations," she says.

Nonprofits are also finding ways to expand proven offline direct mail programs. For example, New York-based CancerCare, which provides free support services, worked with Merkle|Domain this fall to migrate a successful offline fundraising program online. The campaign, in which bakeries donated a dollar for every cupcake sold, was broadened online such that anyone can donate a dollar, decorate a virtual cupcake, send it to a friend and have the donation matched by a CancerCare sponsor.

"Traditional direct mail is important with older audiences since they may not be comfortable giving money online," says Stacey Schutver, director of corporate relations at CancerCare. "But, these virtual cupcakes enhance our brand [and] help us get the word out to a wider audience."

Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center worked with Sparhawk Corporation to create a branded online e-mall that allows supporters to shop online at outlets such as Amazon.com and allow a portion of the sale go to the cancer center. "It's a way for nonprofits to increase returns across all channels," explains Sparhawk founder/president Michael Harakal III. "E-mall links [can be included] in e-mail newsletters, Web sites, direct mail and phone-a-thon scripts to let donors know they can help without writing another check."

Mathias stresses non-profits shouldn't allow new technology to obscure overall direct marketing strategies. "The driver of all of this is having a very good approach and infrastructure for data-base management, because you have to know what's going on with all your donors and prospects," he says. "It's very sexy to talk about great new ideas for non-profits, but [without ability to] learn from what works and what doesn't, a nonprofit will only be as good as yesterday's idea." ∎

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### Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center:

The Web site provides a link to a branded e-mall where supporters can shop online and have a percentage of each sale donated to the center. The e-fundraising mall links to retailers such as Amazon.com and Macys.com. Multiple direct marketing channels are used to educate Kimmel donors that this is another way to give.
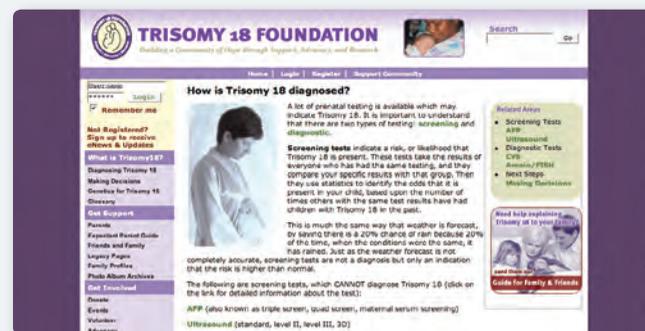


### CancerCare's Cupcakes for Kids:

By developing this online program to augment an annual offline fundraising effort, Merkle|Domain is helping boost fundraising and also enabling the New York-based nonprofit to establish a national footprint. The team can capture information about online donors, who hopefully can be converted into long-term supporters.



### Trisomy 18 Foundation:

Trisomy18.org hosts a program that allows parents who have lost children to the disease to set up memorial pages where donations can be made in the name of the child. This tactic is an example of a growing trend of leveraging tools like social networking and peer-to-peer marketing for nonprofit fundraising.



Nonprofit