

Nonprofit 911 – August 2007
Website 101 for Fundraisers
With Katya Andresen & Mark Rovner
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The audio transcript can be found at www.fundraising123.org

Katya: Here is Mark Rovner.

Mark: Thank you, Katya. I'm afraid I'm doomed to disappoint you with a buildup like that, but I will do my best. I'll do my best to answer as many questions as possible once I get done jabbering. As Katya said, the title of the talk is "Your Website Sucks—Usability for Fund Raisers." The sad news is that probably most non-profit websites are very lacking.

They're very lacking in ways that are relatively easy to fix. It's important that you worry about your website and think about your website for the simple reason that it is, for many, many donors, including donors who may not make an online donation, the way that they will meet your organization.

Think about this a second: If you had a potential major donor coming in to meet you, you wouldn't dress in cut-offs and a torn t-shirt. If your office and your desk looks like mine does most days, you'd probably hide the piles under the desk and you try to put a best face on it. Many of your donors are meeting you through your website and if your website is the equivalent of a messy office or negotiated real estate, which is often the case for larger non-profits, then that old saying holds true online that "you never get a second chance to make a first impression."

Just to put some numbers around that point, a study was done last year of donors who make offline donations—meaning direct-mail donors, event donors, not online donors. Two thirds of those donors reported that as part of their own personal due-diligence process of deciding whether or not to make a gift, they visited the website of the organization they were thinking about giving to.

I'm going to be coming back to that point again and again that your fundraising challenge is not only to get them to your Donate page. If you don't have a Donate page, Network for Good is a pretty good place to start. Your challenge is to make sure that your website is establishing who you are in a pretty compelling way.

Katya tells me that most of you represent smaller non-profits. I have to say that probably puts you at an advantage from a website usability point of

view because it takes a lot of money to really screw up a website. If you don't have it, you probably haven't really screwed it up. I could name names but I'm not going to.

The big boys and big girls are not at an advantage over you. The other reason why smaller non-profits are at an advantage is because many of you may be wearing multiple hats. If you're the development and communications director and the webmaster, you don't have anyone you have to negotiate with about the look and feel of the website.

That's another way that big non-profits tend to mess up. What I hope to do in the next 30 minutes or so is give you a lot of practical guidance, give you some to-do lists of things to do, almost all of which cost nothing or cost whatever it costs for you to post content to your website and all of which can make a big difference.

If I go too fast or if your hand gets tired, I'll remind you, as Katya said, we will be distributing an audio and text transcript of this. I'll be sending around, via Network for Good, a PowerPoint that you can use that has all these lists on them. Before we get into nitty-gritty, here are the four things that I'd love for you to write down because they're the over-arching principles that should guide everything you do around how you present your website from a fundraising perspective.

The first guiding principle is clarity and simplicity. The second guiding principle is authenticity. The third guiding principle is passion. The fourth is experimentation. I'm not going to go through those in order but I'm going to tell you when various of those four uber-themes are coming into play as we go through this.

I told you I wouldn't make you spend any money, but if you've got a few, extra bucks, the one thing I would strongly recommend is a book by a man named Steve Krug called *Don't Make Me Think*. That's been our bible at Sea Change for years and years on usability and it's very practical and very simple and very accessible.

A lot of the points that I'll be making today are either straight from *Don't Make Me Think* or inspired by it. I think the book's about \$15, but it's the best \$15 you'll ever spend. As I said in the beginning, there are really two audiences that you as fundraisers should think about coming to your website.

The first group, and the group that will represent a majority of your online donors, are the people who have made a decision to make a donation to you and are coming to your website to use your website as a transaction device. What we've seen in studies over the years is that a strong majority

of people who make a donation to you online made that decision based on something they got in the mail, or something they saw on the news, or something a friend told them.

The online donors are for the most part coming to you with giving on their mind. The second group, and it's probably a much, much larger group, maybe 20 times as large, are the people who are doing their due diligence and who, if they like what they see, are going to write a check and put it in the mail, or are going to attend your event, or get you the money other some non-web way.

Those are two very different audiences and they have two very different sets of needs. I'm going to go through what the key pointers are for each audience and how you can lay out the welcome mat for them. I was in a hospital recently and it was one of those hospitals that had the color-coded lines.

The green line went to radiology. The red line went to obstetrics. All you had to do was follow the colored line. I love that as a metaphor for what you want to do. You have these two different audiences, you want to take them on two different paths, and you need to blaze a very clear trail for both of them.

Let's talk for a minute about the people who came to give. They got your direct-mail piece and they liked it. They read about you in the paper. However they got there, they got there and they want to make a donation to you. Your biggest challenge with them is to get them to your donate form and to make sure your donate form is good.

To get them to your donate form, you want to have at least one, and I would say more than one, big button on your home page that says, "Donate Now," or "Donate," or "Give." I think there are a lot of organizations who mess up right at the beginning by using soft language like, "Support Us," or "Join us," or "Help us."

I've done a zillion usability tests and I promise you, users don't know what that means. They know what "Donate" means, they know what "Give" means and that's the word that's in their mental image when they come to your website. Your challenge with the came-to-give people is to get them to the form.

Ideally, they're going to see a big "Donate Now" button and they're going to click it and they're going to go straight to the form—no sales pitch, no landing page that says, "Here are the 15 different ways to give." Get them to the form. This is a very task-oriented group of folks. I have had focus groups where online donors, particularly after disasters, have said, "Yes, I

was going to give to this group, but I thought the giving process was complicated,” or “the page was slow loading,” or “They wanted my phone number,” or something like that, “so I went and gave to the other group.”

They can be a little impatient, so closing the deal quickly is the challenge with them. As I said, the giving form itself is very important. In the commercial sector, it’s been well established that every piece of information you ask for cuts down the number of people who actually complete the form.

We’ve seen, by our own studies and other studies that people like Katya have done, that a very high percentage of people who begin the giving process never finish it. Some of that has to do with the design of the form. I think Network for Good forms are really good. A lot of other forms tend to ask for too much information.

Don’t ask for a phone number unless there’s some compelling reason. Don’t ask for a fax number. Don’t ask for any information that you can’t argue you’re going to use on your form or you will be encouraging these came-to-give people not to complete the deal. I could talk all day about landing forms and it’s a particularly hot-button issue for me.

I’ll stop there. Only ask for the information you need. Make sure there’s a sentence on your form about your privacy and email use policy and leave it at that. If you’re a four-star charity on Charity Navigator, that would also be a good thing for your donate form just to remind them that your money’s going to be well spent.

The second group of people, whom we sometimes call the Looky-Lous; these are the people who aren’t going to donate online. They’re not necessarily going to donate online. They want to be sold. They want to be seduced. They want to be reassured that you are the organization they want to give money to or that that great letter they got in the mail from the celebrity is really on the level and that you really are that cool.

Because these tend to be offline donors, meaning the gift will come in via check, they may be a little bit older. They may be a little bit less web savvy, so they need a little bit of hand holding. This is tricky; it’s not always obvious where to go to get the kind of information they’re looking for.

One thing you want to think about is how you’re going to get them from your home page to a page where the kind of information they’re looking for is displayed in a very simple and easy way. What I’m going to do first is tell you what they want to know, because they always say they want to

know the same things, and then we'll talk about different options for getting them there.

This is your case for giving online. It should, in one page—I'll direct you to CARE USA as an example of an organization that does this exceptionally well—you want to establish your organization's vision, a little bit about where the money's going and where the money is coming from. People who are potential donors always are concerned about whether their money's being used efficiently.

That is even more true than it used to be as Baby Boomers replace their parents as donors. If you have any kind of good stewardship badges of honor—if you're a four-star charity, if *Money* magazine has recommended you, anything like that—that's a very important form of third-party validation. A couple of concrete, recent accomplishments to show that there really are concrete, real outcomes of your work in the past year.

While you can link to your annual report, and most organizations do, a lot of these people are not going to sit still for loading a PDF. They may or may not have Adobe Acrobat on their computers. What you don't want to do is hide your case for giving in a PDF file. It's really easy to save your annual report as a PDF and throw it on your site, but that is not accomplishing your goal.

That is not establishing your case for giving for these people. You want it in very simple HTML text and HTML graphics. That's what needs to be on the page. As I said, it's very achievable. CARE USA, among others, does it. How to get them there—in various task tests we've done, the most common button that is on most non-profits where people will click is “About Us.”

The other place they will click is “Donate,” but you want that “Donate” button to go to a form. If you have a button that says, “Why give to your charity,” they will click that. Most organizations don't have that as a major button or as a major click option on the home page. I would recommend it. “Why give,” “Why donate to us,” “Why your money is a great charitable investment,” and take them from there to your case for giving.

I would recommend that your case for giving page also be linked from your “About Us” section because there is a certain number of people who are going to click that as well. If you have great third-party testimonials, use them, particularly if they're people you think your target audience is going to recognize.

That's the two pass ways that you really want to establish clearly for your two audiences—the came-to-give people and the Looky-Lous. I want to

talk a little bit about your home page, because your home page is where these people are going to be starting. You're not only going to want to help them complete their task, you're going to want to accomplish a couple of other things with your home page.

Your home page, as I said, is often the first impression that your organization is going to make with donors. One of the things that you're going to want to do is establish your brand on your home page and to do it in a way that is emotionally compelling. Most giving decisions are emotionally based. I'm going to say that again because it's so important. Most giving decisions are emotionally based and you need to echo that emotion, that passion, back to people and you need to do it in a very efficient way.

You can use visuals. You can use simple language. I didn't make this up and I have nothing to do with it. There's a website called WebPagesThatSuck.com. This is a guy named Vincent Flanders and he has been tracking bad usability for, I don't know, 10 or 11 years and he has identified the worst web design errors of the last 15 years.

His number-two error—and I'm going to read this word for word because it really applies to non-profits and in fact he points out that non-profits are particularly guilty of this—is this: A man from Mars can't figure out what your website is about in less than four seconds. He goes on to say, "You should be able to look at the home page of any site and figure out what the site is about within four seconds. If you can't, the site is a failure."

I wouldn't go so far to say your site is a failure if people can't figure out what you're about in four seconds, but I'd say that as fund raisers your work is a lot harder if you're not establishing your brand in about four seconds, or maybe 10. What I mean by establishing your brand is establishing who you are and what you do and how you're different from other organizations that might be doing the same kind of work you're doing and establishing some kind of emotional connection with your audience.

Maybe that takes more than four seconds. I can tell you, the right imagery can do it one. I know you're going to ask me for specific examples of that during the Q and A. I'm going to mull that over as we go along. Moving from the broad to the specific, there is a set of things that every home page should have.

If you look at your home page, there's a good chance that you don't because these are mistakes that are commonly made and can be cheaply corrected. The first is every home page, and I would argue every page of your website, should have your postal mail address. It is one of the most

common complaints we hear from donors that they have to fish around a site.

They want to mail in a check and they have to dig around to get your address. I would also say your phone number for two reasons. One is they may want to call with questions and they may want to talk to a major-gifts officer. The other—this is interesting and I never could have predicted this—I have had people in focus groups say on numerous occasions that the presence of a phone number reassures them that the charity is real, that it's a real place.

It's purely psychological. I've never had anyone say they called the phone number to see if someone picks up. More than once or twice they've said, "Well, if I see the phone number, I know that they're going to be accountable. I know that there's someone I can call." What else should be on your home page?—an email signup.

You may not close the deal, in terms of donations, on this person's first visit. If you inspire them somehow, you might be able to get their email address and then you can use email marketing over time to convert them to donors. You want to have a guessable web address if at all possible. Web addresses that are either obscure or initials that people don't know are going to hobble your work because guessing the URL is one of the most common ways that people search.

They're going to guess the URL and then if that doesn't work then they might go to Google. The Google conversation, that's a whole other thing we can do another day. As I said earlier, you want at least one and I would say multiple buttons that say, "Give," or "Donate." There are some reasonably predictable patterns that people use to scan a site, but not everyone scans the site the same way.

It's now beyond debate that if you have more than one "Donate" button on your home page you will get more traffic to your form. All things being equal, more traffic to your form means more guests. You want blaze a trail for those fundraising researchers, for the Looky-Lous, either via the "About Us" section or ideally via the "About Us" section and a "Why Give" button.

Those are your home page and website must-dos. I want to talk a little bit about usability fundamentals beyond that and things you can do. Again, these are no-cost things you can do to make a better first impression and to make a better case for giving. The first usability best practice that is, I would say, universally violated in the non-profit world is too many words.

You've heard this a million times: people skim websites, they don't read websites. Somehow we just don't believe that's true for us and so we put up very verbose descriptions and mission statements and vision statements and long explanations of what we do and how we do it and why we do it. Somehow we're sure that we're the exception to the rule.

I promise you, none of us are the exception to the rule. They're still skimming. If they're not seeing what they're looking for by skimming, they're going to give up on you and they're going to move on. Steve Krug says, "The best metaphor for writing web copy is a billboard. You're going down the highway at 60 miles an hour, how much text are you going to put on that billboard as the car goes by?"

I think that's a good place to start. I think it's much easier to get in trouble having too much text than to have too little text. There are some established conventions now for navigating around websites. You want to obey those conventions because people are coming to you with some pretty established expectations about how they're going to be able to get around.

I'm going to go through these a little bit quickly. As I said, you'll get them in writing. Every page of your website should identify who you are, should identify your organization. I promise you, you have at least one page or section on your website where that's not the case. You want to make sure there's a link to the home page on every page of your website.

You want to make sure that your logo, if it's on every page, is clickable and takes you to the home page, because that is what they're going to do to try to get to your home page. You want to make sure there's a "Search" box or a search function. You want to put that in the upper right-hand corner, because that's where they're going to look.

Ideally, you want to put a blank box where they can put their search terms in because that's what tells a user that that's where the search is. About half of users use the "Search" box to try to find what they're looking for and about half click around browsing through the site trying to find what they're looking for.

This is another way you need to blaze multiple trails to the same destination. Every page should have a "Donate" button. Every page should have a "Contact Us" button. Every page should have your address, as I said. The other thing, and it's an extremely common mistake and easily fixed, is people expect images to be clickable, so make your images clickable.

Also, for the technical among you, there should be alt language in the images so that when you mouse over the image you see the alt text language and it gives you some clue where you're going to go. It's also good for people with disabilities who may be using readers to navigate your site. Although it doesn't matter where you take people with the images, but they expect to go somewhere.

I would say, all things being equal, take them to your case for giving or take them to your donate form. The fourth meta-principle that I laid out earlier was experimentation. The reason I say experimentation is a really important element of your usability practices because no two organizations are exactly alike.

No two donor populations are exactly alike. There are going to be ways in which you're a little bit different. You're not going to be different in that your donors expect a "Search" button in the lower right instead of the upper right, but they may be different in where they expect to find certain content or what content they're looking for, or even at the margins what kind of information is going to help impel them to become donors or at least join your email list and become potential donors.

The answer to resolving all those little uncertainties is testing. I don't mean hiring a firm like us or hiring a formal usability firm. I'm talking about testing that you all can do. In the business, it's often called mother-in-law testing because you use your mother-in-law as a test subject. The reality is that most usability testing can be successfully accomplished with three or four subjects who are reasonable approximations of your target audience.

You don't need to test it on your donors or people who you've scientifically determined are your prospects. Spouses will do. Colleagues will do. The trick is to do two things. The trick is to do a set of tests which Steve Krug calls the trunk test. This goes back to the "Web Pages That Suck four-second usability principle."

That is if you were metaphorically locked in the trunk of a car and driven around somebody's website and then you popped out of the trunk, how quickly could they figure out what site they're on, what the site's major sections are, what it is you do, what kind of navigation options you have, and how to get home.

That's pretty easy to do. Just pull up a page and ask the person to answer those questions while you sit there and watch them. Obviously, you don't want to tell them, "I'm going to take you to the "Donate" section of our website." In this test, you might want to have someone who's a little bit further away than the next cubicle or the next office.

You can learn a lot about where people are getting confused and what little things you can do that are going to make the site a lot easier to navigate around. If you're redesigning your site, if you're looking at new designs, doing this very early in the process is going to be more useful than doing it later in the process.

Doing it with paper prototypes, doing it with just print outs of the design, is a perfectly accepted way to do it. You just need to get three or four folks who are not overly familiar with the site and overly familiar with the process, slap it down in front of them and ask them those questions. "What site is this? What page am I on? What are the major sections? What are my navigation options? How do I get home?"

The other kind of testing, and it's probably more important from a fundraising point of view, is called task testing. Task testing is incredibly easy to do. You get the same four people. In this case, they can be your colleagues as long as they're from the finance department or not from IT or not particularly web-centric.

Sit them down at a Google screen or sit them down at a blank screen and say, "I want you to go through the process of making a donation and I want you to talk out loud about where you are and what you're clicking and why you're clicking it and where you're getting stuck and where you have questions.

You do that with three or four people. Again, you're just going to learn a ton about the language you're using for navigation options, whether things should be in big text or small text, whether or not they can find the "Donate" button—you'll be surprised how often they can't, unfortunately—and what they expect to see that they don't see or do see.

I would do that through your donate page. The other task I would do is give them a hypothetical. "You just read a really great article about your organization in the paper and you're thinking about making a gift and your checkbook's in front of you and you want to know whether this is really an on-the-level organization and the kind of organization that they would want to support," and have them go through the process of exploring your site to make the decision.

Again, get them to talk out loud. "What am I seeing? Where am I going? What's drawing my eye? What do I like? What do I not like," and sit there and take notes. Either of these sets of usability tests, the Steve Krug trunk test or task tests can be accomplished in an afternoon and can really yield up a total wealth of information.

I was going to talk for 40 minutes, but I'm kind of running out of canned material to say. The good news for you is that that gives us an extra minute or two to answer questions. I'm getting thumbs up that questions are coming in, so I'm going to give the phone to Katya.

Katya: Thank you, Mark. Here's a great question for you from Gary, which sort of gets to the heart of the theme you've been hitting today, which is putting a focus on the user and the donor. He wants to know: "Should you recognize donors in some way on your website or home page? How would you incorporate, within your website content, what donors you have or any kind of angle related to the donor?"

Mark: That's a great question and I think the short answer is yes. It reminds me that I really didn't go into much detail about the authenticity issue. I think another common mistake that organizations make is that they try to be very institutional in their communications. The reality is, the more people perceive you as a passionate group of talented people trying to accomplish an important goal, the more they're going to feel a personal connection to you.

The flip side of that is, the more you make the donor audience human and real and not just a database, the more that's going to inspire other donors to give as well. The one caveat obviously in recognizing donors is you need to get their permission, but having a donor recognition page or even a thank-you box on your home page that says, "We want to thank the people who have given to us in the past week," is a terrific idea.

It's something that NPR does all the time during their semi-annual beg-a-thons, and they do most things right in their semi-annual beg-a-thons. So I would say, if you can, yes; just get their permission first.

Katya: Jack Miller from Africa Jack—I recognize you from an earlier call—has a really good question: "I feel like I have a good representation of the four—clarity, passion, experimentation and authenticity." He's been a Network for Good customer and a DonateNow customer for a couple months.

He started with the level of donations set rather high at \$100 and recently lowered them. He also feels he has what every home page needs except for the postal mail and phone number, which I think you're probably going to add after hearing from Mark on this call. But he's saying, "I'm not getting any donations. What can I do about that? How can I increase it?"

He has a website designer recommending his main page as a blog, for example, and he's questioning some of that authority. Maybe you can talk

about how if you feel like you're getting it right on your home page but people coming there aren't converting, what might be the problem?

Mark: It is a great question and I'm not being political when I say we could spend the next six hours talking about it. I think we need to deconstruct your problem a little bit. In other words, are you getting tons of traffic to the site but not to the Donate page? If you're getting tons of traffic to the site and not to the Donate page, then you've got navigation issues on your home page or on the landing page that people are coming in from.

If you're getting a lot of traffic to the site and to the Donate page, but you're not getting a lot of gifts, you've got landing page issues around the Donate page. The Donate page is a landing page. Sorry to be confusing about that. You want to look at whether you're asking for too much information or whether there are other navigational problems with the page.

Often, you can increase the completion rate by taking out any intermediate pages between the Donate button and the Donate page itself. One of the ways organizations stumble is by offering too many choices. Giving fewer choices almost always ends up with more gifts. If you're not getting traffic to your site to begin with, if people aren't coming to the site or the Donate page, that's a marketing issue.

You hopefully can find a lot of resources on Network for Good on best practices for marketing. I would send you to Katya's blog first and foremost for good advice on that. It really is a very long conversation. I would start with Katya's blog and book also, and take it from there. It's really about harnessing all of the PR and marketing that you're doing already and making sure you're advertising the online option as thoroughly as possible.

The last thing is, in terms of having your blog as the home page, I think it's an intriguing idea and I will confess that our blog is our home page, so I obviously don't hate the idea. We're not trying to get online donations, but from an authenticity point of view and an immediacy point of view and really putting a human face on your organization, it's something really cool to think about. I don't know if it's right or wrong. We might have to test it.

Katya: By the way, if you're interested in reading my blog, it's at NonProfitMarketingBlog.com. Under blogroll you'll find a link to Mark's blog. Getting the heart of having a lot of options, which is something that just came up, Jennifer writes, "As part of the web re-design process that my organization is undergoing, I'm thinking about having a tailored pitch to each program page with a link to the DonateNow page. Would you

recommend doing this in addition to having a consolidated pitch on a Why Give page?”

Mark: I'm going to give you an answer other than “it depends,” but the reality is if you ask three experts you're going to get three different answers, so take it with a grain of salt. There is a book that came out recently that had an enormous influence on my thinking, called *The Paradox of Choice*, the basic premise of which is the more options you give people and the more different directions you send people, the more likely you are to confuse them and actually create anxiety and send them away.

So if you are an organization that is doing three or four different kinds of things, but they're pretty clearly united under a single umbrella...an example is the ACLU. They have 20 different programs but they're all united around the idea of protecting civil liberties, particularly people's first amendment rights. If your programs are unitable under a single umbrella, pick one program and sell it for three to six months and see how you do.

If that does well, continue to sell it until it peters out. The example I'll give you from the commercial sector is that Colgate has about 20,000 different kinds of toothpaste but all they ever market is Total. I think it's much easier to get in trouble going too general and too broad than it is to be very deep and precise, particularly if you can build your case for giving around a story or a narrative.

I hope that's helpful. As I said, I'm guessing you'll get different answers from different people and you might have to experiment. I would say focus would be better.

Katya: Here's a question from Rebecca who is trying to focus but contending with her organization. She says, “Hi, Mark. Great training. My question is how do you balance the competing needs of departments within the organization on the website? If we have a Donate button on every page, will advocacy expect an Action button on every page? There is also a question of balancing different audiences—some are donors, some are activists or government officials. Just looking for your thoughts. Thanks.”

Debbie asks, “We're an advocacy group and our program folks feel that the website should educate and inform about our advocacy projects and campaigns. How to get them to understand that we can make money from the website too? We have conflicts about the home page.” Those are two similar questions.

Mark: These are very common, larger-organization questions too because every department obviously wants to be heard from in the web design process.

The big answer, unfortunately, is there really needs to be leadership within your organization to make sure that the organization is presenting a unified, coherent and compelling face forward.

A webpage that powerfully establishes your brand is going to be the rising tide that lifts all boats. So the point of unity really ought to be that four-second Martian test. Can I make a forceful case for who I am and what I'm all about? If you accomplish that, you're halfway home as fund raisers.

In terms of being in an organization that has a culture that sees fundraising as dirty or somehow less worthy than public education, other than going to your development director or CEO and saying, "We're leaving money on the table. Are we really making an organizational decision to leave that money on the table" I think that's probably your best way forward. It's such a common frustration and I wish I had a quick and easy answer for it. Be a squeaky wheel and make sure you've got as big a seat at the table as you can.

Katya: A couple people asked about tools, some asked specifically about Network for Good tools and about percentage of fees and all that information. We have a lot of information at NetworkforGood.org/npo. We have a free donation product called Basic DonateNow, as well as another called Custom DonateNow.

Basic DonateNow can be set up in about 15 minutes and it routes donations through Network for Good and then you can log on and see who the donors are. We send you an electronic funds transfer monthly or a check in the mail if you prefer. We also have a Custom product where we build a page that looks exactly like your site and you can specify what's on it. That's \$30 a month with a small setup fee.

I think in listening to Mark today, you'll see that it's nice to have some control over what that page looks like. After the call, you'll be getting follow-up emails with links and more information on the products, fees, rates, as well as some coupons so be on the lookout for those.

Margie is writing to ask, "Please say more, Mark, about how to evoke emotion on the home page with imagery, et cetera."

Mark: The short answer is powerful photography and giving a lot of real estate to it. Again, I'll point to CARE USA as an example of a site that does that particularly well. I think the YWCA.org, at least at one point, had a very powerful website. Obviously we're in the business of solving problems and giving some tutorial depiction to our problem, whether it's poverty,

deforestation or global warming, some depiction of the problem has a place in your overall case for giving.

It's not necessarily inspirational to see a wretched, fly-covered child or a deforested hillside. What you really want to do with that big image is inspire people and connect people with what you're all about and what your vision is. I would say to use a big, beautiful photograph that really reflects your brand is the simple way to do it.

The next way is more complicated but worth considering if you have the money—a very simple, Flash slideshow. A really great one is at SanDiegoZoo.org. It's a really gorgeous, compelling slide show. They just use the Flash to make a nicer transition between the images. I'm not a big fan of introductory Flash movies and things that get on top of our website. They're going to be especially annoying to people who are coming to accomplish a specific task. But either a big image or a very nicely done slide show would be my vote for the best way to evoke emotion.

Katya: I've got a couple questions that are related about balancing the needs of different audiences which is always a common theme for those of us who do have different audiences. Jennifer wants to know: "How do you balance web content for donors versus content for the people looking for the services we provide?"

There's related question from [Yuri] that says: "All these pieces of advice are terrific. Schools are different from other organizations like Red Cross, et cetera, where the sites used by parents or a child for information is not visited as much for random giving, not tied to a child somehow. Do the pieces of advice about multiple Donate buttons still apply?"

Mark: It's a particular challenge for organizations where the website is actually carrying out part of the job of the organization, like the ones you've mentioned or Covenant House or someone like that, and you do need to be mindful of providing navigation options so that the third audience that we didn't talk about, people who come without fundraising in mind, can find what they need.

In fact, you as fund raisers have an enormous incentive to make sure that everybody who comes to your organization's site finds what they're coming for and finds what they need because those satisfied customers are going to talk about you, may end up being donors, and are going to help build your brand.

The more different, disparate audiences that your home page needs to address, the more you need to think about moving to more of a gateway kind of home page, so you can get donors to the Donate sections and

parents to the Parent section and students to the section where they can download their applications.

I think schools have a particularly hard job and in fact, in the “Web Pages that Suck” section list of the worst websites of all time, a very prominent, very prestigious Ivy League university has made the top five four years in a row, and I think it speaks to the difficulty of carrying this off. What you can do on your home page is yes, have multiple Donate buttons, but also be mindful that you need to be a train station and get people to the sections that are relevant to them. If they’re not coming to give, get them to the content.

Katya: Sarah wants to know: “Mark, what do you do if your organization is really wonky? How do you achieve some of the things you are talking about today?”

Mark: Some of my favorite clients are as wonky as they come. The same rules apply—if you’re a wonky environmental group, you can still have the gorgeous sunset photos and the sweet polar bear photos and that’s what’s going to move people to give. It may very well be that the content and the meat of your organization is wonky, but the vision is going to have an emotional component to it that you need to speak to.

You don’t want to hide the fact that what your organization does is wonky; that’s part of the authenticity challenge. But you can really balance that out with the right kind of imagery.

Katya: Here’s a question from Debbie: “Along the lines of folks feeling more comfortable if a phone number is included on the web, what about a street address versus just a PO box. I know some folks are wary of sending to a PO box and feel better seeing an actual street address.”

Mark: Great point. I would be wary of putting a PO box on the bottom and I think in terms of establishing your bona fides and establishing your legitimacy, a real street address is going to be much more effective.

Katya: Rebecca says, “Hi, Mark. We’re a small, national professional membership organization and have not done fund raising. In your experience, do donors outside of an association normally make donations? If so, any suggestions on how we should go about developing the DonateNow Part of our website and marketing it to our membership?”

Mark: Honestly, I can’t think of an example and I’m going to ask Katya if she can, where people outside of a professional association would be motivated to give. I know a couple of major labor unions, and that’s kind

of analogous, who have gone down that path, but I don't think they've been very successful.

Katya: In terms of people outside of the organization wanting to give, no, I think your best bet is trying to get people outside to be members and to see some value, after which they donate over time. We get a lot of questions from membership organizations that are trying to fundraise or show value to members. I just want to throw one concept out there.

A lot of non-profit membership associations, the websites that I see, take a pretty closed approach, like "Join and then you can come to our meetings and save \$50," or, "Join and you can get access to this premium content." I know online, I can find so many great things free. When someone makes me do something like that, I just skip over it and go find it somewhere else.

So I would encourage you to work on showing value by putting a lot of stuff out there free. "Be relentlessly generous" is a phrase I like to use. Keep putting stuff out there and people start liking you and wanting to support you and wanting to be a member.

It sounds counterintuitive, but look at the public radio model for example. You can turn on your radio, you don't have to give, but you do appreciate the content and they're wonderful at guiltting you into supporting them a couple times a year as a result.

There's a question here from Denny who says, "Could Mark speak to the donation form, like a final page that confirms the donor's donation was received and they should be receiving a confirmation email." I can tell you that if you use Network for Good, we take care of a lot of the receiving for you but, Mark, could you talk about that more generally?

Mark: It's a really great question and I should have addressed it in the main talk, so I'm really glad you brought it up. If someone walked in to your office and handed you a check for \$1 million, you would not write them out a receipt and say, "Thank you. Have a nice day." You'd probably give them a big hug or the emotional equivalent.

They're making an emotional connection with you and you want to reinforce that connection. You've got two immediate opportunities to do that. One is that finish screen that pops up after the donation is processed, and absolutely you want the receipt information there so they can print it out and put it in their records.

In addition to that, you want a few well-chosen words of thanks and how they've made a difference and they've joined a group of committed

individuals who are doing great things. You want to make them feel good about what they just did. To the extent that you can customize the auto-responder email that they get, you want to do exactly the same thing.

Maybe you want to go a step further and tell a story or say, “You have joined the ranks of donors like Mary Smith, who...” and then tell her story. It’s a very important, emotional moment for the donor and the more you reinforce it, the more likely you are to get the second and third gifts after that. Thank you very much for bringing that up.

Katya: There are a few people who wrote in to say how much they love *Don’t Make Me Think*, who are fans. I want to mention also, Michael wrote in to recommend yet another book, I don’t know if you’re familiar with it, Mark. It’s called *The Design of Sites: Patterns for Creating Winning Websites* by Douglas K. van Duyne, James A. Landay and Jason I. Hong. So that’s another recommendation.

There’s a question from Alicia that says, “We’re the young, US branch of a large, international NGO. Right now our site can be accessed through a drop-down on the main, international site, as well as through its own URL. We’re looking to redo the site and I’m wondering about branding. Should we try to make the US site have its own, strong identity, or would we be better off keeping the site looking like the international site? What is best to eliminate confusion?”

Mark: This is one of those pesky “it depends” answers. If the international site has the best URL, for example Amnesty International, the international secretariats site in London is Amnesty.org, and the US site is AmnestyUSA.org. In that case, a huge amount of traffic that is destined for the US organization begins with people guessing the URL at the international site.

If that is the case, then you want to maintain a high level of family resemblance to the international site. If you have a distinct URL and the fact that you are part of an international network is not critical to your mission, then coming up with a branding scheme or an identity that is tailored for US donors is probably going to be the best way to go.

I worked for many years at World Wildlife Fund, where we were the US chapter of an international network and I have to say, there were some distinct differences in the kind of language and way that we would want to present ourselves, vis-à-vis our international partner organizations.

If none of those caveats are in place—if they don’t have the good URL and your being part of that network is not critical—then I would consider

going my own way. Unless their site's really great, in which case you're just as well off to piggyback off what they've done.

Katya: I got a few questions on how to set up a donation form. I want to recommend Network for Good for that. This isn't a sales call, but we can set that up for you very easily and we'll be following up with you on that. There are some questions about updating. "How do I convince my management that we need to be updating our website regularly?"

Someone else is wondering if they're updating it too much. Gina says, "Our home page currently has rotating photos. Every time the home page is opened, a different picture shows up. Does this mess with the branding of our organization?" She also wondered, "What's the best way to handle the need for content to be in two languages."

We had some other questions on languages which are probably enough for a whole other teleconference. Mark, could you hit the questions about updating, rotating photos and how fresh your content needs to be, and then maybe a comment or two on dealing with multiple languages?

Mark: The most common way to handle multiple languages, if you've got French or Spanish-language content, that there's a big link toward the top that says "en Español" or "en Français" or whatever the second language is, and take them to a parallel website. That is the standard best practice that I have seen and I think it works perfectly well.

In terms of rotating photos, you should look at every image that's up and ask how well it conveys your brand, how well does it convey what's powerfully compelling about you and what makes you different? I have a colleague that's spent a lot of time looking at the visual brand identity of our client organizations because it's so important.

I would say, if your rotating photos are all on-brand and equally compelling, I see no harm in their rotating. In terms of updating content, there is nothing more off-putting than obviously out-of-date content. You're killing yourself if you've got an invite to a dinner or meeting that has already happened. I would say that is a "house on fire" usability issue.

If you just haven't changed the "blah, blah," the "who we are and what we do" in a while, if there's no evidence that people are bored of it and if your traffic isn't dropping off, et cetera, it's not broken. I promise you, you're going to get bored of your own content long before your audience gets bored of it. Your boredom really doesn't matter; it's your audience's boredom that matters. Obviously, outdated content is lethal, otherwise have a compelling, strategic reason for updating the content and images.

Katya: I want to thank Mark so much for taking the time to join us. I think we all benefited. I know I was scribbling notes myself! It's always good to be reminded of these basics. I think we need to go back and work on the NetworkforGood.org/npo home page. Thanks, Mark, for that.

We are delighted you all could join us. We do these Non-Profit 911 calls monthly and we hope Mark will join us again in the future. I do some of them and we'll be bringing in some of our favorite experts in the field who are wonderful presenters and have great content for you. Again, we will be sending you the audio, a written transcript, and lots of follow-ups so you'll be hearing from us again.

We would love to hear from you on how all of this pans out, so if you have some big successes after this call or if you're still struggling, let us know. Thanks again for joining us. Everyone here at Network for Good really appreciates you taking this time to be here.

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