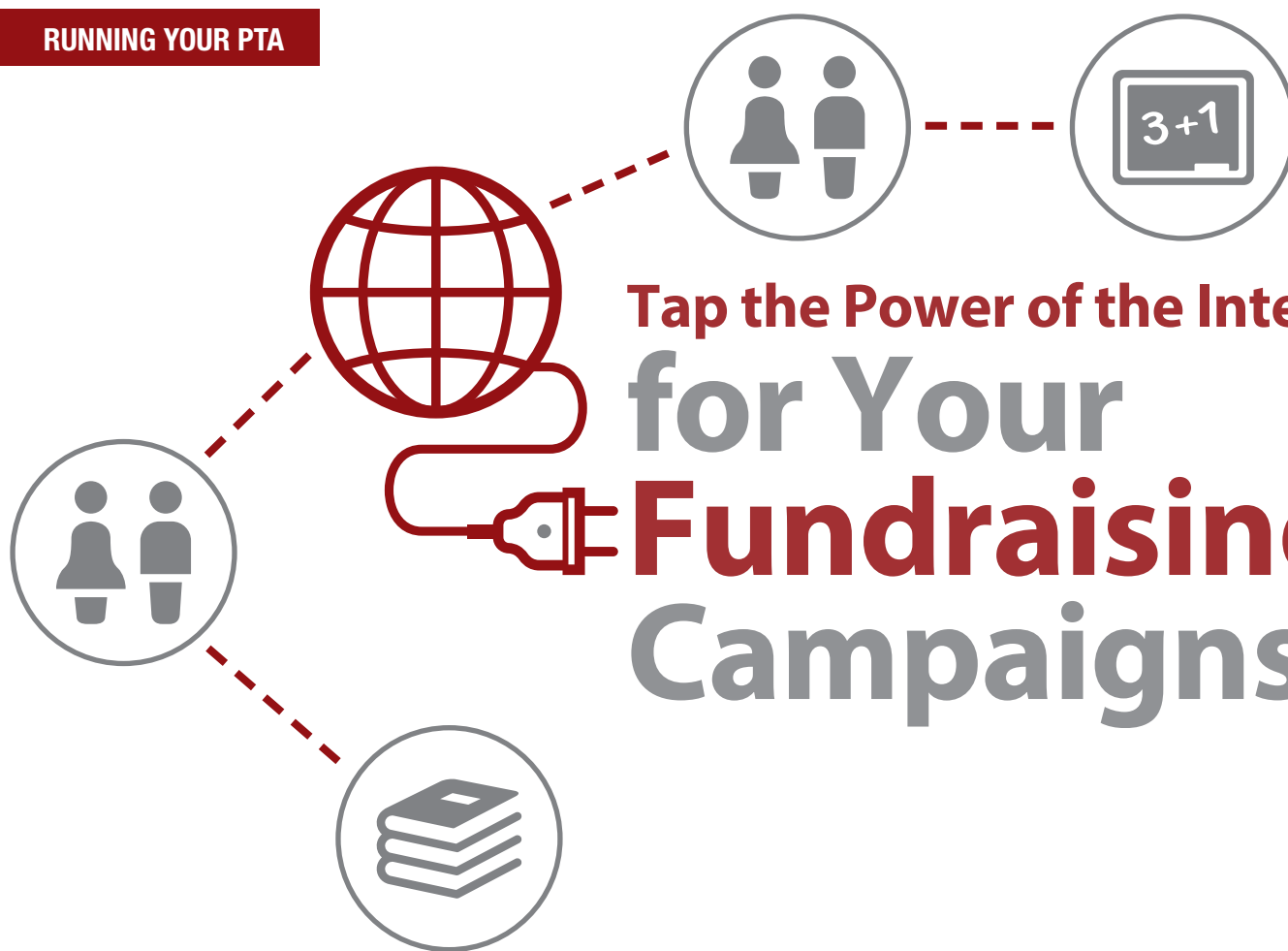




Tap the Power of the Internet for Your Fundraising Campaigns

By Tom Dawkins

It is a very exciting time if you want to make a difference in your community. Just as online tools are connecting school communities, so, too, are the ways of raising the funds for grassroots projects changing. Over the past 10 years, increasingly sophisticated tools have been developed to assist with the process of raising money online. Your choice of tools will depend on the nature of your project and your tax-exempt status.

When Manor High School English teachers Cody Pruitt, Joshua Wyrzten, Daniel Nettles, and history teacher Randy Mathisen, met for the first time, they discovered they shared many of the same challenges and frustrations but also the same passion for and belief in the power of education. They wanted to do more than just talk among themselves—they wanted to make a difference for their school and for all teachers by connecting through social media to share stories, advice, lesson plans, and more. Thus, the Four Teachers Project was born.

The system the teachers wanted to build would cost money, but they didn't want to wait to get their tax deductible 501(c)3 status, a process that could take up to two years. They also felt that an effort such as this had to come from the grassroots, from teachers like them, rather than being pushed by the administration.

They decided to try crowdfunding, a new approach that offers donors a gamelike experience, with pledges being collected only if the project reaches its funding goal by a certain deadline. Their efforts were rewarded with \$5,358 contributed by 69 supporters, sufficient for them to begin building The Desk, a community for teachers to share ideas, teaching tools, best practices, and proven models for how to be successful in the classroom.

Crowdfunding is a newer method to raise funds that has come to great prominence through the huge growth of Kickstarter, which processed just under \$100 million last year. While Kickstarter specializes in creative projects like film or CD production and does not accept charity fundraisers, IndieGoGo allows all types of projects and StartSomeGood is focused on nonprofit and social good initiatives.

What makes crowdfunding different from the first generation of fundraising sites is that it does not discriminate on the basis of organization type. You can represent a registered charity, a nonprofit association, a for-profit business, or a group of volunteers, so long as you meet the other criteria of the particular website. The other difference is that crowdfunding creates a more gamelike dynamic which has been shown to be very successful in getting people involved and excited. Crowdfunding campaigns must be for specific projects and last a limited amount of time. In some instances, you must hit your fundraising goal, or a part of it, before you will receive any of the funds pledged.

If you are part of a US-registered 501(c)3 charity, which PTAs in good standing normally are, then you can use sites like Causes, Razoo, and Crowdrise, all of which support organization and personal fundraising pages. To succeed on these sites, you should have a clear goal and a powerful story supported with videos and photos that you can share with your supporter base to promote it through their social networks.

For public school teachers looking to raise funds for classroom projects, DonorsChoose is one of the earliest and most successful crowdfunding sites, having distributed \$86 million to more than 210,000 projects since 2000.

So what do you need to know to successfully launch your own initiative?

1. Fundraising is about storytelling, about sharing a story of a better future and inviting people to be a part of making that future happen.
2. Don't wait until you're fundraising to share your story! Get out there and tell people about it now, build your networks on Twitter and Facebook, create an e-mail list, write a blog. The more people you have already engaged when you do launch your fundraising campaign, the easier it will be to encourage their donations.
3. Video is the most powerful way to share a story and is mandatory for some crowdsourcing sites, like StartSomeGood. If you don't have experience producing videos, don't let that stop you! Authenticity is much more important than production values; people mainly want to get a sense of the people behind a project and connect with their passion for the project. A simple recording to a webcam or mobile phone often will do the trick.
4. Crowdfunding campaigns offer rewards to supporters; different levels of giving bring more and better rewards. Rewards can range from thank-you cards and invitations to events to handmade objects or recognition on a donors wall. The more creative and unique, the better!
5. With only a limited amount of time to reach your goals, you want to start strong right out of the gate to give yourself the best chance to build momentum. Line up some supporters before you launch and have them make pledges on day 1. As you progress toward your goal, people will see your project as increasingly credible and worth supporting.
6. Fundraising takes work! At the end of the day fundraising is always about getting out there and asking people to support your vision.

Good luck! Creating a better future for schools, school kids, and our communities will take all of us. So ask yourself: what good to you want to start? Then get out there and make it happen!

Tom Dawkins is the cofounder of StartSomeGood.com, a crowdfunding platform for social good initiatives. Follow him on Twitter at www.twitter.com/tomjd or send him an e-mail at hello@startsomegood.com.



Online fundraising options

Crowdfunding sites

Causes (www.causes.com) began life as an app on Facebook and is now a standalone fundraising site. It requires 501(c)3 status. Charities keep whatever they raise, minus a donation processing fee.

Crowdrise (www.crowdrise.com) requires 501(c)3 status and is focused on supporting personal fundraising campaigns, such as when someone runs a marathon on behalf of a charity.

IndieGoGo (www.indiegogo.com) is an uncensored crowdfunding site that accepts all sorts of projects. Funds are “keep what you raise.”

Kickstarter (www.kickstarter.com) is limited to projects involving the creative arts; charitable causes are not eligible. You receive the donations only if you reach your funding goal, and you need to offer some type of reward for donors. Kickstarter is open to U.S. residents over the age of 18 who satisfy Amazon payment requirements.

Razoo (www.razoo.com) enables you to create a fundraising campaign and accept donations on your site or Facebook page. Limited to 501(c)3s, Razoo charges 2.9 percent of funds received. Razoo supplies fundraising pages, social media tools, and ways of processing donations.

StartSomeGood (www.startsomegood.com) is a crowdfunding site for social good-projects. It allows all types of organizations to raise money for social-good projects and funds projects that reach all or a predetermined portion of their fundraising goal.

Fundraising widgets and platforms

ChipIn (www.chipin.com) uses a fundraising widget—essentially a donate button—that can be placed on blogs or social media pages. The widget allows you to track your progress. Anyone can sign up for free, but you need a Paypal account. Fees begin at 2.5 percent of donations.

Givezooks! (www.givezooks.com) enables you to create custom fundraisers that help you ask family and friends for donations. Cost is \$129 a month, but you can opt for Events pricing, which starts at 2 percent per ticket.

FirstGiving (www.firstgiving.com) also provides a variety of fundraising tools across the social media spectrum at a per donation fee of 7.5 percent.

Network for Good (www.networkforgood.org) supports only 501(c)3s and is more about ongoing fundraising than time-specific projects.

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Online fundraising options

Gift shopping

CafePress (www.cafepress.com) is great for sourcing branded items you can sell or use as rewards in a crowdfunding campaign.

ChangingThePresent (www.changingthepresent.org) enables 501(c)3 nonprofits to offer nontraditional charitable gifts to raise funds. The site charges a \$100 annual fee plus 3 percent of donations and a 30-cent per transaction credit card fee.

DonorsChoose (www.donorschoose.org) allows teachers to submit funding requests for classroom supplies and equipment. Donors can visit the site to pick the requests that interest them.

Online auctions

BiddingForGood (www.biddingforgood.com) helps schools and nonprofits create, promote, and manage their online auction. They offer a web portal for shoppers to find charitable auction items, and they will even provide a few items for your auction. The price can be a little steep, though the site claims that customers earn \$6 for each \$1 spent. Annual subscription fee is \$595, and the site collects 9 percent of proceeds under \$20,000, lower percentages if more money is made.

Search engines

GoodSearch (www.goodsearch.com) enables registered U.S. nonprofits to raise money through web browser searches. Individuals download the GoodToolbar and designate your organization to receive funds for their searches, shopping at GoodShop, or eating out through GoodDining. You may net as little as a penny per search, but this can add up over time.

Google Grants (www.google.com/grants) offers free sponsored ads that appear next to related web searches to promote 501(c)3 nonprofits. You must apply for the grant and provide the suggested ad copy and keywords. When a user searches your keywords, your ad appears. The user can then click on the ad to donate to your organization.

Texting

mGive (<http://mgive.com>) allows 501(c)3 nonprofits to register and send a simple text message with a code for donations. The user then texts the code, and the donation is charged to their cellphone bill. Giving is easy, but mGive is not cheap; the least expensive option is \$349 per month with a 12-month contract.

Apps

HelpAttack! (<http://helpattack.com>) aims at using donors' online life for charitable giving. For example, they can pledge funds to your charity every time they log onto Facebook or send a tweet after downloading the HelpAttack! app. Any 501(c)3 can be included in the list of eligible charities at a 4.75 percent fee.

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