A Guide to Online Fundraising Success for Your School Basketball Team

Why Fundraise Online?

1. Online giving is growing exponentially every year, from just over a half a billion dollars in 2000, to more than $4.5 billion in 2005. (www.groundspring.org)

2. People are much more likely to turn their impulse into donations, raffle ticket purchases, or auction bids when online. The instantaneous nature of the internet promotes action by catching people in the moment. Being "close to the click" means being close to donors and dollars.

3. Online fundraising eliminates geographic borders. With the right incentive you can attract a world of potential donors outside your region.

4. People are more generous online. An email campaign launched by North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics resulted in a 20% increase in the average donation. Their overall efforts resulted in a 150% ROI. (www.bronto.com)

5. Online fundraising attracts alternative demographics. cMarket conducted a study concluding that 71% of their online bidders are women. Women are turned off by the highly competitive environment of the traditional auction, making them a highly un-represented group.

6. The internet is quickly becoming the donors medium of choice because it's quick and easy.

7. Online Fundraising is a great option for a time constrained world. The typical auction lasts 1 to 3 hours making it difficult for a lot of people to attend. An online auction generally lasts 1 to 3 weeks, creating a lot more time for bids to be posted by a lot more people.

10 Ways to Boost Your Basketball Team's Online Fundraising Dollars

Fundraising
The nature of online fundraising is very different than traditional fundraising. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind.

1. Offer Big Incentives for Big Returns
With online fundraising, you're dealing on a much larger scale. The audience is larger and more diverse but much harder to engage and coerce action from. Providing the right incentives is key. Modonna School located in San Jose, conducted a raffle with a $1.5 million, 2800-square-foot dream home as the prize. They sold 32,000 tickets at $150 each, for a total of $4.8 million. This shows just how effective an online fundraiser can be. By eliminating geographic limitations, and providing the right incentive, the rewards grow exponentially.

2. Partner With Online Fundraising Providers

To greatly expand the audience for your auctions, consider selling on Ebay Giving Works. (http://givingworks.ebay.com/) Ebay Giving Works is dedicated to non-profit and charity listings. To do this, start by signing up to MissionFish. MissionFish makes it safe and easy for nonprofits to sell on ebay. AuctionPay (www.auctionpay.com) is another resource that can help create bidding activity outside your school's local geographic range. St. Mark's School instituted AuctionPay's Online Auction Solution and managed to raise $25,000; more than one-fourth of the school's total revenue of $97,000. A bidding war even erupted between two grandmothers, one in Florida and one in California, over a lunch with the school's teacher followed by a movie at a local cinema. The item sold for $2,200. (www.nptimes.com) For raffles, RaffleSoft (www.rafflesoft.com) offers good online raffle software.

Communications
Maintaining ongoing communication with potential donors ensures they are up to date on upcoming games and fundraising events.

3. Start an email Campaign
Starting an e-mail or e-newsletter campaign is the #1 most crucial factor in the success of your online fundraiser. If people aren't informed, they won't be willing to help.   Emails should be specifically tailored to each recipient's interests. The tips provided below will make your campaign a success.

➢ *Purchase email Marketing Software*: Email marketing software will save a great deal of time and money. This software allows your donor database to be uploaded directly into an email marketing application, eliminating the need to manually upload data. Emails can be easily tailored to a recipient's interests. Emaillabs.com offers great basic email marketing software. WildApricot, Convio, GetActive, and LocalVoice are designed specifically for online fundraising and offer a handful of specialized tools general email applications do not offer.

➢ *Do Not Solicit in Initial Mailings:* The importance of not soliciting recipients with their first email cannot be emphasized enough. Initial emails should be used to gather information on the recipient needs and interests in order to provide more valuable content. There is a direct correlation between the relationships built with potential donors and the amount they will give.

➢ *Establish a Schedule for Writing and Distributing:* The whole point of an email marketing program is to hold a recipient's attention by keeping them continually informed. People will look forward to receiving your email. A set frequency should be established based on time constraints and your program's ability to produce relevant news or content.

For more information on email marketing read my article "Email Marketing for School Basketball Teams: Why and How."

4. Integrate an RSS Feed

RSS feeds allow for subscribers to be automatically updated on new content without having to check your website. New blogs, email newsletter shipments, and upcoming fundraising events should be placed on an RSS page. Doing this will greatly increase fundraiser participation. For more info on creating RSS feeds visit http://www.wilsonweb.com.

Community
Keeping people engaged with your basketball program is very critical. The more involved they are, the more they will give. A few ideas are outlined below.

5. Start School Blogs and Forums
Blogs are especially great for school basketball websites. Hearing about current basketball team issues from a coach's perspective is something that's very valuable to fans. A forum gives students, community members, parents, and faculty a place to share ideas and become involved.

6. Create Wiki Pages
A wiki page is a webpage that has the capability to be edited by website visitors. Wikipedia is the most commonly known wiki site, offering a visitor edited, free encyclopedia. Consider designing a wiki page for the basketball team. This will allow players, coaches, booster club members, staff, or whoever is involved to contribute unique pictures and stories about the team. This not only helps establish a sense of community but also informs the entire community on current basketball events. JotSpot provides a fully integrated wiki application that makes creating wiki pages a breeze.   While most wiki pages are mostly text based, JotSpot allows you to create rich web-based spreadsheets, calendars, documents and photo galleries with ease. For additional information on general wiki page creation, visit www.intersci.ss.uci.edu.

The Basics
Here are some basic tips that will help make any fundraising effort more successful.

7. Base Appeal on Benefits, Not Needs
Communicate how your basketball team and community will benefit from funds. Don't act desperate in an attempt to receive donations out of pity.

8. Provide Convenience for Donors
Give donors the convenience of paying online, over the phone, or via mail. Establishing several mediums for submitting donations, or purchasing raffle tickets, will increase the likelihood that people will participate.

9. Following up with a Thank You
Don't forget to send thank you notes to any direct donors, big raffle ticket customer, and purchasers of auction items.

10. Use Online Fundraising as a Supplement

Encourage online participation, but don't let this be the only alternative. Many people do not want to become engaged with the online process. Make sure traditional fundraising activities are still in place, they are the backbone of your fundraising efforts.

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