

Staying Ahead of the Curve

Expanding on Lessons from Paul Nazareth, VP Community Engagement, TechSoup Canada

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Changing Landscape for Nonprofits in Canada

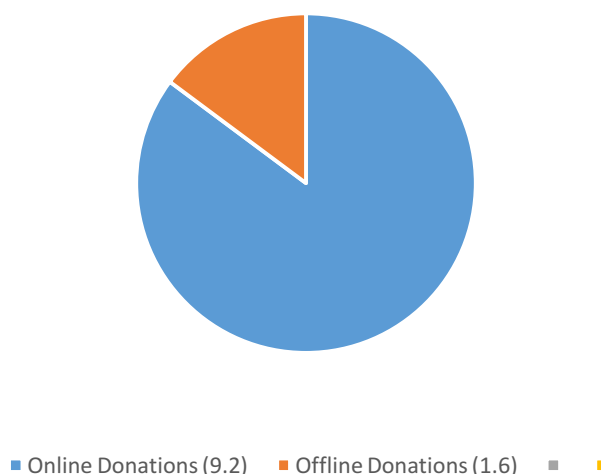
Canada continues to experience rapid changes in the way people use technology to interact. To stay ahead of the curve, it is crucial that non-profit organizations (NPOs) identify and react with moving trends. There are five key areas of focus here:

1. Mobile optimization: Make everything available and easy to view on mobile devices
2. Update the look and functionality of your website
3. Understand and capitalize on big-data collection
4. Understand and target 'Millennials' (18-32 year-olds)
5. Understand and capitalize on the shift in corporate-giving behaviour

1. Mobile Optimization

Today, most of the highest valued donors and target audiences are online using a tablet or smartphone. These devices have taken social interaction by storm and continue to change the face of connectivity. Last year, 9.4 million Canadians reported using their mobile device to access Facebook, rather than a laptop or desktop computer. For nonprofits, this is no longer about reaching twenty-year olds with cellphones, it is about desperately keeping up with mobile trends. With **only 6% of NPOs in Canada using mobile-optimized websites**, now is a time to get ahead of the curve.

2015 Donation Growth Rate (%)



2. Update the Look and Functionality of Your Website

In 2014, State of the Web Nation (Canada) conducted a study wherein **50% of nonprofit organizations stated they were ‘Ashamed’ of their websites**. The other 50% who reported an attractive and functional website enjoyed the benefits of optimized data collection, free-flowing traffic, and ample donor information. Those who fall behind the curve experience losses in donor-base, fundraising and confusing data archives. DO NOT FRET- the very nature of digital technology means catching up is as easy as falling behind.

To update the look and functionality of your website, consider how you would like to:

- A. Share your outcomes
- B. Share your impacts
- C. Convey **who** you are, **what** you stand for and **how** you succeed
- D. Clearly state how to support your mission.

Remember, donors are the lifeblood of your organization:

- A. How easily can they find your site on Google?
- B. How easily can they navigate your site?
- C. Will they find what you want them to find, or will they discover a filing cabinet of reports and backlogged information?

With the right message and enough willpower, inputting this strategy into an attractive and functional website will put the wind back in your sails.

3. Understand and Capitalize on Big-Data Collection

Much like the emerging obsession with kale, or coconut butter, big data has taken the world by storm as an antidote to many of life’s problems. While real-time data cannot tell you everything about a person, it can create an accurate picture of a target audience: What is the typical lifestyle of your donor or target group? How can this information help you acquire new donors and supporters? This kind of data can be collected and used to plan campaigns, direct social media activity and improve the overall competitiveness of your organization.

Updating and maintaining a functional Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) system is critical to this process. This is especially true if you hope to keep up with big-businesses and government bodies. Learning how to manage this information levels the playing field for NPOs and will help keep your organization well ahead of the curve.

4. Understand and Target Millennials

Millennials, also known as Generation-Y/GEN-Y (18-32 year olds) are the world’s pesky, tech-savvy, future leaders. Many people underestimate the level of growth and success this cohort can bring to their organization.

What we know about Millennials:

- A. 26% (9 million) of the Canadian population fall into this category
- B. Soon to be 50% of the North American workforce and 75% of the global workforce
- C. 51% fundraise for at least one charity

What this information tells us is that we need to reconceptualise how we think of ‘youth’. If a nonprofit organization wishes to enjoy longevity, it must appeal to millennials as the heirs of civil society. Thankfully, this group has demonstrated a passion for social causes and a willingness to volunteer. This willingness is driven by the desire to feel empowered as individuals and feel a part of real change.

It is the responsibility of your organization to capture this youth market by making your message interesting and easy to understand. Young business owners, students, and early professionals are a hot commodity. They will do their homework on your organization before supporting it. If the message is not readily available and appealing, they will find something else to support.

Capturing youth support is not a daunting task. Clearly communicating your organizations’ impacts, outputs, and vision will provide the positive feedback many young volunteers seek. **Remember, millennials have a short attention span and look for immediate results – showcase your wins.**

5. Understand and Capitalize on Shifts in Corporate-giving Behaviour

There is increasing disruption in the way organizations are driving social innovation. For-profit companies have shifted from traditional monthly or annual donations towards well-marketed charity partnerships and campaigns that involve their employees. This is old news, however, most NPOs have not yet learned to capitalize on the shift.

To appease their millennial (tech savvy/charity-minded) workforce and consumer base, many corporations now engage in interactive, appealing and well-branded charity campaigns. The shift is not limited to massive corporations, as small to mid-sized businesses report similar changes. The situation creates opportunities for NPOs to build new relationships with corporate partners and engage in creative and effective fundraising campaigns. To capitalize, NPOs must look externally for the right partners and internally for assets to offer in return.

In terms of strategic planning, **NPOs ought to divert some attention away from soliciting one-time, individual donations, and focus on generating partnerships with for-profit companies.** Engaging in this intelligent risk-taking behaviour creates a public profile that shows your organization is not only innovative, but also willing to collaborate with outside skills and contacts.

Yes, caution is a virtue, but to stay ahead of the curve it is essential your organization continue to adapt and grow with changing trends and technologies. Capitalizing on shifts in

corporate-giving behaviour can help improve the public reach, engagement, and financial capabilities of your organization.