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Open to Innovation

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How many constituent communications are you managing at any one time to engage your organization's supporters? If you're like most nonprofit professionals, your answer is most likely - "lots":- such as:

- A direct mail drop to promote your upcoming phone campaign
- A targeted email driving constituents to a donation page on your Web site
- A new MySpace page for your high-profile advocacy campaign, with a link to your organization's first YouTube video
- A new widget for peer-to-peer fundraising to support your annual walk-a-thon
- A photo from the walk-a-thon posted to your Web site with a link to Flickr, where supporters have added their own photos from the event

MORE CHANNELS = MORE CHALLENGES

This dizzying array of new options to reach and engage current and prospective activists and donors presents enormous opportunities for nonprofit marketers and fundraisers. But as the number of channels increases, so do the challenges:

- **Tracking the results.**
With some data in your legacy database and offline fundraising system, and another set of data in your online constituent relationship management (eCRM) solution, what's a nonprofit direct marketer to do? While it's common to manually transfer the data from one system to the other by entering one transaction at a time, it's also incredibly painful and time-consuming. The demand for tighter integration between systems is urgent.
- **Incorporating Web 2.0 applications.**
With evolving technology and applications, nonprofits need to extend their software solutions to better leverage custom Web applications and rapidly growing social media. It's no longer a question of "if" you should leverage Web 2.0 applications, it's "how" you should do it.



Whether it's you, or the self-described techie-guru down the hall, or your strategy consultant, who takes charge of your organization's communications, all these moving pieces need to fit together; your systems and solutions need to "talk" with each other. Closed, proprietary systems that don't easily connect with online tools present a disadvantage to your organization, and leave you wasting valuable resources, such as manually transferring data between systems -- resources that should be used to compete for a supporter's time, attention, and dollars.

NO SILVER BULLET, but THERE IS A SILVER LINING

Not long ago, nonprofits looked for a software solution that could do it all, ideally one that was provided by a "one-stop-shop." Today, with the increasing availability of new technology applications, nonprofits are looking for more choice. Realizing that no single vendor can build all the tools required to meet their online communication needs, organizations are seeking a better, easier way to exchange information between solutions.

While there is no silver bullet, there is an expanding universe of "openness" -- between people, technology, and services -- that paves the path for innovation.

To tap the power of the new "open" Web, organizations need new tools for social media, rich Web applications for a more compelling constituent experience, and new integration options to more effectively manage constituent data.

For example, using open APIs, organizations can integrate data between various Web services, and between offline and online solutions. They can also leverage third-party platforms, such as Google, Facebook, and LinkedIn, to reach out to constituents in new ways, without creating additional silos of data.

But where to start? -- To fully benefit from this evolving array of "open" options for engaging constituents, take the following six steps to maximize your success.

SIX STEPS TO 'OPEN' UP TO MULTICHANNEL INNOVATION

1. Consider the goals you want to achieve using various

- communication channels, including the Internet.
2. Make a list of the various tactics, tools, and databases you are currently using for constituent outreach.
3. Identify gaps in your current communications toolkit, and develop a strategy to close these gaps.
4. Determine where your current constituents 'live' online -- and meet them there.
5. Decide where your future constituents 'live' online -- and start to build a presence in that location.
6. Establish metrics to measure traction in the various channels, then use the results to allocate budget and resources toward the channels with the highest returns on investment.

WHAT DOES OPENNESS MEAN TO YOU?

Openness means different things to different people in the world of nonprofit marketing and fundraising. So where do you fit in? Match yourself to the following descriptions, and learn what your next step should be to open up to innovation.

The Techie -- You have a solid understanding of APIs, and are eager to implement them. You understand the value of allowing two Web sites to talk to each other and share information.

What's next for you? Figure out new and innovative ways to use APIs to customize and improve the constituent experience while using existing applications. Your imagination is the only constraint in the "open" world.

The Strategic Consultant -- You serve the nonprofit community and recognize that openness presents a huge opportunity for both you and your clients.

What's next for you? Help your clients further their missions by exploring creative ways to use open tools, such as mashups that connect an advocacy petition with a Google map. It's time to stake your claim in the newest Internet revolution.

The Nonprofit Executive -- You're faced with ongoing pressure to recruit more supporters

without increasing your budget or resources. You also understand the need for efficiency when it comes to managing several databases -- and the value of using the Internet to build engaged communities of volunteers, donors, advocates, and constituents.

What's next for you? Empower your staff to embrace open tools to better access information and con-



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*Tammy Wagner
Executive Director, American Breast Cancer Foundation*



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Glossary of Terms

API

Application Programming Interface (API) is the code in any software application that allows independent applications to "read" and "write" access. Most APIs are built for use with Web applications, allowing two Web sites to talk to each other and share information. Additionally, APIs allow an application to interface with other systems for the customization and migration of information in and out of an organization's data storage system. Common examples of APIs include importing and exporting data in and out of donor databases, and merging data from multiple sources via the Web. Other potential uses include custom subscription, custom profile management, and microsite campaigns to drive list recruitment and participation actions.

OPEN API

An Open API provides thorough online documentation and code examples to enable developers to build custom applications based on the originating Web services. The specification and rights to implement the API are freely available to anyone without signing non-disclosure agreements or paying royalties.

SOCIAL

NETWORKING SITES

Social networking sites are Web-based communities of people who share interests and activities. Sites like Care2, MySpace, and Facebook have the ability to create groups that share common interests or affiliations, upload videos, and hold discussions in forums. Social networking sites can help nonprofits network, get donations, share information on the Web, connect with

like-minded organizations and potential supporters, and provide a medium for spreading their messages beyond the immediate community.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The online technologies and practices that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media themselves. Social media can take many different forms, including text, images, audio, and video. The social media sites typically use tools like forums, podcasts, bookmarks, communities, wikis, weblogs, etc.

INTEROPERABILITY

The capability of different systems and software applications to work together easily, exchange data, and "talk" to each other. Interoperability allows nonprofits to increase effectiveness by making it easier to get, use, and manipulate data to support their needs and objectives.

MASHUPS

Mashups are custom Web applications that combine online data from two or more sources using APIs to create a new, hybrid service giving visitors a more powerful, interactive experience. Common mashups include mapping applications with geographic data like real estate listings.

WEB 2.0

The second generation of Web-based communities and Web services, such as social networking sites that aim to facilitate collaboration and sharing between users, promoting interactivity and data portability.

nect with your constituents without breaking the bank.

The Fundraising Professional – You’ve heard openness is a hot topic and are determined to figure out how to best leverage it to improve constituent outreach. You recognize the explosive and exponential nature of social media, and realize that you have to tap into this new channel.

What’s next for you? Continue to explore new and exciting ways for your organization to engage supporters by launching into the social Web as never before.

The Technology Vendor – Your nonprofit clients have been after you for quite some time, begging for a simple way to integrate data between systems. You understand their needs, but all of your integration efforts to date have been “one-offs” -- customized solutions for individual clients.

What’s next for you? Embrace openness and connect with the partners that want to ensure your solution integrates with other systems; now is your opportunity to shine!

LOOKING FORWARD

Whatever role you play in helping nonprofits improve their outreach, you’re sure to benefit from solution providers and software systems that are “open.”

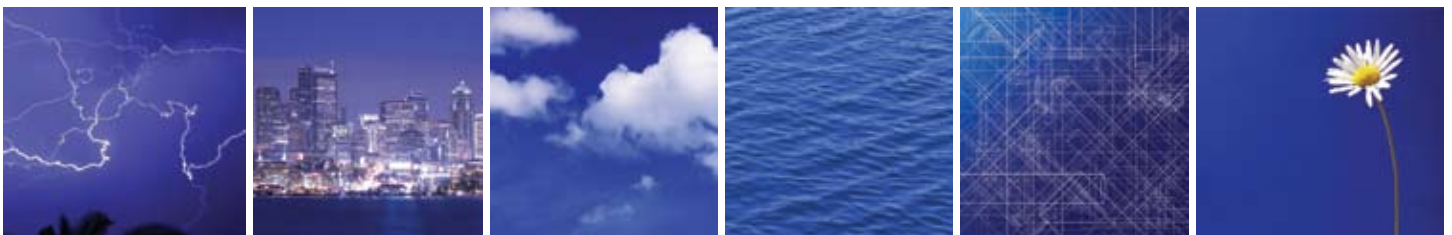
Managing all the options today -- and in the future -- means having more choice to be innovative. It means integrating your solutions and leveraging the current and next generation of Web 2.0. It means making the most of your technology investments to drive efficiency and effectiveness.

So embrace openness, and use your imagination and creativity -- because the sky’s the limit! ■

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