

Charity Begins at Home Page

BY HANS RIEMER



This is unfortunate. The fact of the matter is that Internet marketing is a cost-effective, measurable way of effecting brand visibility and, for a charity, the kind of marketing advantage that can be gained through Internet marketing can make a big difference in an organization's ability to sustain—and even grow—revenue.

Big Brother Big Sister Is Watching

Consider the case of the Big Brother Big Sister Foundation (www.bbbsfoundation.org), a Holbrook, Mass., nonprofit that helps underprivileged children by pairing them with adult role models. A well-known charity, Big Brother Big Sister's operating budget is almost completely raised through the collection and sale of donated clothing and household goods—something few potential supporters knew, and a challenge that the new executive director Steven Beck had to overcome.

Beck, a veteran in the nonprofit sector, had to devise a strategy that would allow Big Brother Big Sister to make significant gains in building awareness in the community, without the resources available to other, better-known charities. He knew that the Internet presented a huge opportunity.

Studying successful Internet marketing campaigns from the for-profit sector, and realizing that such methods remained underutilized in the nonprofit sector, Beck figured an investment in a professional campaign to drive traffic to the Big Brother Big Sister website could pay off by attracting and retaining new donors and making it easy for

In spite of all the attention that has been given to Internet marketing, it remains misunderstood, underutilized and, to a certain degree, mistrusted by many organizations that could benefit greatly by employing simple Internet marketing strategies. This seems to be the case within the philanthropic community, where boards of directors may be reluctant to spend precious resources on something they don't understand.

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them to find and to give to Big Brother Big Sister.

With board approval, Beck engaged an Internet marketing firm, outlined his needs and goals, devised an aggressive strategy and put the plan in motion. Key elements for Big Brother Big Sister's strategy included:

- Website redesign aimed at quickly converting incoming traffic to committed donors
- Geographically targeted pay-per-click program based on a list of carefully selected search terms
- Continual web traffic analysis to maximize campaign efficiency

Big Brother Big Sister's optimized website redesign was coincidental to the addition of new features such as a donation pick-up scheduler and made it easier for site visitors to find the information they needed to make a beneficial decision (known as “stickiness” in the industry). After all, spending money to bring people to an organization's web presence will not produce desired results if visitors arrive to find an uninformative site that is difficult to navigate. A website must be designed to complement an organization's marketing strategy. When interested visitors are greeted by tools and information that make it simple and easy to help, they are more likely to become long-term donors.

By the Numbers

By analyzing the campaign's performance metrics and making the necessary changes, within a few weeks the investment Big Brother Big Sister made in Internet marketing began to pay off. By the end of the campaign's first quarter, Beck said there was no question that the foundation's decision to make an investment in Internet marketing was the right move.

The results were clear: the campaign was paying off. Visitor conversions in-

creased by 50 percent, and for every \$3 invested by Big Brother Big Sister, the foundation brought in \$8—a return on investment in excess of 2½:1.

Beck is careful to explain that Big Brother Big Sister's success with Internet marketing is no accident, but rather the result of careful planning, execution and monitoring. There is a lot that goes into designing and maintaining a successful Internet marketing campaign. Big Brother Big Sister's results are illustrative of the potential the Internet

holds for any organization to build brand visibility and increase revenue. However, success is not a matter of simply paying for a few search terms or writing website copy that includes a keyword phrase or two.

For Beck and Big Brother Big Sister, their experience has started the wheels turning on plans for new programs that will utilize Internet marketing as the basis for more innovative fundraising campaigns, including an electronics recycling program and other plans to help supporters clean out their basements and turn their unwanted junk into an opportunity for a better life for some of Massachusetts' underprivileged children. ☻

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Online Engagement

There are three major steps you must take to attract and engage new prospects via the Internet.

1. Make it easy for them to find you. Individuals who are using search engines to find what your organization has to offer (such as a way to donate money or goods to a charitable cause) must be able to find your site easily, even if they have never heard of your organization.

2. Grab their attention when they come to your site. Your website must articulate your “value proposition” clearly and succinctly, in terms of the benefits your potential donors instantly will understand.

3. Get their contact information or close the transaction before they leave. Make it easy for potential donors to leave their contact information so you can follow up with more information in the future. Or make it easy for them to transact or schedule a donation quickly, safely and easily by giving them all of the information they need to make that decision. Your site should provide encouragement and incentives, as well as eliminate any disincentives.

