

Social Media for Social Good:  
A Case Study Analysis

Julie Hallinan  
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With the rise of social networking and online donation forms, social media is transforming the way non-profit organizations fundraise. Donating has become more personal, and organizations can no longer solely rely on shepherding supporters to their cause. The most effective way to raise money is to take fundraising to where donors are, and the internet is where you can find them.

Old donation forms are well-intended but provide little interaction between the organization and the donor. Social media allows supporters to become connected in a more engaging way and even enables donors to serve as advocates for the cause.

“As important as charity is, it must compete with the thousand personal demands, distractions, and pleasures that make up our lives. Far too often, giving money is just not that convenient.”<sup>1</sup> Social media has the ability to meet donors online in a convenient way that mitigates the feeling that making a donation may have to wait for a better time.

This research analyzes and compares the online fundraising techniques of four internet forums: theCHIVE, Reddit, Facebook, and Twitter. Each site is unique and uses its strengths to fundraise differently. TheCHIVE, a photo entertainment blog, has created a community of followers world-wide with its amusing and amazing posts. Reddit’s discussion-board format and subgroups allows many internet users with similar interests to gather in a virtual crowd which facilitates locating potential donors and supporters. The ability for Facebook users to easily share and publish information shapes and encourages do-it-yourself fundraising campaigns that gives supporters a more direct role in fundraising and advocating for an organization they support. Instead

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<sup>1</sup> Richard C. McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2007), 6.

of losing donors in the long text of a mass mailer or multiple pages of a website, non-profits can create a clear and concise fundraising campaign in 140 characters on Twitter.

Each section will provide a brief introduction to a specific internet forum and provide multiple success stories of organizations who utilized social media to create unique fundraising campaigns. The strengths and weaknesses of each outlet will also be discussed.

While there is no one-size-fits all formula for all non-profits to follow, there is much to learn about the power of social media to do social good.

## **theCHIVE**

Most non-profit organizations create a blog to connect with their donors, to share relevant news about their organization or specific industry, and to promote fundraising campaigns. However, one blog was so successful at fundraising that it started its own non-profit.

TheCHIVE is a photo entertainment website owned and operated by Resignation, LLC. Two brothers, Leo and John Resig, founded Resignation, LLC in August 2007 and then launched TheChive.com in November, 2008. At first glance, many would be surprised to learn that the site raised over \$650,000 in less than two years. A blog-style website, four admins post galleries of images several times throughout the day with notable posts such as “Daily Morning Awesomeness,” “Daily Afternoon Randomness,” “Animals That Don’t Suck,” and “There are Sexy *Chivers*

Among Us.” In addition to searching the internet themselves, Chive administrators also receive thousands of user submitted photos.

Over 40 million men and women (known as *chivers* and *chivettes*) view theCHIVE monthly. With 10 million unique visitors and 145 million page views each month, theCHIVE is quickly becoming one of the most popular humor website. *Chivers* and *chivettes* are located in all 50 states and internationally and can be spotted with theCHIVE’s signature green t-shirts donning the motto “Keep Calm and Chive On.”

## **Stories**

On June 28, 2011, theCHIVE took its first attempt at fundraising. Instead of a usual update with cute animals or lavish cars, John Resig posted saying “A Chivette needs our help: Meet Lilli.” While corresponding with a woman who submits photos regularly, John learned about her three-year-old daughter Lilli who had been diagnosed with Smith-Magenis Syndrome (SMS). SMS is believed to affects at least 1 in 25,000 people worldwide. Lilli was also born with a heart defect that affects 25 percent of children with SMS. The medical condition would also delay her physical and mental growth. SMS causes an inverted melatonin level and irregular sleep patterns on top of sensory issues, such as a lower sensitivity to pain. Self-injury is also very common.

John told *chivers* of a company in England called Safe Spaces which specializes in creating safe living and sleeping spaces for kids with special needs, which is not covered by Lilli’s insurance. “Safe Spaces is the only company in the world that creates safe spaces specifically for Children with SMS, a special retrofitted room-within-a-room

where Lilli will be safe from harm.”<sup>2</sup> After creating a donation page, he challenged theCHIVE community to donate \$17,000 to build Lilli a Safe Space room.

TheCHIVE community instantly responded. In less than two hours, they surpassed their goal. The campaign ultimately raised \$34,000—double the original goal.

TheCHIVE’s largest fundraiser was for 23 year-old Navy EOD tech, Taylor Morris. In May 2012, Morris was leading a team of Army Special forces in Afghanistan when he stepped on an IED. It exploded underneath him and blew off all four of his limbs. Even though Taylor was bleeding to death, he called to the oncoming medics NOT to come get him, putting their safety in front of his own life.<sup>3</sup> Once the area was cleared, Taylor was given care. Three days later Taylor landed back in the United States and was transported to Walter Reed hospital in Washington D.C. to begin the long and painful rehab process. Upon his arrival, Taylor became only the 5th person at Walter Reed to ever survive a four limb amputation.

After writing about Taylor’s heroic efforts, John Resig asked *Chivers* to help raise \$30,000 for the down payment on Taylor’s dream cabin. Forty-five minutes after the post was uploaded, theCHIVE had raised \$27,814. Donations continued to pour in. Within four hours, *Chivers* donated \$100,000. By the next morning, the total reached \$250,000.

Due to the overwhelming generosity of theCHIVE community, Chive Charities was created at the end of 2012. Chive Charities is a 501(c)(3) non-profit pending organization which takes a unique approach to fundraising. “Rather than using the

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<sup>2</sup> John Resig, A Chivette needs our help: Meet Lilli (34 Photos: WE EXCEEDED OUR GOAL!), *theCHIVE*, last modified June 28, 2011, <http://thehive.com/2011/06/28/a-chivette-needs-our-help-34-photos/>.

<sup>3</sup> John Resig, *Chivers*, this is the story of Taylor Morris (22 Photos), *theCHIVE*, last modified May 31, 2012, <http://thehive.com/2012/05/31/chivers-this-is-the-story-of-taylor-morris-22-photos/>.

cause to raise awareness for the individual, they explain, “we will help the individual raise awareness for the cause.”<sup>4</sup>

Chive Charities uses monthly flash charity campaigns to raise money for deserving individuals. One or two individuals are chosen from submitted applications each month based on lack of public awareness for the cause and financial need and are headlined as major campaigns on theCHIVE and Chive Charities websites.

One hundred percent of donations go towards the promoted cause. Smaller stories are promoted exclusively on Chive Charities and are supported through the Chive Fund. The Chive Fund donates to individuals with a smaller need, helps underfunded campaigns, and supports operating costs of Chive Charities.

## **Analysis**

At first glance, theCHIVE is a “humor site that aggregates all of the funny content on the Internet and compartmentalizes it into categories and puts it on one long scroll, and that sounds really boring,” John Resig remarks. To say the site is “as all boobs and no heart would be a mistake.”<sup>5</sup>

Showcasing original galleries of funny photos, beautiful women, groundbreaking photography, and art from all over the world, there is something for everyone at theCHIVE. But ask any chiver about the website, and he’ll tell you that it’s more than just a photo blog—it’s a community. There’s an indisputable feeling that *chivers* and *chivettes* belong something more than face value. By cultivating an anonymous

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<sup>4</sup> “About Chive Charities,” *theCHIVE*. accessed April 26, 2013, <http://chivecharities.org/about>.

<sup>5</sup> Melanie Asmar, “Aurora theater shooting: Fund for victim Farrah Soudani gets busty boost from theCHIVE,” *theCHIVE*, last modified October 2, 2012, [http://blogs.westword.com/latestword/2012/10/thehive\\_aurora\\_theater\\_shooting\\_farah\\_soudani.php](http://blogs.westword.com/latestword/2012/10/thehive_aurora_theater_shooting_farah_soudani.php).

community, theCHIVE has created an international family that responds the same way a nuclear family would. When a member is in need, the family is quick to respond.

While Chive Charities demonstrates a unique style of fundraising, a downside to theCHIVE's method is that its fundraisers only directly benefit a few people. With a more traditional approach, an organization that fundraises for a broad issue for research or treatment has the ability to improve the lives of many.

The site's variety attracts a diverse audience, and its pathos leaves *chivers* coming back for more. "To get people involved, your organization has to tell a great story," Sheeraz Raj, president of Convio, advises.<sup>6</sup> They laugh while scrolling through the "Cat Saturday" post and learn new facts on another about movies and pop culture. Viewers are amazed by the astonishing photography and continuously motivated by the bravery of fellow *chivers* in the wake of disaster or living with a critical illness.

Chive Charities puts operating costs second and allows *chivers* to donate to this separately through the "Chive Fund." This may be risky, but ultimately those who support you will also support you to continue doing your work.

Although the average time spent on theCHIVE is only 8 minutes, *chivers* carry the motto "Keep Calm and Chive On" into their daily lives through the widespread generosity, which spurs many random acts of kindness attached with a note reading "KCCO."

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<sup>6</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 11.

## Best Practices

While fundraising for individuals may not be the easiest practice for most non-profits, creating a blog which fosters a tight knit internet community may be a practical way to raise awareness for under-championed causes.

### 1. Make it personal

Blog posts should be more casual than press releases and the text on your webpage. Blogs enable viewers to get a sense of who you are as a person, and not just who you are as an organization.<sup>7</sup> They are created to give a “human voice” to the cause. Your followers no longer have the time or desire to read long editorials, so make it easy and personal. Randy Paynter, founder of Care2, explains that “the more connected people feel, the more active they’ll be.”<sup>8</sup>

### 2. Create a variety of posts

TheCHIVE would not attract as large of an audience if it only posted galleries of adorable animals. Blogs need to have fresh content on a daily basis. Consider blogging instead of posting news articles to your organization’s website. Share updates about your organization or groundbreaking news. Posts that include photos or videos are much more appealing and have a more traction.<sup>9</sup> Share stories from events or from the field. Interviewing experts or having guest bloggers is also an interesting alternative to break away from traditional posts.

### 3. Add share functionality

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<sup>7</sup> Heather Mansfield, *A How-To Guide for Nonprofits: Social Media for Social Good* (United States: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 155.

<sup>8</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Mansfield, *A How-To Guide for Nonprofits: Social Media for Social Good*, 164.



Enabling viewers to share your blog post on their Facebook or Twitter is a great way to create more traffic (and more donors!) to your blog. Adding a plug-in that allows your followers to e-mail the post to a friend will also generate more attention.

#### 4. Be motivated

Blogs are inexpensive and easy to use, but that doesn't mean you should be careless. "The most wildly popular blogs are the products of motivated individuals, not marketing departments."<sup>10</sup> Invest time in creating a blog that stands out from your website, and use it to feature your most important campaigns.

## **Reddit**

Reddit is quickly surpassing traditional news outlets as a source of up-to-date information about current events and issues. The internet forum was significantly ahead of the media in updating followers about the tense standoff between police and Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. By utilizing this immediacy and its talent for aggregating people with similar interests, Reddit may also be used to leverage attention and support for fundraising campaigns.

Its ability to bring together large groups of internet users lays in its structure. Reddit is a social news and entertainment website where users submit content in the form of a link or a text post. Other users then vote the submission "up" or "down," which is used to rank the post and determine its position on the site's subpages and front page. The site boasts 4.4 billion page views and 62.3 million unique visitors per month.

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<sup>10</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 15.

As virtual bulletin board, the site is divided into over 67,000 smaller sections, or “subreddits,” based on topics or interests. Users can also post comments about the submission, and respond back and forth in a conversation tree of comments; the comments themselves can also be “upvoted” and “downvoted.”

## **Stories**

In December 2007, a redditor asked through a post: “Ok Reddit, we’ve proven our power with Mister Splashey Pants and that lady who wanted to go to Alaska. At what point, though, do we take this to a more meaningful level?” After gaining the attention of Reddit administrators, co-founders Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian decided to create a poll that users could submit and vote for organizations that Reddit should champion for.

Users chose the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a digital rights advocacy group which advising policymakers and educates the press and public. EFF has been involved in many legal battles such as Apple v. Does in which EFF defended several online journalists. The court ruled in favor of online journalists and their rights to protect the confidentiality of sources as offline reporters do.

As an extra incentive, co-founder Ohanian pledged to mail 250 reddit postcards to the first 250 donors. Reddit also partnered with the online science and technology comic strip artists xkcd to offer 100 signed xkcd comics to the first 100 donors. In eleven days, redditors raised \$3045.51 for the organization.

Reddit’s most popular fundraiser began as a friendly competition between two of the least likely interest groups to get along. On December 9, 2010, a user in the

Christianity subreddit began a campaign to raise \$39,000 for an organization World Vision, an evangelical relief and development organization, in honor of the holiday season. This post caught the attention of users on the Atheism subreddit who suggested that r/Atheism, with nearly 12 times more followers than r/Christianity, compete against the other community and raise 10 times their target number.

“Let the (sometimes pointless) animosity between our groups be used for good!” one user called. “Let the X-mas Wars and the overall battle for goodness in the world begin!”<sup>11</sup> Although the groups did not reach their target numbers (r/Christianity raised \$13,000 and r/Atheism raised \$50,000), the friendly competition gained much recognition and continues annually.

Reddit has created history of philanthropy and rallying for social causes. In 2011, reddit helped a 22-year-old user who was beginning a teaching job in Chicago create a classroom library through a book donation drive. Reddit also participated in a black out in protest of SOPA and PROTECT IP in 2012.

### **Mob mentality**

Despite reddit’s ability to aggregate people to bring attention to important social causes, the internet also breeds a dangerous mob mentality. In an interview with Big Think, co-founder Ohanian describes an instance when a video of a young girl throwing puppies into a river gained attention on the site. “There are ways that the anonymous masses of the internet can do really great and interesting stuff and go through good

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<sup>11</sup> “OK, Battle stations everybody. Tonight we show r/Christianity what we are made of...” *Reddit*, last modified December 9, 2012, [http://www.reddit.com/r/atheism/comments/eix3p/ok\\_battle\\_stations\\_everybody\\_tonight\\_we\\_show/](http://www.reddit.com/r/atheism/comments/eix3p/ok_battle_stations_everybody_tonight_we_show/).

channels, like the authorities,” he explains. “Like law and order does have a place. And when it comes to sort of terrorizing virtually someone – as despicable as that girl was for doing that, that does not seem just. And it seems there are better ways for her to get justice than to terrorize her online or to find out and reveal all kinds of personal info.”<sup>12</sup>

Another instance of this mob mentality surfaced when a redditor solicited donations for Golisano Children's Hospital in Syracuse, New York by promoting her personal fundraiser on the site. Maya Gilsey, a 21-year-old St. Lawrence University student, pledged to shave her head in solidarity with children sick with cancer and hoped to raise \$10,000 for their treatment. However, the post was immediately flagged as a fraud with one user saying “PLEASE do not give any of your money to this woman claiming to shave her head for cancer. It's obviously a huge scam.”<sup>13</sup> Many reacted similarly; some threatened to send pizzas to her house and others tracked her down on Facebook.

Gawker ultimately proved that Gisley did exist and her campaign was legitimate. Admittedly, her methods weren't the most professional. She would repeatedly post solicitations and then delete them. Perhaps her biggest mistake, Gisley directed donors to her personal website and paypal account and defended her actions saying that “the hospital was lagging in setting up an official one for her.”<sup>14</sup> While redditors responses were vicious, they were not without merit.

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<sup>12</sup> “How Reddit Uses Its Powers for Awesome,” *Bigthink.com*, last modified September 14, 2010, <http://bigthink.com/videos/how-reddit-uses-its-powers-for-awesome>.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Zuras, “Reddit Users Call Children's Cancer Fundraiser a Fraud -- But She's Legit,” *Switched.com*, February 4, 2011, <http://www.switched.com/2011/02/04/reddit-users-call-maya-gilsey-cancer-fundraiser-fraud-its-legit/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

## Analysis

Reddit's ability to bring together large groups of like-minded individuals allows many fundraisers to exist within the website simultaneously. These campaigns succeed through crowd fundraising. This style of raising money "describes the collective effort of individuals who network and pool their money, usually via the Internet, to support efforts initiated by other people or organizations."<sup>15</sup>

By organizing internet users into subreddits, non-profit organizations also have the ability to target specific groups of individuals who are connected to or interested in a cause. However, it may be difficult for a fundraising campaign to receive the attention of the whole subreddit if there are multiple organizations advertising vying for donations in the group.

Additionally, fundraisers should ensure that the incentive to donate stays consistent throughout the campaign. During its first site-wide fundraiser, reddit offered a number of postcards which were limited to the first 100-250 donors. Knowing that they would go quickly, later donors had a decreased incentive to give.

## Best practices

Non-profits face a simple choice when communicating online: attempt to aggregate people to learn about their cause, or go to aggregators who have gathered a virtual crowd for them.<sup>16</sup> Despite negative side of mob mentality, Reddit exemplifies the

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<sup>15</sup> Andrea Ordanini, Lucia Miceli, Marta Pizzetti, A. Parasuraman, "Crowd-funding: Transforming Customers Into Investors Through Innovative Service Platforms," *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 22 Iss: 4 (2011): 443.

<sup>16</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 16.

latter and can be utilized as a fast and easy way to locate large groups of like-minded individuals to do good.

1. Advertise by posting on a subreddit

Reddit accounts are free to create, and with 67,000 subreddits, there is sure to be a subgroup related to your cause. Subreddits such as r/Environment for environmental issues and r/Cancer for discussion and support aggregate individuals with similar interests. Posting an image and short description of your online fundraising campaign and then taking steps to get your post voted up will increase its visibility and support.

2. Have your fundraiser sponsored by a subreddit

Message the moderators of a subreddit and ask if they would be interested in teaming up for your cause. Explain why that group should be interested in your organization and the benefits of partnering on this campaign.

If your fundraiser is endorsed by a subreddit then a link will be fixed to the sidebar on the page. This reduces the need to have your post voted up so it gains attention, but it still needs to be actively promoted in the group so do not think that this alternative requires less work.

3. Establish credibility

Maya Gisley learned the importance of using a credible donation site the hard way. “The most important thing really comes down to accountability,” Ohanian explains. “And that’s a great opportunity for a lot of ‘not for profits’ because the internet makes it so much easier to be accountable in a way that was just

difficult, or just a pain in the ass just 15 or 20 years ago.”<sup>17</sup> Always direct supporters to your website or a third-party fundraising page to make donations.

## **Facebook**

“People depend increasingly on other Internet users (their peers) to ‘prioritize and rank information and content,’” Richard McPherson, author of *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, explains.<sup>18</sup> Facebook, one of the most successful social media websites to date, is making it easier than ever for internet users to receive suggestions and keep up to date on what other users are reading or supporting. With 1.06 billion users world-wide, Facebook is rapidly changing the way individuals communicate and keep in contact with their peers and it is this new technology that encourages do-it-yourself fundraisers on the website.

Facebook is no longer a social media site just for younger generations. Over 75 percent of American adults ages 30-49 have accounts as well as 52 percent of 50-64 year-olds.<sup>19</sup> Even adults over the age of 65 are joining Facebook. The largest demographic continues to be adults ages 18-29, with 83 percent of this group being Facebook users. These young adults are becoming the next generation of donors, and going to social media sites like Facebook is the most effective way to reach them.

An October 2012 Pew study showed that 70 percent of all American Facebook users receive most of their news links from friends and family. As internet users rely on this group to prioritize information, people, not the media, are deciding which issues and

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<sup>17</sup> “How Reddit Uses Its Powers for Awesome.”

<sup>18</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Shea Bennett, “Social Media 2013: User Demographics For Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest And Instagram [INFOGRAPHIC],” *Mediabistro.com*, March 19, 2013, [http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-user-demographics\\_b38095](http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-user-demographics_b38095).

organizations will receive attention.<sup>20</sup> This creates a great opportunity for non-profits which allows for a much more grassroots and donor driven style of fundraising.

Facebook allows users to continuously stay in touch with friends, relatives and other acquaintances. It also has the ability to bring together with similar interests. Promoting an organization and its fundraising campaign on Facebook has become the easiest way to reach untapped audiences with functions such as “Like” and “Share” buttons. According to the 2012 Nonprofit Social Networking Benchmark Report, each “Like” costs about \$3.50 to acquire and, over 12 months, is valued at over \$200.<sup>21</sup>

## Stories

“Successful charities will be the ones that offer the most engaging variety of donation choices, endorsed and promoted by friends and peers, with the most convenient paths to involvement.”<sup>22</sup> Donors and supporters are no longer satisfied by only sending in their check; they want to be actively involved in raising money for the organizations they support.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society has enabled supporters to help the organization in a more engaging way with do-it-yourself fundraising. This approach allows donors to not only raise money and support the organization, but to also be advocates for the cause. Anyone can sign up to launch a fundraising activity. Activities have included bake sales, golf tournaments, and dinner parties or simply soliciting donations.

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<sup>20</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> “2012 Nonprofit Social Network Report,” *Nonprofit Social Network Survey*. accessed April 26, 2013, <http://nonprofitsocialnetworksurvey.com/index.php>.

<sup>22</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 7.



Research conducted by Sarah Smith, Frank Windmeijer, and Edmund Wright at the Centre for Market and Public Organisation investigates how donors are influenced by the donations of their peers in the context of individual online fundraising. By focusing on individual fundraising webpages set up for people who raised money for charity by running in the 2010 London marathon, the researchers show that higher donations cause people to increase the amount that they give.<sup>23</sup>

The data set included 12,000 fundraising pages which received more than 300,000 donations to more than 1,000 different charities. All donations that have been made online are listed on the fundraiser's page, with the most recent first. Information on how much has been given and by whom is visible to each person who visits the webpage. Each fundraiser received an average of 34.5 donations and raised an average of \$1690 with a mean online donation of nearly \$47.

While it is impossible to know how many of these donations may have been solicited via Facebook, the social media site provides a powerful advertising outlet for MS supporters, London Marathon charity runners, and all DIY fundraisers. The increased attention to a campaign and visibility of a donor honor roll will help to solicit more and larger donations. Promoting a campaign on Facebook and encouraging donors to share a link on their own newsfeed takes fundraising to where an organization's supporters are and exposes individual fundraising pages to much larger audiences.

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<sup>23</sup> Sarah Smith, Frank Windmeijer, and Edmund Wright, "Peer Effects in Charitable Giving: Evidence From the (Running) Field," *Centre for Market and Public Organisation*, CMPO Working Paper Series No. 12/290 (2012): 3.

## Analysis

The success earned by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and London Marathon can best be explained by Ken Deutsch, founder of Direct Change.

“Grassroots fund-raising works best,” Ken said, “when the ideas are not mine, but come from the people. That’s why we have to be flexible in our strategy.”<sup>24</sup> Putting the power of fundraising in the hands of these individuals gives them the creativity and convenience to organize whatever type of event they see fit, and Facebook’s ability to connect individuals with friends, family, and acquaintances fosters DIY fundraisers to advertise their campaign to much larger audiences. Asking friends and family to share or repost links to certified donation pages increases the amount of attention campaigns receive exponentially

Unfortunately, Facebook fundraisers may face the same challenge as Reddit fundraisers with the threat of donor fatigue as multiple campaigns may compete for attention online.

## Best practices

1. Allow flexibility

Empower your supporters to be part of the campaign by soliciting donations themselves and becoming advocates for your cause. Let them choose the most convenient way to do so. The more structure you create for do-it-yourself campaigns, the less it fits into your supporters lives which decreases their availability to be involved.

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<sup>24</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 50.

## 2. Create a vanity URL

By now, your organization should have an established presence on Facebook.

Make sure the URL for your organization's page is easy to identify such as [www.facebook.com/organizationsname](http://www.facebook.com/organizationsname). When Facebook users see their peers advocating for your cause, it should be easy for them to find your organization's page to learn more about you.

## 3. Avoid syncing Facebook with other social media

Each forum should be treated differently. Many posts on Twitter each day is acceptable but can be seen as excessive on Facebook.

## **Twitter**

Mail solicitations contain one or two pages of text, and websites promote fundraising campaigns through multiple webpages, but what if it was possible to raise money using only 140 characters?

Twitter, a social networking and microblogging website, is making fundraising short and simple. With so few characters to convey a message or update, tweets must be concise. How is it feasible to convey a large-scale fundraising campaign?

## **Stories**

Twestival began in London on September 25, 2008. The event brought together 250 people who were connected through Twitter and ultimately collected over \$1,500 and 14 boxes of canned goods for a local homeless shelter. In 2009, its founders looked to expand the idea to multiple cities. "Only there was a crucial piece of the puzzle

missing - that one cause which could unite people on Twitter.”<sup>25</sup> Charity:Water, a non-profit organization bringing clean, safe drinking water to people in developing nations, was chosen as the global cause. Meet-ups took place on February 12 in 202 cities world-wide raising \$264,000.

Since then Twestival has taken on a much more local approach, encouraging volunteers to register teams to coordinate Twestivals for community organizations. Instead of coordinating Twestivals world-wide on a single day, the 2013 Twestival is a year-long campaign that encourages coordinators to host meet-ups to benefit local non-profits on any day of the year. Since 2009, Twestival has raised \$1.75 million in support of 286 charities.<sup>26</sup>

In November 2008, Epic Change, a non-profit which aims to rebuild and expand Shepherds Junior, a small primary school in Arusha, Tanzania, created a fundraising campaign which centered on the Thanksgiving holiday to raise \$10,000. Tweetsgiving is a worldwide celebration of gratitude.

At the front of the campaign is a 14-year-old girl named Leah. As a school assignment, Leah was asked to write a thank you letter to anyone for anything. “Dear universe, I might not always tell you, but I am filled with gratitude for all that you have been providing to me,” she begins. “I am thankful for my school because it let me know who I am and what I can become in my near future. I am thankful for my teachers because it is believed that one teacher can shape a student, one student can shape the

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<sup>25</sup> Amanda Rose, “Twestival. Two Years On,” *Amandalindsayrose.tumblr.com/*, November 24, 2010, <http://amandalindsayrose.tumblr.com/post/1669397180/twestival-two-years-on>.

<sup>26</sup> “The Twestival Story,” *Twestival.com*. accessed April 26, 2013, [http://www.twestival.com/our\\_story](http://www.twestival.com/our_story).

whole world.” Leah’s dream is to become president, and even the boys in her class say that they will vote for her to become the first female president of Tanzania.<sup>27</sup>

They first asked Twitter users to tweet about anything they were thankful for and to include the #TweetsGiving tag and a link to their site. Then Epic Change asked that they make a donation in honor of whatever they were thankful for. These donations, done through PayPal, allowed donors to buy a brick in the new classroom for \$10 or become a “Top Turkey” for \$100.<sup>28</sup> Thousands of people tweeted using the hash tag, and 360 donors contributed \$11,021.

Over the past five years, Epic Change, now Epic Thanks, has partnered with other deserving organizations to raise over \$100,000 through its holiday themed campaign. These funds have enabled classrooms and a library to be built at Shepherd’s Junior School, a temporary home for disabled veterans and more.

## **Success**

“Communicating messages in short bursts of information, even if they are sometimes grammatically incorrect, is an acquired and valuable skill that is useful in today’s online society and economy.”<sup>29</sup> The creators of Twestival and Tweetsgiving have learned to use this skill to connect thousands of people across the globe through Twitter.

“When a group of motivated individuals begins to realize its potential for affecting change, nothing stands in the way of all kinds of grassroots activity, both online and

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<sup>27</sup> “Learn More,” *Epicthanks.com*. accessed April 26, 2013, <http://epicthanks.org/learn-more/>.

<sup>28</sup> MG Siegler, “TweetsGiving uses Twitter to fund a classroom in Africa on Thanksgiving,” *Venturebeat.com*. November 27, 2008, <http://venturebeat.com/2008/11/27/tweetsgiving-uses-twitter-to-fund-a-classroom-in-africa-on-thanksgiving/#6leC0194iysRs7bP.99>.

<sup>29</sup> Mansfield, *A How-To Guide for Nonprofits: Social Media for Social Good*, 92.

off.”<sup>30</sup> When Twestival looked to take on a global approach in 2009, co-founder Amanda Rose reached out to motivated people in her network that she believed might be interested in hosting a Twestival in their city. The results are indisputable.

Tweetgiving’s success stems from the design of its campaign. Centered around a cause, giving thanks during the holiday, and not Epic Change or Shepherd’s Junior School’s names gives the fundraiser a broader appeal.

Twestival and Tweetsgiving also draw success from having set start and end dates. Tweetsgiving begins two days before Thanksgiving, and Twestival hosts one day events throughout the year. A sense of urgency always motivates people to take action.<sup>31</sup> Hosting these fundraisers as annual events also brings recurring donors.

## **Best practices**

1. Provide up-to-date information

Posting the latest update on the progress and needs of the campaign will keep your supporters engaged and your campaign relevant.

2. Create a unique hash tag

During the Tweetsgiving event, #Tweetsgiving became the #1 trending topic on Twitter and gave the fundraiser widespread attention. There are 200 million active Twitter users who send approximately 400 million tweets each month. With a catchy hash tag partnered with an ask as simple as “what are you thankful for?” a campaign has the potential to go viral.

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<sup>30</sup> McPherson, *Digital Giving: How Technology is Changing Charity*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Mansfield, *A How-To Guide for Nonprofits: Social Media for Social Good*, 112.

### 3. Compile tweets into a Storify

Storify is an online service that allows users to create a timeline using social media. Once you are registered on its site, use the Twitter function on the toolbar to search for your hash tag or organization's name. Select tweets to highlight in your timeline and drag them into the "story." Your Storify can then be published with a URL that you can promote on other platforms.

## **Conclusion**

As these case studies reveal, each social media outlet has strengths and weaknesses. TheCHIVE's unique style utilizes the generosity of *chivers* world-wide through its loyal and philanthropic internet community to help its members in need but has mainly benefits a few individuals. Reddit conveniently aggregates groups of users with similar interests that allow non-profits to target potential supporters; however, it is important to establish credibility online. Reddit users may also be inundated with many fundraisers competing for their attention. Facebook's sharing capabilities and unlimited self-publishing tools facilitates the rise and support of do-it-yourself fundraisers that gives supporters the opportunity to be more engaged with the organization. Again, Facebook faces the same problem as Reddit as many users may be promoting fundraisers. Twitter brings communication down to a short and concise science and provides the opportunity for fundraising campaigns to stand out with unique hash tags. While not all of these outlets and practices work best for all organizations (there is no cookie cutter formula), social media has the power to connected thousands of individuals and do social good.

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