

Gamifying Giving (to engage and expand your nonprofit's donor base)

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Gamifying giving? Ignoring the delightful alliteration of the phrase, we understand your hesitation about using something called “gamification” in your nonprofit’s fundraising efforts. Your nonprofit’s work isn’t a game—you’ve got campaigns to support, communities to help prosper, volunteers to organize, and missions to accomplish. The idea of making a “game” out of fundraising might seem almost insulting: after all, this isn’t a game. This is your nonprofit staff and board’s passion.

But here’s the thing about humans: they love to play games. And here’s the thing about your nonprofit’s top financial supporters: they’re humans. Both human psychology and anecdotal data prove that gamifying giving provides a major boost to nonprofits’ yearly donation hauls.

Gamifying giving in order to engage your existing donor base and to expand your nonprofit’s audience isn’t playing a game with your yearly budget at all. In fact, it’s a savvy way to ensure your fundraising efforts get more engagement than they would without a gameplay aspect.

If you’re not persuaded, we’ve got an example you’ll recognize. And looking at it from a gamification angle will leave you absolutely convinced that gamification is a great way to capitalize on the donor base you’ve already got and expand

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Challenge of 2014

Between July and August 2014, more than 17 million people posted videos of themselves dumping massive buckets of ice water onto their own heads, announcing they’d made a donation to the ALS Foundation, and then challenging friends to make a donation to the ALS Foundation within 24 hours or to douse themselves with freezing water. More often than not, recipients of the challenge both donated and filmed themselves pouring a bucket of ice water onto their own heads.

Bill Gates and former president George W. Bush made videos of themselves (as well as donations); Weird Al Yankovic challenged then-president Barack Obama, who demurred at the ice water dump but did donate \$100 to the ALS Foundation. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge spread through pop culture like wildfire.

Essentially, this fundraiser had become the perfect game for its era. 2014 took place at a time where social media was starting to entrench itself as an important news platform (news both in the traditional sense and in the hyper-local sense) within American culture.

The ability to post videos of ourselves on a platform visible to all of our friends at once was still novel in 2014. The combination of making this fundraiser into a challenge—or “game”—and offering donors an opportunity to contribute to an obvious social good while grabbing their fifteen seconds of fame made the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge one of the most successful fundraisers of all time.

Speaking of that obvious social good, let’s look at what sort of **impact the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge ultimately produced:**

- **\$115 million dollars** were raised through the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge.
- The ALS Association was able to commit **\$110 million** to research funding.
- The ALS Association’s newfound ability to fund research in the wake of the challenge collectively **increased ALS research output by 20%** as of 2018.
- The number of ALS treatment centers directly serving ALS sufferers **increased from 100 to 156.**

Dumping ice water on your head might sound like a game, but there was absolutely nothing silly about what the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge of 2014 accomplished.

So what does this mean for your nonprofit?

Sure, the ALS Ice Bucket challenge may have been an outlier example of gamifying giving, but it shows how games can not only engage your existing donors, but expose your name to supporters in the context of a great giving experience.

If you decide to make a game out of raising the money your nonprofit needs to operate and achieve its mission, there’s a good chance your donors won’t be the only ones having fun!

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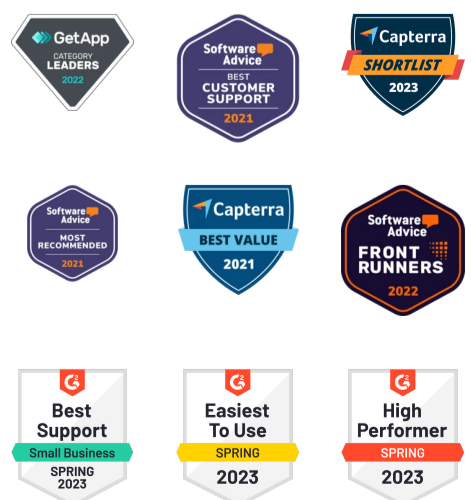
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