

The 2014 Online Fundraising Survival Guide

A practical handbook for surviving
(and thriving) in a rapidly changing
digital world

A free fundraising guide
from your friends at
[Network for Good](#)

Network  for Good™

Why Does Online Fundraising Matter?

The Chronicle of Philanthropy reports that [online donations rose by 13% in 2013](#), outpacing overall charitable giving rates. As digital giving continues to grow, it's more important than ever that you begin fundraising online.

Think of online fundraising as one piece of your overall fundraising strategy. Online fundraising campaigns offer a unique opportunity to customize the giving experience. While there are now many ways for nonprofits to raise money online—such as crowdfunding, peer-to-peer fundraising, text to give, and online auctions—without a core online fundraising program and strategy, you won't see the donation results you're hoping for.

In this guide, you'll learn the essentials that your nonprofit needs to achieve online fundraising success in 2014.

Your survival guide includes:

- Key stats and trends to help you understand the changing digital landscape
- Actionable to-dos to make your life easier and help you raise more money
- Resources and recommended reading to help you stay up to date on best practices and become an online fundraising pro

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How to Conquer Your Donation Page

In 2014, you absolutely must have an easy, intuitive way for donors to give online. Because e-commerce and shopping cart–style experiences aren't optimized for charitable giving, you need a dedicated donation page to raise more money online. Online donation pages allow donors to quickly give and offer essential tools for fundraisers like the ability to track gifts and send automatic thank yous.

There are three basic requirements any online donation experience should satisfy:

1. It should make giving easy. This can't be stressed enough, so we'll say it again and again. Don't make your donors think too hard about giving to your organization. Enable your supporters to quickly donate and share their support on the go via mobile devices and social media.



[From the Digital Giving Index](#)

2. It should keep donors in the moment of giving. When a prospective donor lands on your donation page, everything they see should reinforce their decision to give while making it quick and easy to complete their donation. This means the page should closely match your nonprofit's branding, campaign materials, and messages. Make your donation page an extension of the conversation you're having with your potential donors so there's no disconnect.

3. It should promote a positive relationship with your donor. Donor retention really begins *before* a donation is made. But if it's confusing, difficult, or frustrating to give to your cause, you're not creating a positive experience for your donor. Your donation page should also help you quickly thank donors with a powerful post-donation email acknowledgement, plus give you the information needed to cultivate these supporters.

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Donation Page To-Do List

- Make sure your current online donation solution is optimized for charitable giving and a great donor experience
- Audit your donation page and remove any unnecessary options
- Offer well-positioned recurring gift options
- Include impact labels to illustrate what each giving level will accomplish
- Add your nonprofit's branding: logo, color scheme, and other design elements
- Include your BBB, Charity Navigator, and other ratings to reinforce trust

Recommended Reading and Resources

→ [Donation Page Grader](#)

Find out how your online donation page stacks up with this free quiz.

→ [Online Donation Page Checklist](#)

A list of must-haves for your donation page.

→ [DonateNow Demo](#)

Looking for a first-rate online donation solution? Watch this demo to learn more!

→ [7 Online Donation Page Mistakes to Avoid](#)

Make sure you're not committing these deadly donation page sins.

→ [The Nonprofit Marketing Blog](#)

Take your page—and your marketing strategy—to the next level with our blog.

→ [Sea Change Strategies blog](#)

Nonprofit marketing tips backed by research and years of experience.

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How to (Finally) Fix Your Website

Your nonprofit's website is the home base for everything there is to know about who you are, what you do, and how your supporters can get involved. Regardless of their donation preferences, 65% of all supporters will check out your website prior to making a donation—so don't miss this opportunity to make a great first impression!

If your organization's website needs some help and an overhaul isn't in the cards, there are still some ways to make your online experience more donor friendly. If nothing else, you can tackle your home page, donation page, and About Us pages.

Let donors find your website. If no one can find your website, you're missing out on potential donors. Make sure your web address is easy to remember and that your organization comes up in a search when people look for terms that are highly relevant to your cause, such as "animal shelters in Tacoma."

Make it easy to give from your website. Donors expect to find a way to donate right on your site—if you don't have this option prominently featured, they may assume you don't need their help.

Show where the money goes. Create a simple "Why Donate" page and provide links to it from your About Us page, home page, and donation form. Include easy-to-understand pie charts and clear descriptions of where your money comes from and where it goes.

Highlight your endorsements. Testimonials, ratings, and seals of approval are all powerful cues that tell potential donors that yours is an organization that they can trust because others are willing to speak on your behalf.

Test it. Ask a few objective testers to help you identify any issues with your site. Give them a hypothetical situation: They have heard of your organization and are considering donating to your cause, but first they want to do some research on your site. Have them talk through the process, what they do and don't like, if they could find everything easily, and what, if any, information that they were expecting to see but couldn't find.

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Website To-Do List

- Review your web traffic reports to understand your most visited pages and where visitors may be dropping off
- Make your donation page no more than one click away at all times
- Include a prominent, highly clickable Donate Now button on your website
- Declutter your home page and offer clear, user-centric navigation
- Prominently feature your endorsements and testimonials

Recommended Reading and Resources

→ [How to Create an Effective Nonprofit Website eGuide](#)

Learn what to modify so that your site educates and inspires potential donors.

→ [Quiz: Is Your Website Ick or Slick?](#)

Take the quiz to find out how your website stacks up.

→ [How to Ask for Donations on Your Website](#)

Discover how your website can help you raise funds.

→ [3 Tests to Improve Your Website and Donation Process](#)

Try these simple usability tests to improve your donation process.

→ [5 Tips For Increasing Traffic to Your Nonprofit's Website](#)

If your website is ready for business but no one's coming, follow these tips.

→ [Wired Impact blog](#)

A helpful resource for all things nonprofit blog and social media.

→ [Don't Make Me Think by Steve Krug](#)

Learn from Steve's "common sense approach to web usability."

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How to Avoid Mobile Obscurity



This year the number of mobile-connected devices is [expected to surpass the world's population!](#)

Think about how this changes the game of philanthropy. Mobile giving allows donors to give right when they feel inspired, so don't make them wait. People are less likely to donate if they need to search out your charity's website, and they're definitely not going to wait for you to mail them a paper donation form.

Make it snappy. Keep your website, email, and donation page load times under 3 seconds for optimal mobile delivery.

Minimize data entry. Whether it's on a donation form or a newsletter sign-up box, try to minimize the amount of typing your visitors will have to do.

Keep your copy short and sweet. Remember: online visitors don't read, they skim. Use an easy-to-read font size and type in all of your online materials. Choose shorter sentences and clear calls to action instead of long paragraphs.

Remove the roadblocks. Reduce your dependence on Flash, JavaScript, popups, or other animations for best results as many mobile devices can't correctly display content in these formats.

Keep relevant content front and center. Don't force mobile users to scroll across three columns and all four corners of your site to find what they're looking for.

Make links and buttons easy to use. Be sure to provide enough space between links and buttons to prevent a wayward thumb from clicking on something by accident.

Keep it simple. Embrace the use of white space, clear the clutter, and narrow your visitor's focus to one or two clear calls to action. This will improve your conversion rates by removing unnecessary distractions.

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Mobile To-Do List

- Test your donation page, emails, and website on a smartphone
- Look at your web traffic to understand how many visitors are accessing your pages via mobile and learn which devices your audience uses most often
- Offer mobile-friendly giving options
- Optimize and simplify key pages of your website so that they are easy to use on a mobile device
- Remember to avoid using Flash, JavaScript, or popups

Recommended Reading and Resources

- [Why Mobile Matters: A Guide to the Mobile Web](#)
Learn the basics of mobile giving and be poised to reap the rewards.
- [3 Keys to Making Your Nonprofit Website Mobile Optimized](#)
More reasons and ways to invest in mobile optimization.
- [How You Can Encourage Mobile and Online Giving](#)
See real examples of nonprofits using mobile to raise money and learn how you can follow their lead.
- [MobileTest.me](#)
Want to know what your website looks like on a mobile device? Then this website is the place to go.
- [Mobile First by Luke Wroblewski](#)
Learn more about strategic web design for mobile.

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How to Email Like a Pro

A well-planned email marketing strategy can make or break a nonprofit's online fundraising efforts. The inbox is still the best way to reach people online, so you need a fine-tuned program to communicate with your supporters and inspire them to act.

Get the right tool. You need an email system that can track the emails you send and provide valuable information on who opens them, when, and what they click on. This insight will help you improve the quality of your communications.



Grow your list. Each time someone donates or interacts with your organization, do you collect their email address? Emailing your supporters helps them stay up-to-date on what your nonprofit is doing and provides an easy way to donate and volunteer.

Segment for success. Divide your list into groups to send more personalized, better-received messages.

Limit your subject line length. The perfect subject line length is up for debate, although the rule of thumb is 40 characters. When in doubt, test across as many email clients as you can, and take a look at your open rates as you test.

Perfect your subject line copy. You've only got one chance to make a good first impression. Your email subject lines can show how much you respect your constituents' busy schedules by telling them exactly what they'll find inside. Avoid using ALL CAPS, dollar signs, and exclamation points, all of which will raise flags for spam filters.

Track and measure your results. Monitor your organization's click-through and open rates and adjust your approach based on your results. Don't be afraid to change the frequency of your messages as well as your subject lines, content, and calls to action.

Don't forget about mobile. In 2013, [51% of email opens happened on mobile devices](#). Make sure your email is easy to read on a smartphone and that your emails point to mobile-friendly web pages. Can someone easily click on your link or button with their thumb? If not, rethink your email design. Your desktop readers will thank you, too.

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Email To-Do List

- Audit your current email strategy
- Determine if your current email provider helps you manage your list, segment and test your emails, and report on your results
- Track your organization's open rates, click through rates, and conversion rates (how many people take the action you want)
- Create a communication calendar that will track your outreach, including which audience segments you plan to contact
- Make it easy to sign up for your emails any time a supporter interacts with you

Recommended Reading and Resources

→ [Nonprofit Guide to Email Engagement](#)

Don't leave your donors on the back burner—use email to keep them interested.

→ [Quiz: How Well Does Your Email Strategy Stack Up?](#)

Take our quiz to find out!

→ [7 Email Newsletter Mistakes Every Nonprofit Should Avoid](#)

Transform common email newsletter blunders into dynamic, engaging messages.

→ [How to Test Your Nonprofit Emails](#)

Use simple testing methods to uncover the subject lines, content, and calls to action that inspire supporters to give.

→ [8 Things to Check Before You Send That Nonprofit Message](#)

Make sure your message will inspire action by following these best practices.

→ [Constant Contact blog](#)

Get fresh insights and tips from Network for Good's partner in email marketing.

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How to #Win @Social Media

If you're still not sure what your organization should be doing with social media, now's the time to dig in—[73% of American adults online now use social media](#)! Leverage the power of social media to give supporters another way to forge a relationship with your cause and empower them to share your message with their networks.



Create a social media strategy that fits your audience and your mission. It's not important for you to become a social media expert overnight or to have profiles on every social network. It *is* important for your nonprofit to have a social media presence on the platforms where your audience already gathers. Pinpoint where the richest conversations about your cause take place and start there.

Listen first. If you're not sure how to start the conversation, listen first. Follow thought leaders in your field and look for what people are saying about your cause.

Be present. You can't just "set it and forget it"; embrace the opportunity to communicate directly with people who are passionate about your cause. Be responsive, ask questions, and provide value. Social media is not just another broadcast channel, it's a crucial way to build relationships and be top of mind.

Use images. Content with compelling images receives [94% more views on average than content without images](#).

Offer more. Don't just repost the same content from your newsletters. Add bonus information and related resources, and point them to the rest of the story

Find your voice. Take a look at the language you're already using across your website. Do you have a consistent voice, does everything sound as if one person wrote it? Create a persona for how you want your nonprofit to be perceived on social media.

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Social Media To-Do List

- Understand where your supporters are online
- Outline a strategy that complements your overall marketing plan
- Create a calendar to plan your content and posting frequency
- Develop a social media policy for your organization
- Create profiles that are consistent with your nonprofit's branding and voice

Recommended Reading and Resources

→ [Social Media Mini Guide](#)

Use Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and Instagram to tell your story and connect with your supporters online.

→ [Quiz: Are You a Socially Savvy Fundraiser?](#)

Discover if you're using social channels to reach donors in the best way.

→ [Social Media Housekeeping Tips for Nonprofits](#)

Make sure your social media is welcoming to supporters 24/7.

→ [How to Keep the Social Media Conversation Going](#)

Here's how to start speaking with your supporters on the web.

→ [Big Duck blog](#) and [Social Media for Nonprofits](#)

Smart thoughts and resources on using social media for your cause

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How to Connect with a New Generation of Donors

When thinking about your audience, do you picture a specific age group? How about Millennials? This generation of roughly 80 million [is poised to receive the greatest transfer of wealth in history](#)—an estimated \$41 trillion. Of course you need to still focus on major gifts and planned giving with Baby Boomers, but for continued fundraising success, you need a plan to attract and keep these younger donors. To do so, it's important to understand how Millennials prefer to communicate and take action.

No matter the message, if your outreach doesn't meet Millennials' expectations in terms of accessibility and authenticity, your organization's engagement with this group will suffer. Here are some things to remember when building your base of younger donors:



Share and connect. The [most frequent action taken by Millennials on a nonprofit's website](#) is to connect with the organization via social media. Use your website as a hub for younger donors to find ways to connect with you.

Giving is social. The [Millennial Impact Report](#) states that over 70% of Millennials are willing to raise money on behalf of causes that matter to them. Young supporters can be powerful fundraisers. Equip them with easy-to-share content and the right peer-to-peer fundraising tools to spread your message and volunteer opportunities with their networks.

Authenticity is paramount. Trust and transparency are increasingly important for all donors, and Millennials are no exception. Being upfront about your mission and how you accomplish it will win you favorable ratings from this group, as will having an authentic, personal approach to the way you communicate with supporters. No faceless messages devoid of personality, please!

Involvement, not just awareness. Millennials are interested in true involvement with the causes they support. They view themselves as collaborators, not just donors.

Engagement, then participation. As this generation is likely to quickly tune out irrelevant messages, it's important to create an ongoing communication strategy that builds a relationship with younger supporters before asking for a donation.

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Millennial Engagement To-Do List

- Double check that your donation page, emails, and website are mobile friendly
- Survey your younger supporters to learn more about their preferences
- Create engagement that wins over Millennials where they are: online
- Track your organization's email open rates and conversation rates (how many people complete your call to action)
- Use analytics to see which types of your content attract Millennials

Recommended Reading and Resources

[Millennial Guide](#)

Learn how engaging Millennials through cause creates loyal, engaged employees.

[BUILD a new Millennial Platform for Engagement](#)

Create a dialogue with Millennials and have loyal donors for years to come.

[Millennial Impact Report](#)

Guidance on how Millennials interact with cause and how nonprofits can benefit.

[Next Gen Donors report](#)

The results of a national survey of Millennial involvement with philanthropy.

[Cause for Change: The Why and How of Nonprofit Millennial Engagement by Kari Dunn Saratovsky and Derrick Feldmann](#)

Strategies for encouraging Millennial participation in your nonprofit.

How to Create Content Your Supporters Will Love

Your nonprofit's content should stir people to take action. Sending a variety of communications such as newsletters, blog entries, thank you emails, and social media posts will help you create a relationship with your donors and spark the actions you want: donations, volunteer time, or signed petitions.

Write a donor-centric newsletter. The heart of a loyalty-building newsletter is showing the donor that *she makes a difference*. The “star” is your donor. This principle should guide all your decisions about newsletter content. When you consider putting something in your newsletter, ask yourself: “Does this demonstrate to the donor that her involvement matters?” If it doesn’t, *throw it out*.

Maintain an updated blog. Does your nonprofit want to enter the blogosphere? Blogging about your cause and its developments can keep your supporters up to date, interest would-be supporters, and provide a valuable resource for others in your field.

Pack some punch with pictures. There’s not much that can stand-in for beautiful images of your organization's work. Because humans are visual creatures, images and photos can communicate more effectively than just text alone. Visuals help us to better understand and retain information and are more persuasive than words alone. Whenever you can, include photos of your volunteers and staff members in action. Even when babies and puppies aren’t in your mission, including a visual will help your message resonate with your reader.

Tell thoughtful stories. Wise thinkers throughout history have used stories to communicate important truths and help people make decisions. You can put the same ideas to work by *showing* your passion through a hero or protagonist, the obstacle they face, a goal or a great “aha!” moment, and a resolution. Focus on someone you’ve helped or who’s been touched by your nonprofit and avoid telling broad stories about your nonprofit as a whole. The more specific you are, the better, and the more invigorated your listeners will feel.

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Content To-Do List

- Look at your website's stats to understand which search terms donors are using to find your organization
- Create an editorial calendar to plan high level themes
- Collect testimonials and success stories from beneficiaries, volunteers, and donors to use in your communications
- Send a digital newsletter to supporters focusing on them
- Include emotional images that inspire your donors

Recommended Reading and Resources

→ [How to Make the Case for Giving eGuide](#)

Use these steps to help your story come alive and convince donors to give.

→ [How to Create a Nonprofit Editorial Calendar](#)

Creating an editorial calendar is an effective way to keep your organization's newsletter, website, blog, and social media content fresh and current.

→ [6 Foolproof Tips for Great Nonprofit Content](#)

Don't waste the short amount of time you have to grab a reader's attention.

→ [Content Marketing for Nonprofits by Kivi Leroux Miller](#)

Expert advice on how to make content marketing work for your organization.

→ [Copyblogger blog](#)

An excellent reference for everything content marketing.

→ [Writing to Make a Difference blog](#)

Tips for improving your grant and copy writing.

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How to *Really* Rock Donor Stewardship



According to the Association of Fundraising Professionals' [2013 Fundraising Effectiveness Survey Report](#), 105% of donors gained by nonprofits were offset by lapsed donors. Let that sink in for a minute: for every 100 new donors that came through the door, 105 walked out. Not exactly the growth most nonprofits are looking for.

The relationship isn't over once you've asked for a donation and a donor makes a gift! Keep the love alive by planning a great donor stewardship program and continuing to cultivate your connection with your donors:

Thank quickly and graciously. Instantly send out tax receipts and thank your donors profusely for their generosity. Remind them of the impact their gift will have.

Celebrate your donors. Find ways to recognize and celebrate your donors on your website, in your newsletters, and in your future outreach.

Extend an invitation. Keep the door open for your donors to do more—such as volunteer, attend an event, or help you spread the word about your cause. Make them feel like they're part of the team.

Make them feel special. Personalize your acknowledgements to include relevant details to each donor, like additional information on the specific programs they support.

Keep in touch. Reach out regularly to update your donors on your progress and how their donations are making a difference.

Ask for feedback. Your donors are a valuable source of insight and inspiration. Make it easy for them to share their comments and suggestions, and take note of indirect feedback such as unsubscribe requests.

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Donor Stewardship To-Do List

- Audit your donor thank you letters and acknowledgement process
- Create a donor stewardship calendar for donor outreach throughout the year
- Regularly update donors on the impact of their gifts
- Recruit staff members, volunteers, board members, and beneficiaries to help
- Personally thank your donors for their support a few times per year

Recommended Reading and Resources

→ [Be a Stellar Donor Steward Checklist](#)

A step-by-step guide to thanking and retaining loyal donors.

→ [Quiz: How Well Are You Thanking Your Donors?](#)

Are you sure you're doing enough to say thank you? Find out with this quiz.

→ [The 4 Key Qualities of Amazing Thank You Letters](#)

Don't forget these keys to effective and memorable donor thank you letters.

→ [The Secret to Effective Fundraising Premiums](#)

Should you give your donors gifts? Here's some food for thought.

→ [The 6 Keys to Donor Retention](#)

Start turning first-time donors into lifetime givers.

→ [Lisa Sargent Communications](#)

Get advice from a fundraising copywriter and donor communications specialist.

→ [SOFII: The Thank-You and Welcome Showcase](#)

Everything you need to know for thanking and welcoming new donors.

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How to Have Smarter Fundraising Events

Fundraising events are a staple of the nonprofit world, but the cost of executing one can negate any return on investment. To reap the rewards, maximize donation opportunities and focus on how your event can keep donors interested and actively helping your cause.

Take the process online. Make it convenient for event attendees to register and buy tickets to your events online. By digitally managing invitations, registrations, and ticketing details, you'll save time and money.

Leave the door open for additional gifts. Online registration often offers the chance to give an additional gift while you're at it. These supporters are already excited about your work and will likely be happy to donate, if given the opportunity.

Encourage mobile donations. At your event, supporters will feel a strong connection to your cause and are often inspired to do more. Channel their good feelings into more gifts by encouraging them to give on the spot via their mobile device. Solutions like DonateNow offer mobile giving features for donating and pledging via smartphones.

Set up recurring donations and memberships. Set up a "Donation Station" or membership kiosk that will help loyal supporters set up a recurring gift or become members of your organization. Be sure to staff your booth to make this process personal, easy, and fun. (Bonus: This is also a perfect opportunity to show donors how easy it is to give online!)

Feature a testimonial. Invite those who have been served by your organization to speak at your event. Encourage them to share what difference your work (and the work of your donors) has made in their lives.

Make donors the stars of your event. Think donor wall of fame or even a red carpet photo booth where your supporters can be treated like the VIPs they are. Bonus: elements like these are infinitely shareable—who doesn't want to brag about seeing their name in lights?

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Fundraising Events To-Do List

- Review your event plans and decide how much of your outreach, registration, and follow up can be done online
- Test your event fundraising pages on a smartphone
- Give attendees ways to get involved with your event online and offer easy ways for them to share your event details with their networks
- Identify opportunities for event attendees to boost their donations, before, during, and after the event
- Share the results of your event prominently on your nonprofit's website, social media, and in regular email communications

Recommended Reading and Resources

→ [How to Make Your Next Event a Success eGuide](#)

Throwing a nonprofit event has never been easier!

→ [Learn more about EventsNow powered by givezooks!](#)

Network for Good's online ticketing and events registration tool.

→ [The Secret to Effectively Marketing Your Fundraising Event](#)

Maximize your investment with a targeted outreach strategy.

→ [How to Use Social Media to Grow Your Events](#)

Leverage social media to encourage more people to attend your event.

→ [Event 360 blog](#)

Event trends and knowledge from a full-service event-planning company.

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About Us

Network for Good powers more digital giving than any other platform. Since 2001, we've processed over \$1 billion for more than 100,000 nonprofits. We are Level 1 Audited PCI Compliant and accredited by the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance, meeting all 20 of its standards for charity accountability. Plus, we're registered in every state for online fundraising.

We're a mission-minded organization, just like you, so we understand the challenges you face. We're here to help.

Our suite of affordable fundraising solutions helps nonprofits raise money and engage supporters online—plus we provide the training that will make you a fundraising superstar.

1. Get an easy-to-use, branded, and secure online donation page with [DonateNow](#). With built-in best practices and mobile-friendly giving options, you'll raise more than ever before.
2. Email campaign and newsletter tools by [Constant Contact](#) for sending and tracking emails and telling you which messages work best.
3. [Fundraising Fundamentals premium training](#): Exclusive access to Network for Good's expert advice with personalized reviews, step-by-step tutorials, fundraising templates, and more.
4. Online event management: [EventsNow](#), powered by givezooks!, for accepting donations, registrations, and ticket purchases online.

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