

## How to Build and Promote an Online Monthly Donor Program

By Harry Lynch, CFRE

(Feb. 23, 2009) Think turning yearly donors into monthly donors involves a flood of time, energy and paper? Think again. Learn how to incorporate a recurring online gift program without all the sweat.

Whether last year ended better than expected or as badly as you feared, the question in 2009 is—what next? What can your organization do to ride out the storm? How can you accomplish even more—most likely with fewer resources at your disposal?

Many nonprofits are focusing, more than ever, on leveraging value from their current constituents. Savvy fundraisers know that re-tooling their monthly giving programs is one way to keep costs low while achieving exponential upgrades.

While monthly sustainer programs have long been a part of our “fundraising toolkit” the expense of monthly reminder mailings, and the costly follow-up process required for success, has limited the value of monthly programs for many nonprofits—at least until recently. But the advent of automatic online transaction tools has dramatically changed the landscape.

These days, getting started is the easy part—deceptively so in fact. Most online donation processors now offer the capacity for recurring gifts. If you don’t already have the capability, it’s likely that you can easily add that component to your current online donation processing module. But having the basic functionality is a very different thing than building a program and effectively promoting it in multiple mediums.

### Getting the Word Out

The first step is to create a special “landing page” that explains, in simple language, how the program works and what the advantages are. Be sure to make it very clear how one can opt out at any time. (Very few of your donors will!) Then develop prominent and enticing links and pathways throughout your website to the monthly giving signup page. Frequently mention monthly-giving opportunities in your email appeals and e-newsletters. At least once a year, consider a special targeted email campaign that specifically promotes the program and invites your donors and prospects to join.

Everywhere and anywhere, point out the advantages of giving this way—how small gifts quickly add up, the ease and security of donating and of course the benefits the regular income stream provide to your organization and its

critical programs.

Monthly giving programs also are a vivid example of potential synchronicity between your online and offline marketing efforts. You can bolster your success online by promoting the program in your printed newsletters, developing inserts for your direct mail packages and even testing targeted direct mail that sends offline donors online to sign up to be monthly sustainers. Last but not least, your acknowledgements and welcome packages—offline as well as online—will most likely prove to be a wonderful point of opportunity for promotion.

A handful of very large charities have proven that TV campaigns and large scale telemarketing efforts are highly effective ways to build monthly sustainer programs. But if you don't have those resources, don't worry. Even with a tight budget, you can find many other creative ways to promote your own sustainer program, from handing out flyers at your events to having staff or volunteers call or email monthly donors and prospects when they are about to lapse.

What is the biggest mistake you can make? To get discouraged in the early months of promoting the program, as the results first arrive in a slow trickle. So many charities give up much too quickly. But so many others have stuck with it and seen the magic in the math ... when two become four ... eight morphs into sixteen ... then dozens transform into hundreds. For these organizations, persistence pays off with significant upgrades and high value donors, who renew at rates of 90-plus percent for virtually no cost.

What more can we ask for in times like these?

*Harry Lynch, CFRE, is CEO of Sanky Communications in New York and currently serves as vice-chair of the AFP External Relations Division. AFP members may submit stories or offer story suggestions to eWire by contacting [ewire@afpnet.org](mailto:ewire@afpnet.org).*