

# CASE STUDY

*Dreaming Big: Powerful Online  
Marketing for Small &  
Growing Nonprofits*



# SMALL NONPROFITS DREAM BIG

*Despite having a small staff, The V Foundation has big plans for the next 10 years. See how they found the perfect match of an efficient donor management system, powerful online marketing tools, and the guidance to get them well on the way to meeting their goals.*

Since 1993, The V Foundation has raised more than \$100 million and awarded cancer research grants in 38 states and the District of Columbia. The V Foundation has a strong presence in the scientific community: researchers have developed their laboratories and taken their science from the labs to clinics with the help of funds raised by this organization. The Foundation's Scientific Advisory Board, comprised of some of the top physicians and research scientists from prominent universities and cancer centers nationwide, assures that only the cancer research projects with the most potential are funded. The V Foundation's small but capable staff strives to increase funding for cancer research year after year while maintaining the lowest overhead among cancer research fundraising organizations—with careful cost control, performance monitoring through annual reporting, and a focus on fundraising efforts with a high return.

Building relationships with supporters and raising more dollars online were two very important parts of the same equation for The V Foundation. The challenge for any small or growing organization is balancing limited time and resources with the need to take a big risk. To dive into new online fundraising campaigns with little or no online fundraising experience, and to pledge to spend more time with supporters (not spreadsheets) with a small, resource constrained staff takes real guts. Fortunately for nonprofits like The V Foundation, having guts doesn't have to mean going it alone.

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*“We opted to use Convio's online marketing and donor management tools to communicate with donors more efficiently and effectively.*

***I'm amazed at what we've achieved in such a short amount of time.”***

*– Jefferson Parker, VP of Operations, The V Foundation*

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## THE CHALLENGE

With just three administrative staffers and four people dedicated to raising funds, The V Foundation faced a big challenge: significantly increasing their revenue in the following 10 years without adding to their staff. And to top it off, their donor database and email marketing software—must-haves for reaching their goal—just weren't working for them.

For example, staffers had to take donations made online and either manually key them into the donor database or do a mass upload through a cumbersome, time-consuming process. Reporting required training and technical skills. Data import was difficult. The system required server maintenance. The foundation couldn't customize the database to meet their needs.

Their email marketing software was inefficient and didn't allow the foundation to produce professional-looking emails. It offered no detailed tracking of email statistics and no integration with the organization's other systems, and reporting was difficult.

Another challenge: each year, The V Foundation does a few collaborative fundraising and marketing campaigns with the ESPN sports network that drive big spikes in their donations. They needed an integrated online fundraising and donor management solution that could scale to handle large increases in donations without having to worry about capacity issues.

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## THE GOALS

The V Foundation knew they could leverage their enthusiasm for their mission to drive better results for their organization. But, there was no question about it: **they needed a better solution—one that matched their goals:**

- Drive and manage a significant increase in revenue over the next 10 years
- Send professional-looking, effective online communications to drive donations and inform constituents
- Manage the additional volume of fundraising programs and donation processing and manage software and servers without adding significantly to their staff
- Integrate their online donations system and donor management system
- Easily meet the high-volume donation periods when the foundation does a promotion with the ESPN network—without having to pay penalty fees
- Keep staff members focused on working with constituents, *not* on managing data

## AN END TO DATABASE WOES

With a very small staff, it was increasingly time consuming and inefficient for The V Foundation to manually enter online donations into their donor database. In addition, when they leveraged their close relationship with the ESPN network to reach out to potential donors, they found that their current donor database made it difficult to accommodate spikes in donations—and didn't integrate well with the other systems they had in place.

The V Foundation selected the Convio Common Ground™ donor management/CRM system to track, manage, and understand all of their data. Common Ground tracks information about all of their constituents—donors, new contacts, and anyone else who helps support their mission—in one place. It's easy for staff members to use. Custom reporting is a snap. And, it integrates with their online donation forms—easily scaling to meet high-volume donation periods at no extra charge and without transaction limits.

Common Ground lets The V Foundation accept donations online and immediately processes and places them into the system, with no data entry necessary. With Common Ground's integrated dashboards, staff members can see at a glance how a campaign is performing or track donations along a daily, weekly, or monthly timeline. With a few clicks, they can easily get the answers they need without chasing down spreadsheets or searching through multiple programs.



*Donations from The V Foundation website are automatically tracked within the Common Ground database. Staff members no longer have to re-key donation information and customizable dashboards make tracking and monitoring donation levels a breeze.*

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## ADDING ONLINE MARKETING TO THE MIX

In addition to choosing Common Ground for their donor management needs, The V Foundation chose Convio's complete suite of fundraising tools for communicating, tracking and managing their fundraising and marketing campaigns. But with such a small staff, they weren't sure they could handle implementing and learning a new tool in a short period. So, they opted to join the Convio Go!™ program—a one-year structured program designed to help nonprofits with little or no experience with online fundraising get up and running quickly, at a lower cost.

“The Go! program has been great because it's allowed us to step through month- by-month and get things like newsletters and emails out right away without having to be experts at the start,” Parker said. The program has been effective at removing the anxiety of kicking off new programs using new online tools. The organization now uses Convio online marketing tools to communicate events and fundraising opportunities through email newsletters and fundraising campaigns to their constituents. They also track communications to determine what's working and what's not, so they can tailor future communications to more effectively engage their constituents.

### Kick-Starting Conversations

One of the Convio Go! team's specialties is helping clients find the appropriate window for sending regular online communications, helping them to perfect their timing as well as develop a reliable internal publication process. By the time most clients have graduated from the Go! program, they've sent between 6-12 eNewsletters, eBlasts, eLetters and eCards, and subsequent sends run like clockwork. Go! gave The V Foundation the technology to send out regular communications and a team of experts to guide them on timing and content.

First, the Go! team helped The V Foundation create a solid editorial calendar as the cornerstone of their online marketing program. Having the calendar as a guideline helped the organization create an action plan and stay on track with the right frequency and content for timely and relevant communications throughout the year. The organization now produces content to promote news, events, and other activities, and hasn't missed sending out a monthly email newsletter since they began the Go! program.

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## Welcome Series

One of the first outreach publications that the Go! program helped The V Foundation implement was a welcome series. A welcome series is a sequence of automated email messages sent to new constituents after they register and continuing over the course of their first 2-4 weeks on your email list. **A solid, professional welcome series consists of 2-3 simple messages that set the tone for the relationship,** create an identifiable voice for your organization, and educate new constituents about your mission and the scope of your impact before they start getting appeals.

The first message in the series is a personal greeting from the voice of your organization, often the Executive Director (in the case of The V Foundation, it was Nick Valvano, CEO). This message highlights the state of the organization with a focus on educating the constituent, especially about new and interesting approaches and results. The second and third messages in the welcome series engage new constituents by highlighting specific ways they can get involved to support your mission.

The image displays two versions of an email welcome series from The V Foundation for Cancer Research. Both emails feature the foundation's logo and a 'Welcome' header. The left email is a personal letter from Nick Valvano, CEO, welcoming the recipient and providing information about the foundation's mission and how to get involved. The right email is a similar letter but with a focus on encouraging the recipient to take action, such as making a donation, sharing their story, and joining the foundation's online community. Both emails include a 'Donate Now' button and a 'Tell A Friend' button. The right email also includes a 'Join Our Blog Conversation' button and a 'Become a Facebook Friend' button. The left email includes a 'Powered by CONVIO' logo and contact information for the foundation.

After the constituent has received all of the emails in the welcome series, they can be added to your larger list and receive the regular communications by your organization.

## Monthly eNews

In addition to maintaining constituent relationships, sending out regular communications has helped The V Foundation grow their email list. They created an email list building campaign that uses their website, blog, and Facebook™ page to promote sign-up for email communications. By registering and opting into the email, visitors received a monthly eNewsletter with updates from the foundation. **Sending good content regularly creates opportunities for constituents to share it with others**, which in turn drives further awareness of the organization, website visits and new constituents.

The screenshot shows the top of an eNewsletter. At the top left is the logo for 'THE V FOUNDATION® for Cancer Research'. To the right is the word 'eNews' in a large, bold, blue font. Below the logo is a dark blue navigation bar with white text: 'Forward to a Friend | Donate | JimmyV.org'. The main content area is white. On the right side, there are three stacked buttons: 'Donate Now', 'Tell A Friend', and '2009 Grants by Select Cancer Types'. The main text area features a date 'April 2010' and a headline 'RSVP for Dick Vitale's Gala'. Below the headline is a photograph of Dick Vitale, a man in a suit and tie, smiling. To the right of the photo is text: 'You are cordially invited to the fifth annual Dick Vitale Gala featuring special guests Tony Dungy (introduced by Colts Head Coach Jim Caldwell) and Tom Izzo (introduced by Magic Johnson) at The Ritz Carlton Sarasota (Florida) on May 21, 2010. Tickets and sponsorships are still available.' Below the photo and text is another line of text: 'Raise money for cancer research and meet some of your favorite coaches. Net proceeds from the Gala will be awarded to pediatric cancer research. RSVP today!'.

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eNewsletters can be monthly, bi-monthly, or even quarterly depending on your organizational resources and available content. The key here is not just to be regular, but to offer high-quality, engaging content. The eNewsletter consists of story excerpts that direct readers to the website for the full story.

## Sustained Giving Campaign

Through the Go! program, The V Foundation also has produced a successful monthly giving campaign (also known as a “sustaining campaign” or “sustained giving campaign”). Of all fundraising campaigns, monthly sustaining campaigns can have the greatest long-term value. Monthly donors tend to give smaller amounts each month (compared to one-time gifts), but often have a higher annual value because of the frequency of their gifts. **The average sustaining gift for organizations in the Go! Program is \$43, representing an annual donor value of \$500 or more.**



**THE V FOUNDATION<sup>®</sup>**  
for Cancer Research

### Make a Monthly Gift

Don't miss your chance to [join our monthly giving program](#)--there's still time. Your monthly gift can help us award additional cancer research grants as we strive to find a cure.

With the generous support of our donors in 2009, we funded projects such as:

- \$1 million Breast Cancer Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE) Supplemental grant
- \$1 million research project to generate lymph nodes to help melanoma patients
- \$1 million Lung Cancer Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE) Supplemental grant

Your monthly gift will help us all year long with the challenging work we face. Simply set it up once and then forget about it! Charitable giving has never been easier.

**Won't you [join our monthly giving program](#) today** and help us make an impact against this deadly disease? We cannot do it without you!

As always, thank you for your continued partnership.



**THE V FOUNDATION<sup>®</sup>**  
for Cancer Research

### Make a Monthly Gift

Visit our website | Forward to a Friend | Donate Now

For about \$0.50 a day—less than the cost of a cup of coffee—you can bring us one step closer to accelerating cancer research and ultimately reaching a cure.

Our monthly donors are dedicated and compassionate friends who agree to give \$15 a month to provide ongoing support for life-saving cancer research.

Please, become a monthly donor today! [Join us.](#)

Yours Sincerely,  
*John Leshney*  
John Leshney, President of Development

**Join Our Monthly Giving Program Today**  
[Click here to donate](#)

**One Team. One Cause.**  
In the fight against cancer, we all play on the same team. Please consider joining our monthly giving program to support the fight!

“There are 86,400 seconds in a day. It's up to you to decide what to do with them.” -- Jim Valvano

This year, nearly 1.5 million Americans will learn they have cancer that's one person almost every 30 seconds. We don't have a moment to lose.

When Jim Valvano was battling cancer, he believed he headed a special team of people to help carry his fight against cancer into the future. **I invite you to join our monthly giving program. It's easy, convenient and safe. [Click here to join us.](#)**

Your donation is important because it supports life-saving cancer research. For example, the cost of funding a V Scholar Grant for one year is \$100,000.

• \$25 Monthly - One person donating \$25/month for one year is approximately one day of research

\$25 Monthly

The Go! program helps The V Foundation create powerful fundraising campaigns, such as monthly giving campaigns. The foundation talks about their mission as a collaborative effort between the organization and their supporters—inspiring readers and letting donors know how they can make an impact.



## Year End Campaign

**Year-end giving, or giving in the last two months of the year, accounts for 35-70% of many organizations' total annual online fundraising.** And because it is often the most important campaign of the year, it is also the most structured. Sending a multi-part integrated campaign at year end allows each message to complement the others and build up to the last day of the year.



There is no time more appropriate to say thank you.

At this Thanksgiving time, we wish for you and those dear to you a wonderful Thanksgiving day and a happy, healthy holiday season.

We recognize that our progress in funding essential cancer research is made possible by the support of donors and friends like you. Thank you for your generosity.

Visit Our Website | Donate | Forward to a Friend | Get Involved



Spread Cheer, Fight Cancer

Make a Gift | Tell a Friend

Spread Cheer, Fight Cancer

Donate Today!

The V Foundation end of year campaign started in Thanksgiving and ran through the end of the year to maximize giving.

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## RESULTS YOU JUST CAN'T IGNORE

Using Convio Common Ground and participating in the Convio Go! program, The V Foundation is managing their online marketing in a smart, efficient way that helps them achieve their mission and goals. They're raising more money by contacting constituents regularly and keeping them informed without having to spend as much time on entering and maintaining data or managing cumbersome email software.

***Here are just a few of the results The V Foundation has seen in just one year of participating in the Convio Go! program:***

- Grew email list by nearly 5,000 (from 11,400 to just over 17,000)—3,000 of which originated from online donations
- Worked with ESPN to drive nearly 13,000 online donations totaling more than \$1.6 million
- Hasn't missed sending a monthly email newsletter
- Reduced staff time in processing online donations and sending online communications

"We're seeing a return on our investment through efficiency in staff time, and we're able to reach our donors and prospective donors in ways we previously couldn't. We're also getting more donations from them, so we're seeing the return in actual dollars, too," Sherrie Mazur, Director of Marketing and Communications of The V Foundation, said.

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## CONCLUSION

***The V Foundation found the solution they were looking for in Convio Common Ground and Convio Go!***

With efficient donor management, powerful online marketing tools, and the guidance to get them on track, they're well on their way to meeting their 10-year goal.

"Convio's online tools offer a lot of flexibility in what you can accomplish. We've been very happy with what we've been able to produce," Parker said. "We've also found Common Ground to be a smart way to manage the donor database without requiring extensive training or on-site maintenance of software and servers. Most other options would require more investment of time and administrative work to help us use them to scale up our fundraising."

"Bottom line, would I recommend Convio to a nonprofit that's looking to step up their fundraising and marketing? Absolutely!"

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## CONVIO COMMON GROUND™

Common Ground is a CRM system designed for nonprofits that moves beyond the traditional donor database. Common Ground provides nonprofits with key features for managing donations, including pledge gift management, batch gift entry, major gift fundraising, relationship tracking, fundraising events and more. It also helps nonprofits manage other types of interactions—including volunteer tracking to organize multi-shift volunteer jobs, then easily find available volunteers in the database whose availability and skills match upcoming shifts. Because Common Ground is built on the Force.com platform from Salesforce.com it can be extended with clicks, not code, allowing nonprofits to easily customize fields, page layouts, workflows and access privileges and get all of the advantages of a reliable, cost-effective IT solution while avoiding the headaches of managing technology onsite.

**To learn more about Common Ground**, visit [www.convio.com/cg](http://www.convio.com/cg).

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## CONVIO GO!™

Convio Go! is designed to remove the mystery from online fundraising and communications through a one-year, structured program that provides the technology to reach more people and raise more money. Go! clients also get access to online experts that will provide training along the way, and clients can take over whenever they're ready.

Convio helps Go! clients with overall campaign management—from the production to the analytics—while teaching them the best practices to make them successful. Go! clients share the experience with a group of professional colleagues by sharing ideas and learning, and providing accountability to the process with reporting and analytics to share with their teams.

**To learn more about Go!**, visit [www.convio.com/go](http://www.convio.com/go).

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## ABOUT THE V FOUNDATION FOR CANCER RESEARCH

The V Foundation for Cancer Research was founded in 1993 by ESPN and the late Jim Valvano, legendary North Carolina State basketball coach and ESPN commentator. Since 1993, The Foundation has raised more than \$100 million to fund cancer research grants nationwide. It awards 100 percent of all direct cash donations and net proceeds of events directly to cancer research and related programs. Administrative and fundraising expenses are paid by their endowment. The Foundation awards grants through a competitive awards process strictly supervised by a Scientific Advisory Board.

**For more information on The V Foundation or to make a donation**, please visit [www.jimmyv.org](http://www.jimmyv.org).

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## ABOUT CONVIO

Convio is the leading provider of on-demand constituent relationship management (CRM) software and services that give nonprofit organizations a better way to inspire and mobilize people to support their organization. Convio Online Marketing, the company's online marketing suite, offers integrated software for fundraising, advocacy, events, email marketing and web content management, and its Convio Common Ground™ CRM system helps organizations efficiently track and manage all interactions with supporters. All Convio products are delivered through the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model and are backed by a portfolio of best-in-class consulting and support services and a network of partners who provide value added services and applications focused on the unique needs of nonprofit organizations. For more information, please visit [www.convio.com](http://www.convio.com).

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