



From Online Stores to Online Relationships:

Tips and Tools for an Innovative Approach to Ecommerce for Nonprofits

Includes:

Six Tips for Successful Ecommerce

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was created for organizations as a handbook about the fundamentals of ecommerce. It describes how to plan and set up an online store, and maximize online store results for driving donations and other forms of support.

Note that this guide covers just some of the basics of email marketing and online fundraising. For more detailed information about these topics, refer to the Convio guides available for free at: www.convio.com/resources.

Throughout this booklet, you will notice tips to make your ecommerce programs run more smoothly. These come from a team of experts with the experience of working on Internet projects with more than 350 nonprofit organizations throughout the United States.

Introduction to eCommerce for Nonprofits

Many nonprofit professionals equate ecommerce, or the buying and selling of goods and services on the Internet, with Amazon.com and other big for-profit companies selling products online. That's the for-profit approach to ecommerce. For nonprofits, there's more.

Nonprofit organizations have the unique ability to not only use ecommerce for traditional online store sales, but also to take it further.

Consider this: Many nonprofits already have products and services that they sell or could sell online. Hats, t-shirts, mugs and pens — anything an organization might sell at an event or in a gift shop — can be sold in an online store. Beyond that, memberships, publications, seminars, services, volunteer opportunities and donations also can be “sold” online. Sponsorships of, for example, research projects, can be sold online. A whale at a wildlife conservation organization can be “adopted” through an online store.

In addition to selling tangible items such as t-shirts, or virtual items such as sponsorships, nonprofits can take advantage of other benefits of ecommerce. For example, the ecommerce model in the for-profit world supports cross-promotion of related items as well as customer relationship management. Nonprofits can get better results with the same approaches because they often are more trusted, and people visiting their Web sites tend to already have an interest in supporting their mission.

Another consideration: Online stores give Web site browsers a low-involvement way to interact with organizations. Nonprofits can maximize online store interactions by collecting information from constituents as they check out. As organizations collect constituent information through the online store, they can use that information to drive further involvement by promoting volunteer, fundraising or advocacy opportunities with the organization.

Through ecommerce, nonprofit organizations can reach new constituents, encourage them to get involved in other ways, collect information about them, use that information to communicate information relevant to them, track their activity with the organization and build relationships with them to encourage loyalty and ongoing support.

This guide covers key topics for any organization adding ecommerce to its online strategy. With tips for planning and setting up an online store, and ideas for maximizing online store results, it will help you to create and implement a successful, ongoing ecommerce program that helps to support your organization's mission.

Getting Started

The first step in launching an ecommerce program for your organization is to develop a strategy. Consider the approaches in this section to ensure your ecommerce program is as effective as possible.

Rethink What Ecommerce Means for Nonprofits

Before you start your ecommerce initiative, it's important that you re-set the way you think about ecommerce. Ecommerce for nonprofits is about using all of the valuable aspects of an online store, and extending it to enhance what your organization probably already does — raise funds to support meaningful programs, publicize events, sell goods and services, and build enduring relationships with a committed constituent base. It expands your reach to a wider audience and generates new support so your organization can better serve its mission.

There are several levels of activities for an online store. If your organization has a gift shop, for example, offering all of the same gift shop items through an online store is the simplest form of an ecommerce program. Or, for example, if your organization has leftover items such as hats or t-shirts that were once used as a membership premium, those items could be sold through your online store.

Take the idea a step further. Your organization has other products and services that you could sell online, but you might not think of them that way. Your “products” might include memberships, publications, seminars, services, volunteer opportunities — all of these “products” can be sold online.

Another option is to sell virtual fundraising products. For example, an environmental organization might have a program to plant trees on a hillside to prevent soil erosion. That organization could sell tree certificates through its online store. The constituent who bought a tree would receive a tree certificate or could “plant” the tree in honor of a friend or family member and send that person a certificate. Thinking about products for your online store in this way opens a new world of opportunity for fundraising.

Consider Your Organization's Needs

The most important thing you can do when setting up your ecommerce program is to consider how your organization operates, how many resources you have to devote to an online store, what you can sell online and what are your objectives.

GET COMMITMENT FROM OTHERS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

While the benefits of an online store to your organization might be unquestionable, it is critical that everyone in your organization get behind the ecommerce initiative to ensure its success. Remember: it's not a stand-alone project. It supports and enhances all of the programs and activities that your organization already does.

HAVE A STRATEGY

Your ecommerce plan does not have to be complex, but it does need to outline your organization's objectives and how you plan to achieve them. The benefits of an online store can be enormous if you think about what you have to sell and how you are going to sell it.

Use the following examples and chart to help you think through the support you need and the corresponding things you can sell in your online store.

TIP

If an organization needs something to serve its mission — for example a homeless shelter that needs to purchase food — then support for that thing is a product that can be “sold” in an online store.

	PROGRAM	NEED	ONLINE STORE "PRODUCT"
1. (example)	General funds	Revenue	T-shirts with organization's logo
2. (example)	Build a shelter	Lumber	Buy a 2 x 4 board for \$8.
3. (example)	Research about a disease	Medical researchers	Sponsor a scientist for \$250.
4.			
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10.			

Set Up Your Online Store

Once you have an ecommerce plan, the next step is to set up your online store. While each store may vary in complexity, any store should have the following capabilities:

CATALOG

Your store needs catalog capabilities that allow constituents to view and select goods or services. They also need to be able to see information and/or pictures of the items.

BROWSING/SEARCHING

Your online store should make it easy for customers to find what they want. Constituents must know what is in the store, and products must be organized in a logical manner. Constituents should be able to easily browse and mark products for later purchase.

SHOPPING CART

Once constituents find what they are looking for, they should be able to put the selection in a "shopping cart" and search for other items. This makes it easier for constituents to purchase multiple items. This part of the online store also should allow constituents to place items in a shopping cart, leave the Web site, and then return later to purchase the items.

MEMBER/SPECIAL PRICING

Your online store should allow you to offer special pricing to members or to recipients of promotional offers. Constituents should be able to enter a code for promotional offers, or log in to receive special member pricing.

CHECKOUT

Your online store should make it easy for constituents to purchase the items they want. You must have a way to receive online payments using credit cards. The purchase of the item should be made as simple as possible for the constituent.

Here are the basic steps of checkout:

1. The constituent must give information about himself, usually name, mailing address, billing address and email address.
2. Credit card or billing information must be gathered.
3. The merchant must process the constituent's payment information.
4. The constituent must receive confirmation of the sale.

TIP

Convio's ecommerce software for nonprofits includes all of the capabilities needed for an online store.

Making the Most of Your Online Store

Your ecommerce program is an ongoing activity that doesn't end when you launch an online store. Here are just a few ways that you can maximize your ecommerce results to benefit your entire organization.

Customize Fundraising Programs for Your Store

If your organization is like most, it already has several fundraising programs in place — some online, and some offline. Why not take advantage of the programs you already have for your online store?

TIP

For more information about building successful online fundraising programs, download *Using the Internet to Raise Funds and Build Donor Relationships* at www.convio.com/resources

For example, a zoo that sends quarterly email and postal mail communications asking for donations could turn that into several compelling online store products. The store could "sell" heads of lettuce for the hippopotamus, bananas for the monkeys and seeds for the birds. A constituent may then "buy" 10 heads of lettuce for the hippopotamus, providing the zoo with much needed funds.

The key to this approach is giving constituents a strong sense of how their donations will be used. Putting the donation in context may move a constituent to give who otherwise might not. Be sure, though, not to mislead constituents about their donations. If the purchase of lettuce for the hippopotamus is simply representative of how far a constituent's donation will go, make sure that you indicate that somewhere in the online store.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES

As organizations begin using ecommerce to drive support for their missions, more examples of effective strategies are emerging. Following are a few examples:

Email certificates are a great way to sell virtual fundraising products in your online store. Jewish National Fund (JNF) uses this strategy to help drive funds for its tree-planting program. Constituents can "buy" trees by making an \$18 donation to help JNF plant trees in Israel. After purchasing trees, constituents can choose from several email certificate options to let friends or loved ones know that a tree was planted in honor of them.

JNF, for ISRAEL forever.
888-JNF-0099

Jewish National Fund

Welcome to the JNF online tree planting center, your opportunity to give the gift that keeps on growing. Planting a tree in Israel is the perfect way to show you care. For \$18/tree, you can plant trees for many different reasons and help green the land of Israel while sending a special gift to a friend or loved one.

Buy a Tree for \$10 each, not \$18. [Click here](#) to open an E-Z Tree account. * EZ Tree Members must be [logged in](#) and can [click here](#) to use their account

Plant Trees and Get One Free!
You can now plant 2 trees and JNF will add a third tree **for free!** Or, purchase 4 trees and JNF will add a tree **for free** to make it a circle of 5! To take advantage of this great offer, [click here](#).

If you would like to order by phone, please call 1-800-542-TREE. **All orders are in US dollars only.**

Please click on any tree certificate image below to enlarge the picture.

CLICK HERE TO DONATE TO JNF:
In Israel, Sara and Miriam have lived in the Negev Desert all their lives. But without water, their children may not be so lucky.

CLICK HERE TO PLANT A TREE IN ISRAEL

CLICK HERE FOR JNF STORE

CLICK HERE TO EARN 12% ON YOUR MONEY

CLICK HERE TO EARN MONEY FOR YOUR CONGREGATION OR ORGANIZATION

CLICK HERE FOR TAX WISE GIVING

CLICK HERE FOR BAR/BAT MITZVAH & SIMCHA PROGRAM

CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP NOW

Jewish National Fund sells certificates to drive funds for its tree-planting program.






Some organizations use online store functionality to promote membership or pledge premiums. KCET, a California public broadcasting station, uses its online store functionality to offer premiums, or incentives, for different pledge levels.

SELECT A PROGRAM OR GIFT:

Basic Membership

SEARCH BY PLEDGE AMOUNT:

FEATURED GIFTS

 <p>My Music #104: The 60's Experience - 4 CD Box Set</p> <p>Enjoy this great 4 CD Box Set with music from the great 60's experience! Enjoy songs like Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale," and The Moody Blues singing "Nights In White Satin." Get yours today!</p> <p>Pledge amount: \$150</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="ADD TO CART"/></p>	 <p>Dr. Wayne Dyer: The Power of Intention Ultimate Collection with DVD</p> <p>Dr. Dyer transforms conventional thinking about making things happen in our lives into an understanding of how one possesses the potential and power to co-create the life one desires. Get CDs, a DVD set, and two books that include "Getting in the Gap."</p> <p>Pledge amount: \$365</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="ADD TO CART"/></p>	 <p>Suze Orman: For the Young, Fabulous, & Broke Ultimate Collection</p> <p>This great collection includes Orman's DVD and book, "For the Young, Fabulous & Broke" and "How to Talk to Your Kids about Money" CD. Also has Orman's FICO Kit with everything to improve your credit and Will & Trust Kit where you can create your own.</p> <p>Pledge amount: \$270</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="ADD TO CART"/></p>	 <p>Dr. Christiane Northrup's Mother-Daughter Wisdom - BOOK</p> <p>Written with warmth and remarkable insight, this book will change lives and become essential reading for all women. It's for every woman who's had a mother--whether or not she has children of her own, and even if her house is filled with boys.</p> <p>Pledge amount: \$120</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="ADD TO CART"/></p>	 <p>Kids Club Packages - KCET Kids w/ Clifford the Big Red Dog Plush & Kids Pack</p> <p>Make your tyke a KCET Kid! Special surprises include: a personal On-Air announcement, Clifford Plush Toy, A KCET Birthday Card, A KCET Backpack filled with activities, and Special Event Invitations!</p> <p>Pledge amount: \$75</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="ADD TO CART"/></p>
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NO "THANK YOU" GIFT:

I'D LIKE 100% OF MY PLEDGE TO GO TO KCET.

KCET public broadcasting station uses pledge premiums in its online store.

Cross-promote

Ecommerce gives nonprofit organizations the opportunity to use cross-promotion strategies that the for-profit world has used for years: cross-selling and up-selling. These strategies allow an organization to drive additional revenue.

TIP

While the point of purchase is a great time to cross-sell or up-sell, be sure not to distract constituents with more than one related offer, or they might abandon the check-out process.

Cross-selling is the practice of suggesting related products or services to a customer who is buying something. For example, if you're buying a book on Amazon.com, you may be shown a list of books similar to the one you are buying. Another common example is when you hear, "Would you like fries with that?" as you order a burger at a fast food restaurant.

Nonprofit organizations can take advantage of cross-selling, too, through their online stores. For example, a National Public Radio station selling a hat in its online store might ask the constituent at the time of purchase if he or she would also like to purchase a t-shirt or make a donation to the station.

Nonprofits also can take advantage of the up-sell strategy. Up-selling is the practice of suggesting higher priced products or services to a customer who is considering a purchase. An up-sell often is for a better version of the same product or service. Think: "Would you like to biggie-size that?"

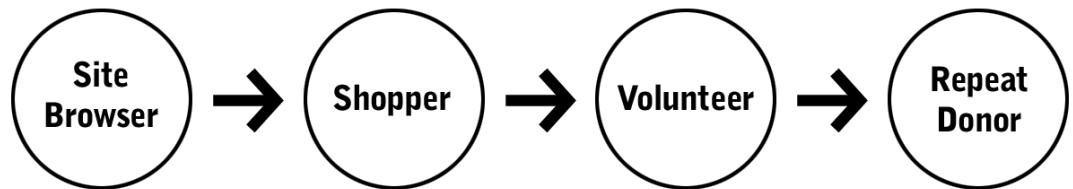
To up-sell in your online store, you will need to offer constituents an "upgrade" to their purchase as they check out. For example, a museum could configure its online store to ask a constituent who is buying a \$15 individual membership if he or she would like to upgrade to a "family" membership for just \$10 more — a \$5 savings from the regular family membership price.

The same museum's online store could automatically ask constituents to donate or purchase more to receive an additional benefit. For example, "Your current total is \$75. If you spend just \$25 more, you will receive a free ticket to our upcoming exhibit."

Nonprofits also have a unique opportunity to use cross-promotion strategies to take a constituent from a low-engagement activity, such as purchasing a t-shirt, to a higher-engagement activity, such as becoming a volunteer.

Build Constituent Profiles

A key benefit to having an online store is that it gives Web site visitors a low-involvement way to interact with the organization. When a site browser purchases something in your store, it is the beginning of a potentially long-term relationship.



Organizations can use online stores to identify new constituents, and then create deeper relationships with them over time.

TIP

Convio's software for nonprofit ecommerce allows you to automatically flag interests in a constituent's online profile based on purchases he or she has made.

To maximize online store interactions, you should collect information from constituents as they check out, and then add that information to their profiles in your online database. Your ecommerce software should allow you to do this by automatically flagging interests in each constituent's profile based on what he or she purchases.

As you collect constituent information through your online store, you'll be poised to drive more involvement. You can use that information to promote volunteer, fundraising or advocacy opportunities with the organization, and drive personalized email and Web content.

Here's an example: A wildlife preservation organization could use constituent profile information to send an email to constituents that have an interest in wolves — which may include people who have purchased "save the wolves" t-shirts or taken action on legislation affecting wolf habitats — encouraging them to donate to the "save the wolves" fund. The organization also could display special wolf-related messages to those constituents when they are logged in to the organization's Web site.

Integrate with Other Online Programs

To get the most from your online store, it should be part of a comprehensive online constituent relationship management (eCRM) program. eCRM is about building a relationship with a loyal network of constituents ready to support your organization.

TIP

Convio's Internet software for email marketing, Web site publishing, online fundraising and online advocacy allows organizations to collect information from all online constituent interactions in a single eCRM database.

The key to an eCRM approach is to use the Internet to reach new constituents, collect information about them, use that information to motivate them, track their activity with the organization and build relationships with them to encourage loyalty and ongoing support.

For example, an organization's existing donors, activists and volunteers already have a strong affinity for the organization — at one time they donated money or time for the organization's cause. Coordinating advocacy and fundraising efforts with your online store immediately supplements the pool of potential activists, donors and volunteers for any appeal. Use online store interactions to identify new constituents and promote other activities and opportunities to them.



Six Tips for Successful Ecommerce

From mission and constituent base to staff size and budget, every organization is different. So, every organization will have a unique approach to ecommerce.

Despite varied approaches, organizations should include a few basics as part of their ecommerce program. Here are six quick tips that will help you build a successful ecommerce program:

1. Plan.

As with any fundraising campaign, it is critical to understand your objectives before you begin an ecommerce project. Setting goals will help you determine the best approach. For example, one goal might be to increase the monthly number of new constituents added to your email list, while increasing the average level of online gifts. Your online store, then, might always feature a low-dollar item, such as a hat with your organization's logo, to encourage new site visitors to buy. It also might encourage constituents who make, say, \$25 donations to support a specific program, to make additional \$10 donations to a related fund.

2. Commit.

While your organization probably is good at operating efficiently, it's important to commit to making your ecommerce program a success. Remember that this is an ongoing, strategic addition to your existing programs. Invest time and dollars in software and strategy accordingly. A key mistake to avoid: Launching a partially planned and funded online store that yields lackluster results, and then thinking that ecommerce will not work for your organization.

3. Integrate.

Ecommerce is most effective when it's part of a comprehensive eCRM program. Look for software that allows you to create an online store, conduct online fundraising, marketing and advocacy campaigns, and collect information from all of these activities in a single database. This will give you a complete view of your online constituents, which is essential to, for example, converting advocates to donors and donors to advocates through targeted online communications.

4. Promote.

If you build it, will they come? Not necessarily. They have to know about it. It's important to remember your online store in everything you do. Promote it aggressively both online and offline — in newsletters, on your Web site's home page, in brochures. And, be sure to integrate it into your overall fundraising and marketing efforts.

5. Analyze.

In some cases, thinking like a business can help. With an online store that's part of a comprehensive eCRM program, your organization can take advantage of the strategies for-profit businesses have used for years. Analyze the information you collect about constituent interests and use it to cross-promote, segment your constituents for targeted appeals, and more.

6. Imagine.

The key for a successful ecommerce program is to open your mind to new possibilities of what "products" you have to sell. Be sure not to get caught up in the definition of "online store" and confine yourself to the for-profit model of selling tangible goods. Consider the things you need to serve your mission — for example, funding for a new research initiative — and make the scientists of that research project your online store "products" that constituents can "buy".



Spotlight: Convio eCommerce

Convio eCommerce helps you take advantage of ecommerce strategies by combining a familiar online store with Internet tools that help you drive support for your mission. If you sell merchandise, you'll have all of the tools you need for online store sales.

You'll also have much more. You'll have the tools to encourage shoppers to get involved with your organization in other ways, collect information about them, use that information to communicate relevant information to them, and encourage ongoing support.

Create an Online Store

Convio eCommerce gives you the capabilities of a traditional online store to sell anything from physical products such as t-shirts, to virtual fundraising products such as memberships and sponsorships:

- Catalog of products
- Browsing, sorting and searching
- Shopping cart and checkout
- Shipping calculation
- Member pricing and/or other special pricing

Cross-promote to Boost Fundraising and Other Involvement

Relate online store products to other items or campaigns to move constituents to a higher level of giving, or to get them involved with your organization in other ways. For example, a museum could configure its online store to ask a constituent who is buying a \$15 individual membership if he or she would like to upgrade to a "family" membership for just \$10 more — a \$5 savings from the regular family membership price.

Create Virtual Fundraising Products

Use ecommerce for a new form of fundraising: compelling fundraising campaigns that give constituents a strong sense of how their donations will be used. For example, a zoo that sends quarterly email and postal appeals could turn that campaign into several compelling online store products. The store could "sell" heads of lettuce for the hippopotamus, bananas for the monkeys and seeds for the birds. A constituent could then "buy" 10 heads of lettuce for the hippopotamus, providing the zoo with much-needed funds.

Build Constituent Profiles

Flag interests in a constituent's online profile based on purchases he or she makes, and then use that information to promote other opportunities to support your organization. An example: A wildlife preservation organization could use profile information to send an email to constituents that have an interest in wolves — which may include people who have purchased "save the wolves" t-shirts — encouraging them to donate to the "save the wolves" fund.

Get a Complete View of Constituents

Convio eCommerce includes Constituent360™, the online database included with any Convio software solution. It houses all of the information from your online interactions with constituents, and synchronizes with your offline databases.