

Convio Open Initiative:

Extending the nonprofit community's online reach

Introduction

The growth of social media and customized Web applications is creating new opportunities for nonprofit organizations to reach and engage constituents. Building on the success nonprofits are already experiencing in applying online constituent relationship management (eCRM) techniques, this new chapter in online outreach taps into emerging online trends.

Now organizations can reach more constituents through popular social media sites such as Facebook® and MySpace™, and make communications more appealing with videos, flash animations and mapping mashups. These new opportunities also increase the complexity of data management, and make data integration between systems even more critical.

Through the Convio Open Initiative, nonprofits can tap into the power of the new Web while leveraging their existing Convio solutions. By integrating with the latest online technology such as social networking sites, online calendars, photo sharing, viral video, and mapping mashups, Convio is helping nonprofits provide a more compelling constituent experience and reach a wider audience. Whether nonprofits require tools for rich Web applications or need to more effectively manage constituent data, Convio's open approach benefits organizations of all sizes and in any stage of Internet adoption.

Convio Open is part of an important shift taking place across the software industry, giving organizations the freedom to choose the best solution for their needs without being constrained by the limitations of conventional systems. Convio Open is about providing nonprofits with the flexibility to integrate with other Web applications, and allows for the exchange of offline and online campaign data in real-time. With this ability, organizations can improve campaign response rates through personalized, relevant communications based on previous interactions.

This paper explores how Convio Open helps address various technology challenges faced by nonprofits, and how nonprofits can take advantage of this initiative to reach existing and new supporters in unique and effective ways.

Nonprofits on the Internet: From Closed to Open

The acquisition and retention of constituents has always been a key success factor of nonprofit fundraising and advocacy efforts. However, the Internet has dramatically changed the way in which nonprofits engage their constituents to accomplish their goals.

Increasingly, software vendors are using the Internet to deliver online constituent relationship management (eCRM) solutions to the nonprofit sector through the Software as a Service (SaaS) model. This model provides nonprofits with economies of scale, faster implementation, flexible data integration options and, most importantly, the freedom to focus on their missions instead of the challenges of IT hardware and infrastructure management and maintenance.

Many nonprofits want to standardize with a single vendor to meet all of their online and offline communication needs. However, this can involve making unsatisfactory trade-offs on the depth, breadth and quality of tools, given the broad range of technology available to implement integrated marketing programs. Some organizations select specialized tools for tasks like sending email. Often, these tools are not integrated with other Web tools or databases, creating an environment commonly referred to as "data silos" that makes targeted, coordinated marketing nearly impossible.

This technology dilemma is complicated further by new tools like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube™, Plaxo™, Flickr™ and others. These tools empower constituents to organize, create content, and even solicit support for an organization, but they can further complicate nonprofit organizations' online toolkits.

The rapid growth of these sites presents great potential for organizations to engage supporters in new and innovative ways. For example, an organization might add an "Adopt a Pet" application to Facebook that individuals can include in their profile. The application could allow the person to publicly show support for the cause on his or her profile page, and attract friends with similar interests to do the same and perhaps adopt a pet themselves.

The Importance of Integration

Many organizations use an installed donor database system to support their offline initiatives, as well as one or more online applications to support their Web site, email, and online fundraising and advocacy efforts. With constituent and transactional data housed in multiple places, organizations struggle to gain a complete view of their constituents and often are left with fragmented pieces of information about their supporters. Integration between various applications is critical to centralizing data so it can be leveraged by all departments of an organization.

The need for integration extends beyond data to nonprofit communication strategies. No longer are organizations asking *if* they should integrate their online and offline campaigns, they are trying to determine *how* to integrate. Furthermore, nonprofits are eager to take advantage of new opportunities like social media. In some cases, organizations seek "all-in-one" solutions to minimize integration needs, only to discover that such solutions either don't exist or require significant trade-offs in functionality.

Today, as more technology providers, like Convio, Salesforce.com™, Google™, Facebook, and Yahoo!™ embrace the concept of openness, they are delivering new integration opportunities through "Web services" — providing integration without the complexity of traditional software development.

Web services are software components that communicate using standards-based Web technologies including HTTP and XML-based messaging. Designed to be accessible by dissimilar applications, they can vary from simple operations, such as checking a banking account balance online to complex processes like running a customer relationship management system. The use of Web services has evolved as a practical, cost-effective solution for facilitating the exchange of information across systems.

With the Convio Open Initiative, Convio supports this open, forward-thinking approach and has made interacting with other solutions a priority in providing more choice for the nonprofit community.

Convio Open: Unfolding New Opportunities

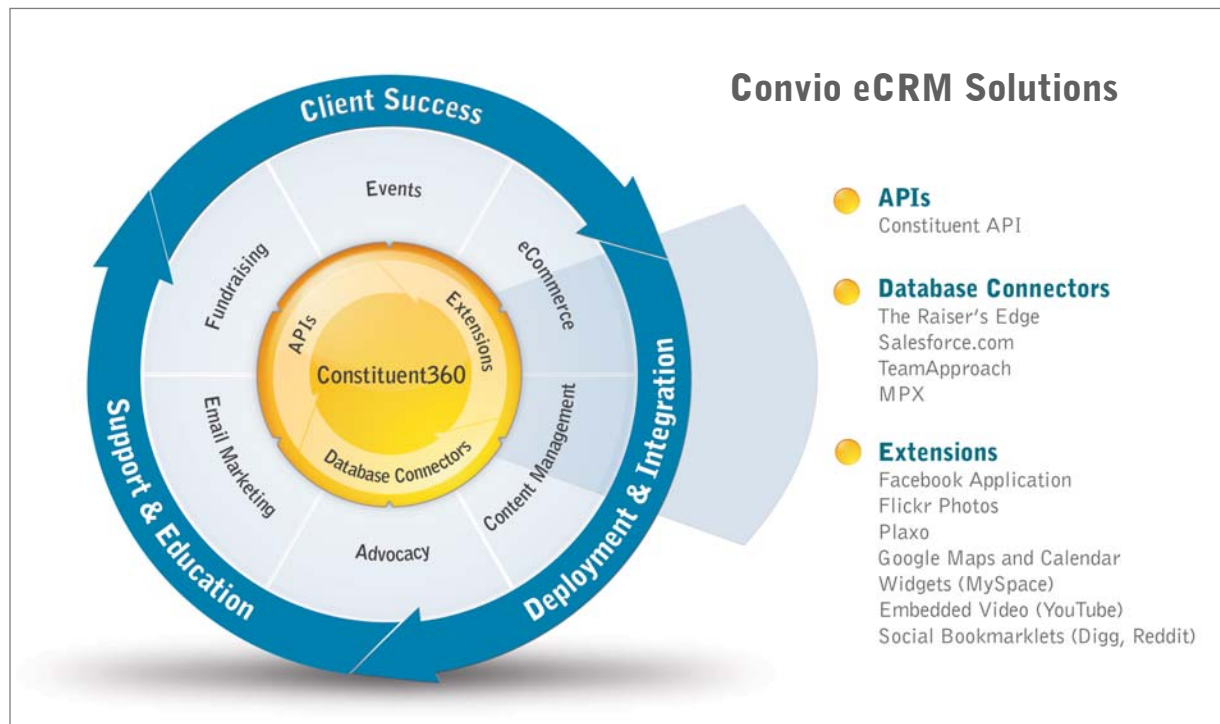
For nonprofit organizations, understanding how well a vendor's tools will work with and complement other vendor solutions is critical when selecting an eCRM solution to ensure the solution can grow with their organization. That is one reason why more organizations are demanding the freedom to choose the best solutions to meet their eCRM goals, and demanding that their vendors have a strong open philosophy. Whether it's integrating social media, creating custom applications to extend the value of their technology investments, or connecting to a legacy offline system, nonprofits want tools that work well together and allow for data integration.

That is why Convio now offers Convio Open — to allow its clients to extend the value of their eCRM investment. With Convio Open, organizations can link together their various communication channels, and related data, in a way that was never possible before. The interoperability of Convio with other products, including offline databases and social media sites such as Facebook and Flickr, allows organizations to take advantage of emerging Internet trends to enhance constituent relationships and reach new market segments.

Convio Open consists of three core components: APIs, Extensions, and Database Connectors. While all components provide new opportunities to build tighter relationships with constituents, each component addresses a different need for nonprofit organizations.

Practical Ways to Leverage the Social Web

- Embed streaming Web videos from sites like YouTube into your Web site.
- From Facebook, allow constituents to support your organization, advertise their support and recruit friends.
- Add event participant photos to your event-specific Flickr photo album and promote events with the social networking features of Flickr.
- Combine Google Maps and Web site content to create dynamic and integrated maps for a better online experience.
- Help supporters quickly and easily tap into any of their address books from within their event participant center using Plaxo's Address Book Access Widget.
- Allow readers to subscribe to RSS™-enabled content, include that subscription where they like to read their content (their aggregator), and receive new content from that subscription whenever it is available.
- Use widgets to build a constituent base by empowering your supporters to spread the word on behalf of your organization via their personal networking sites, blogs and email.



Convio now opens its solutions to allow clients to extend the value of their eCRM investment.

Convio APIs

Convio APIs decrease the amount of effort required for organizations to generate custom solutions to meet their specific business needs, while increasing the value of the Convio platform. For example, an organization might want to use a FLASH animation as a part of a fundraising campaign. Rather than having members of the target audience watch the video and then click through to a Convio-powered donation page, the organization can create a FLASH-based custom donation form that utilizes the Convio API. This enables supporters to make donations without being sent to a different Web address. The donation information could then be relayed in real-time to the Convio database where it would be added to the constituent's profile, or if this was a first-time donation for the individual, a new constituent record would be created. By streamlining the donation process and decreasing the number of clicks, the donor experience is improved and the conversion rate increases.

With all Convio API documentation publicly available online to anyone who has access to the Internet, Convio fosters a collaborative community environment. Organizations can share their use of Convio APIs, discuss best practices and exchange code examples.

Convio Extensions

Convio Extensions allows nonprofits to take advantage of the popularity of social media sites in ways that enable them to reach new and existing supporters. Nonprofits can use Convio Extensions to leverage solutions such as Facebook and MySpace to communicate with and cultivate their constituent relationships without sacrificing the personal nature of their interactions.

For example, an organization can use the Convio Extension that was built specifically to integrate with Facebook. With this extension, a Facebook user can donate or take action from their Facebook page, and the information be relayed in real-time back to the Convio database. In addition, friends of the individual could also receive a notification via their Facebook News Feed that this person donated or took action. At the same time, the organization can push content, such as the latest fundraising or

advocacy campaign, to the constituent's Facebook profile page. The immediate and viral nature of such activities that take place through social media sites dramatically expand the potential universe of constituents that an organization can reach.

Organizations also can leverage Convio Extensions to explore the possibilities offered by other “open” sites, such as Google, Flickr, and Yahoo!. For example, Convio Extensions allows organizations to integrate organizational data with Google Maps, automatically share TeamRaiser™ photo albums with Flickr, and embed YouTube videos within their Web sites to dynamically display based on relevant content of a visitor’s site visit.

By making it easy for organizations to integrate their Convio content with other applications, Convio Extensions provides more choices to create unique engagement strategies. In addition to driving constituent traffic to their Web sites, organizations can use social media sites already popular with constituents to engage them — while sharing data with the Convio platform to keep relevant information centralized in one location.

Convio Database Connectors

Organizations continue to have a strong desire to integrate their eCRM solution with their donor database systems, but have been challenged to do so because many installed solutions are not designed to interface with Web-based platforms like Convio. Now, with Convio Database Connectors, organizations can integrate their online and offline solutions to maximize their existing technology investments.

Convio Database Connectors allow online and offline systems to talk to each other in near real-time, ensuring that constituent data stored in different systems is synchronized. So, when an organization executes an integrated marketing campaign that includes an online donation page, a phone campaign, and a direct mail drop, all of the related information and results can be integrated in the Convio database. By opening the offline world and integrating it with the online world, it is easier for nonprofits to achieve their multi-channel integrated marketing goals.

The ability to integrate constituent data between Convio and various donor databases, including Salesforce.com, Target Team Approach™ and Blackbaud’s The Raiser’s Edge®, gives organizations access to a complete view of their constituents and related interactions. Convio Database Connectors ensure that its clients have the freedom to use and integrate the ideal solutions to meet their needs.

Discover Convio Open

Convio offers a public Web site <http://open.convio.com> where visitors can view API documentation, learn how Extensions work, and find client examples. Convio also offers a client-focused community forum for sharing best practices, examples, and ideas about how they are using Convio Open to further their organization's missions.



Austin | Berkeley | Washington, DC
www.convio.com | info@convio.com