

Getting it right online - a brief guide for charities and pressure groups

A five part series that starts with a look at some of the most common mistakes made by organisations that are campaigning online. The series will go on to explore some simple techniques and approaches that can substantially increase the effectiveness of online action – and recruit lots of new supporters.

Part 1 – Basic Online Mistakes

In the last ten years we have seen an explosion in the online presence of charities and pressure groups. Now there are virtually no organisations that don't have a web site and aren't trying to use it to gain supporters.

There seems to be a progression of mistakes that organisations go through in developing and using their web sites. This series is an attempt to shorten the learning curve.

As a personal observation it seems many organisations are making the same very basic mistake that blighted so much direct mail when it started to gain popularity in the 1980s. Gimmicks and whizzy ideas seem to be given precedence and there doesn't seem to be enough testing. And a blanket approach to emailing with no personalisation is making too many emails irrelevant to the recipients.

Testing shows us what people really respond to, and there are many, many ways you can test your online activity – the tools are all there.

In this issue we're highlighting five critical mistakes that are being made in online campaigns.

1. 'You' not 'Me'

Organisations aren't thinking about what the visitor is looking for, they're thinking about what they like themselves. For example, sites are still being built with flash graphics: some of them start with animation sequences that can take minutes to load. Meanwhile your visitor has gone elsewhere.

2. Generic Landing Pages

Online banner and google adwords campaigns are taking surfers to home pages rather than pages that are relevant to the campaign that is being advertised. There's nothing more frustrating than going to a home page when you are being invited to support a specific campaign.

3. Unaccountable Online Advertising

Organisations are wasting money on online advertising that isn't properly accountable. Advertising executives are selling banner adverts where you pay per 1000 impressions – i.e. the number of times someone opens the page your advert is on. This isn't normally very cost effective. And usually you have to commit a budget of several thousand pounds.

If you are going to buy banners then use a service like that provided by <http://www.fuel-group.com/> where you only need to pay for the conversions - i.e. money donated or specified action taken.

With Google adwords you just pay for the clicks through to your web site. There are also other equivalent services from Yahoo and Microsoft, although Google is by far the best. There is a whole science (and art) to making google adwords work, which we'll explore in a later article.

4. Unpersonalised Email

Organisations aren't utilising their email software to personalise emails and thus make it more relevant to the recipients. If it's more relevant they'll respond at a much higher rate. We'll explain how you can maximise email response in a special report on using email for campaigning and fundraising.

5. Sites Aren't Being Optimised Properly

A properly optimised web site will naturally drive visitors to your web site without you having to pay for this traffic. But there's a lack of real understanding about optimising web sites and some basic mistakes being made. For example, if your web designer makes text into graphics then google's webcrawler (which 'interrogates' your site and helps google to decide how to rank the site) can't see the words. This will probably lower your ranking.

These and other issues will be explored in future articles. We'll look at examples of campaigns that are working well and those that aren't and explain why. We'll explain about what you need to do to get more visitors and to get them to stay longer. We'll also point you in the direction of resources - many which are free - that will help you to vastly improve how you make your organisations presence felt on the web.

Part 2 in next newsletter: Why landing pages are critical to the success of any online campaign.

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