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Technology Strategy: Decision Making for Nonprofit Boards

By Philippa Gamse

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Many nonprofit organizations struggle, quite understandably, with technology planning and investment. New computers, sophisticated Websites and database systems can be expensive. Staff members may be resistant to change and to learning new applications.

But, to quote a famous saying from my homeland: "penny wise can be pound foolish". Sound and well-thought out purchases in the short term have the potential to save significant resources in the medium to long term.

So, how should your Board of Directors and / or your Technology Committee approach technology planning and investment?

One technique is to start out with a "blue-sky" session. First, take an inventory of the capabilities that you currently have, what's working in your operations, and your limitations and frustrations. Then, without consideration of constraints such as cost or staff resources, list the things that you should ideally be able to do.

I like to use "What's the One Thing" questions for this process to help you focus and prioritize:

- * What's the One Thing that you're currently doing that is most valued by your constituents? (i.e. Board, members, funders, staff, the general public . . .)
- * What's the One Thing that you currently don't do that your constituents wish that you would?
- * What's the One Thing that would give you maximum competitive advantage? (or fundraising edge, or whatever is your most burning need . . .)

Look at the procedures that are currently absorbing staff time and resources. Is there potential to streamline these, or to recreate them in a way that would be more cost-effective?

For example, many organizations produce small informational leaflets, brief white papers, or regularly updated research findings. These are sold for a few dollars, which may not cover the true cost of

printing, mailing, and check or credit card processing.

An alternative is to provide these as downloadable e-books on your Website. When the buyer enters their credit card, they gain instant access to your materials in whatever format you choose – Adobe Acrobat (pdf), Word, html, etc. Once this system is set up, you should have few maintenance or support issues, and you're in business on a 24/7 basis. You can change the documents whenever you need to, without leaving stocks of outdated print copies.

Are you using e-mail as effectively as you could? There are two elements to successful implementation of e-mail:

1. Maintaining a comprehensive database of all the contacts that your organization has, including

appropriate details of your dealings with each one.

This allows you to create personalized, targeted and timely e-mail messages that you can send to selected recipients, such as:

- * News updates about your organization
- * Special events, discount purchase offers
- * Legislative alerts and tracking notices
- * Fundraising appeals
- * Membership renewal reminders

Of course, you should include and adhere to a privacy policy whenever using e-mail, and you must honor requests to be removed from your mailing list.

2. Having clear e-mail usage procedures. Sometimes it is preferable to use direct personal contact such as telephone or letters instead of e-mail – for instance, when responding to complaints, or thanking donors for gifts.

But your staff should be clear and comfortable about using e-mail to save time and resources. Sending bulk e-mail from a good database is faster and cheaper than sending bulk faxes. One association that I consulted with recently linked their staff bonuses directly to savings realized from using e-mail over fax.

A great deal of Board business can be conducted via e-mail. This may not include actual voting (check your by-laws and legal obligations for this). But much of the background information that is provided at a typical Board meeting could be disseminated by e-mail ahead of time, thus freeing up valuable meeting time for substantive discussion.

How effective is your Website in promoting and achieving your strategy? An intranet (password protected area) can be very useful if you have staff or chapters geographically distant from your head office. It can provide training materials, mentoring discussion boards, templates for frequently used documents, etc. And, you can have a private section of your site for your Board, as an alternative to sending information via e-mail.

Depending on your operations, there are other technologies that might be appropriate for you to consider as you plan your future strategy and investments. These could include handheld devices and laptops if you have employees who are often out of the office. Voice recognition software can be used for dictation by disabled staff, or those who are really not comfortable with keyboards. For larger organizations, virtual private networks may be appropriate for file sharing and synchronized database maintenance.

Whatever your size, use the strategic and prioritizing "What's the One Thing . . .?" questions that I listed above, together with your estimation of current inefficiencies in staff time and resources to come up with a wish list. Then you can start to analyze the potential investments that you need to make, and the potential savings or revenue that you can realize in the longer term.

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Philippa Gamse, CyberSpeaker, is an eBusiness and technology strategy consultant and professional

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<http://www.CyberSpeaker.com/tipsheet.html> Philippa can be reached at (831) 465-0317.

Moving Message Board

By Paula Jones

Moving message boards are used in the areas where continuous announcements, or other information are need to be displayed in to either indoor or outdoor. Used most widely in churches, schools, airports, other transport stations, banks, production and administration department of organization as marquee information billboards.

Moving message boards uses the technology of LED which stands for light emitting diode. With the power of LED's, you can have a renewable advertisement that is not limited to a single declaration. Boards are easily programmable, meaning you can display anything you want at any time you wish with different scrolling options.

One need not to have high knowledge to operate these electronic boards. As they are accepted with high demand all over the world, the manufacturers are being pushed to created signs that are more user- friendly.

Moving message boards can be controlled remotely via usual methods when connected to personal computers or to any other source. In addition it is also possible to use an infra red keyboard to control the boards, which gives immediate results.

New technology allows these electronic signs to be operated from an almost every sources. Fibre optic networks and tcp/ip , private newswires, radio, pagers and some cellular phones can all be used to operate electronic displays.

Most importantly, these boards are used as "silent sales man". They can be programmed to automatically be switched on and off given a time frame. Thus they become easy to use and with no maintenance cost.

Paula Jones

Jayex Technology Limited, based in London specialise in advanced information display systems. Established in 1978 we have pioneered the development of the LED display market and now have over 18,000 customers worldwide. We offer, probably the largest range of models from small single line signs to big screen Megavision screens that can display live video and action replay in stadia.

Moving Message Board

Electronic Reader Board

Out door Sign

Electronic Display Boards

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RSS ADVERTISING SECRETS

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