

the fundraising **EDGE**

A Resource on Product Fundraising Issues and Trends for Parents, Teachers, Principals and Non-Profit Group Volunteers

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Why Your Group Should Be Exploring Web 2.0

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Like many PTA and PTO leaders these days, Kathryn O'Dekirk is trying to figure out how to deal with a tight budget. Mrs. O'Dekirk, president of an elementary school PTA in Willow Springs, NC, says her group missed its fall fundraising goal by about \$4,000. Reluctant to cut any programs for the students, she turned to the social networking website Facebook to reach out to parents for tips and suggestions on how to bridge the gap.

"We're using our Facebook group to discuss new strategies, and we have been able to bounce some great ideas around," she said.

By now, you've probably come face-to-face with Web 2.0. According to Wikipedia.com (which is part of the phenomenon), Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of web development and web design that facilitates information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration on the Internet. Examples include Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, etc. Hundreds of millions of people around the world are taking advantage of this new technology to communicate in new ways, including parent groups.

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other Web 2.0 applications are so popular because of the faster pace of life most of us are experiencing these days, according to Internet experts.

"The time people have, especially parents, is increasingly fragmented," said

Frank Skinner, a marketing professional based in Atlanta, GA who develops strategies using Web 2.0 technology for non-profit organizations. "Reaching parents at the right place and right time, even if it's for only a split second, is more important than ever."

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In addition to Facebook, Mrs. O'Dekirk's group uses Twitter to communicate with parents more frequently than ever before. Twitter is a micro-

blogging website which allows users to send and read brief messages. Today, Mrs. O'Dekirk "tweets" several times per week to keep parents informed about her PTA's activities. In 140 characters or less (the limit for Twitter messages), Mrs. O'Dekirk sends reminders about upcoming meetings and early release, where to purchase spirit wear online fundraising updates and calls for volunteers, among other items. When "tweeting" about fundraising, Mrs. O'Dekirk always mentions the goal of the program to prevent apathy and build support among parents.

"Many parents have praised our Facebook and Twitter pages and all our efforts to keep them informed," Mrs. O'Dekirk said. "In the past, I heard parents say 'I didn't know you needed help' and 'If I had only known.' I've not heard a single parent say that this year."

Parent groups are also tapping another Web 2.0 technology to get students excited about fundraising. The online video-sharing website YouTube allows anyone to post videos up to ten minutes. A quick search turns up several videos of school principals getting their heads shaved, taking whipped cream pies to the face and even letting students take over their office for a day. Each of these wacky activities was a reward for students who helped the school reach its fundraising goal. This fall if your principal agrees to a little self-humiliation to help the cause, don't forget to bring



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Crossing the Finish Line

7 Tips for Closing a Fundraiser



Why Your Group Should Be Exploring Web 2.0

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along your video camera. Post that footage on YouTube as incentive for future fundraising events. Another idea: ask your fundraising professional if he or she has any professionally-produced video you can post as well to help keep momentum alive.

Web 2.0 technology is being leveraged by millions of people and organizations around the world. It's a lot to take in, but be sure to consider whether your group would benefit by establishing a presence in this new area. "Social media unfortunately comes with a lot of hype," Skinner said. "However once you get past the frenzy, these communities are an inexpensive way to maintain your presence with the people who matter most."

The end of your sale can be as exciting as the beginning if you make a big deal about reaching your goal and give lots of attention to the volunteers who made that happen.

1 REWARD ACHIEVEMENTS

Make sure that all students who participated – even in small ways – are rewarded exactly as advertised. Present personal and group awards after the products have been delivered. Announce dollars earned, top sellers, and prize winners. Display charts in classrooms or school halls to give students a sense of achievement in helping the school reach its goal.

2 CELEBRATE

Make a fuss about special achievement. Tell everyone, "We did better than anticipated, so there will be ice cream on Friday for everybody." Plan a wrap-up assembly. If your principal promised to kiss a pig, tell the students that you've located the biggest, smelliest pig in town. Most important of all, talk about what you'll do with the money. In letters to volunteers, in your newsletter, and on your organization's website, emphasize what the fundraising made possible. Be specific. You might say, "Because of the success of this sale, we can now fund a new field trip." Include a photo.

3 SAY THANKS

Parent volunteers feel extra commitment to a project if their contributions are also recognized. Use the school sign to say "Great job!" To add a personal touch, send supporters photocopies of one child's handwritten note or add a brief handwritten thanks to photocopies of a typed letter. Use automated calling to say, "thank you."

4 SHOW APPRECIATION

Express gratitude tangibly. At your next parent/teacher meeting or student assembly, ask all who helped with the sale to stand. Designate a parking spot for a special volunteer of the week or reserve a prime

parking space for a top volunteer at the next school event. With each order you pass out, include a pair of complimentary passes to the next ticketed event at the school, or a pencil with the group's name or a bumper sticker promoting your group. If you hold a volunteer appreciation breakfast or luncheon, send a chocolate bar with the invitation.

5 RECOGNIZE VOLUNTEERS

Broadcast the names of active volunteers. In your newsletter or by email, list the names of all participants. Create a tree of thanks on a wall at school, writing volunteers' names and brief notes about their contributions on colored leaves around the trees. Take photos of parent volunteers handing out and picking up their orders and post these on your website and school bulletin board. Create a Walk of Fame with a red carpet remnant, decorated with stars that include each participant's name.

6 HAVE FUN

Remind volunteers that sales can be fun. At your next meeting, play "Jeopardy" with topics relating to your volunteers. Write and read poems about individual volunteers. Buy some goofy yard ornaments such as plastic flamingoes; then plant one each week in a volunteer's front yard along with a note of thanks. Make your volunteer luncheon a little wacky by calling it Volunteeraville and serving cheeseburgers and milkshakes in a Jimmy Buffet-themed buffet.

7 GIVE AND GET FEEDBACK

Solicit volunteers' ideas for how to improve the sale so all opinions count. Schedule a meeting with the fundraising professional with whom you worked. Ask them how it went from their end. Was there anything they'd do differently or suggest you do differently next time? Likewise, share your constructive suggestions for how they can do a better job. Think of things that would have made your job easier if only you had known ahead of time.

Things to do now to prepare for your spring fundraiser

It's been a busy fall, so it's understandable if the spring fundraiser isn't top of mind right now. But soon you should start thinking about your group's next big program. Research shows about 20% of all parent groups say their most profitable fundraiser kicks off in February, March or April. The spring fundraiser is an opportunity to make one last stride toward reaching your overall goals for the year. Here are some ideas for things you can do now to get a head start on this spring's program.

Thank Volunteers Now

Want to keep those volunteers who helped with the fall fundraiser on board this spring? Then be sure to thank them now. Volunteers are more likely to raise their hands again if they know their time and efforts are appreciated.

"When your volunteers replay their experience thinking of the playground they helped build instead of the catalogs, order forms and monies they organized, this memory just might motivate them to sign up and volunteer again," said Rick Anderson, a fundraising professional in Minnesota.

Create an environment that celebrates the spirit of volunteering all the time. End-of-semester appreciation is nice, but you might need to recognize your star players weekly, monthly or on some recurring basis. Try offering a prime parking spot with a big sign that reads "Reserved for Volunteer of the Week" or a monthly raffle for "best seat in the house" for school events like graduation or local events such as a hot play or concert.

Put a Bug in the Principal's Ear

School principals are busy people. In fact, 7 out of 10 principals say "fragmentation of time" is a major concern, according to the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Now is the time to put a bug in the principal's

Looking Ahead



ear about the spring fundraiser. When it comes to fundraising, principal involvement varies from school to school. But most principals need at least an overview of the program prior to its launch, according to James Hodge, principal of an elementary school in Bridgeport, CT.

"When it has the school's name attached to it, I have to know what's going on – what products we sell, what vendors we use – because when someone has a question, I usually answer the phone call," Mr. Hodge said. "If I don't know what's going on, I can't respond."

Schedule a meeting with the principal to provide a brief summary of the spring program. Use that opportunity to find out if he's willing to help motivate students by sleeping on the roof of the school or kissing a pig if the fundraising goal is met. Ultimately, the principal's support and involvement can make or break a fundraiser.

Tap Your Fundraising Professional

Take advantage of the knowledge and experience your fundraising professional can provide. Touch base with your sales rep and ask if they know when neighborhood schools and sports leagues are planning to conduct fundraisers in the spring. It's easier to shift your dates now to avoid competition if you learn there's a walk-a-thon or product sale scheduled at the same time as your spring program.

Change the Subject

Following the fall program, after all the products have been delivered, money counted and volunteers thanked, it's time to change the subject away from fundraising for awhile. Show parents your group does more than raise money. Host a spaghetti dinner, movie night or even a carnival, but don't charge admission. Instead, promote them as community-building events. Keep fundraising chatter to a minimum between programs to prevent burnout among supporters.

Fundraising Advice from the Experts!

The award-winning *Fundraising Edge* newsletter is published by the Association of Fund-Raising Distributors & Suppliers (AFRDS), a non-profit organization dedicated to helping groups like yours reach their fundraising goals.

Here's a preview of what's inside this issue of the *Fundraising Edge*!



Learn how to leverage the latest online technology, including Twitter and Facebook, to increase participation in your fundraising programs



Discover new ways to bring a successful fundraiser to a close



Get an early start on this spring's programs with tips and suggestions from experienced parent group volunteers and fundraising professionals

the
fundraising **EDGE**

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