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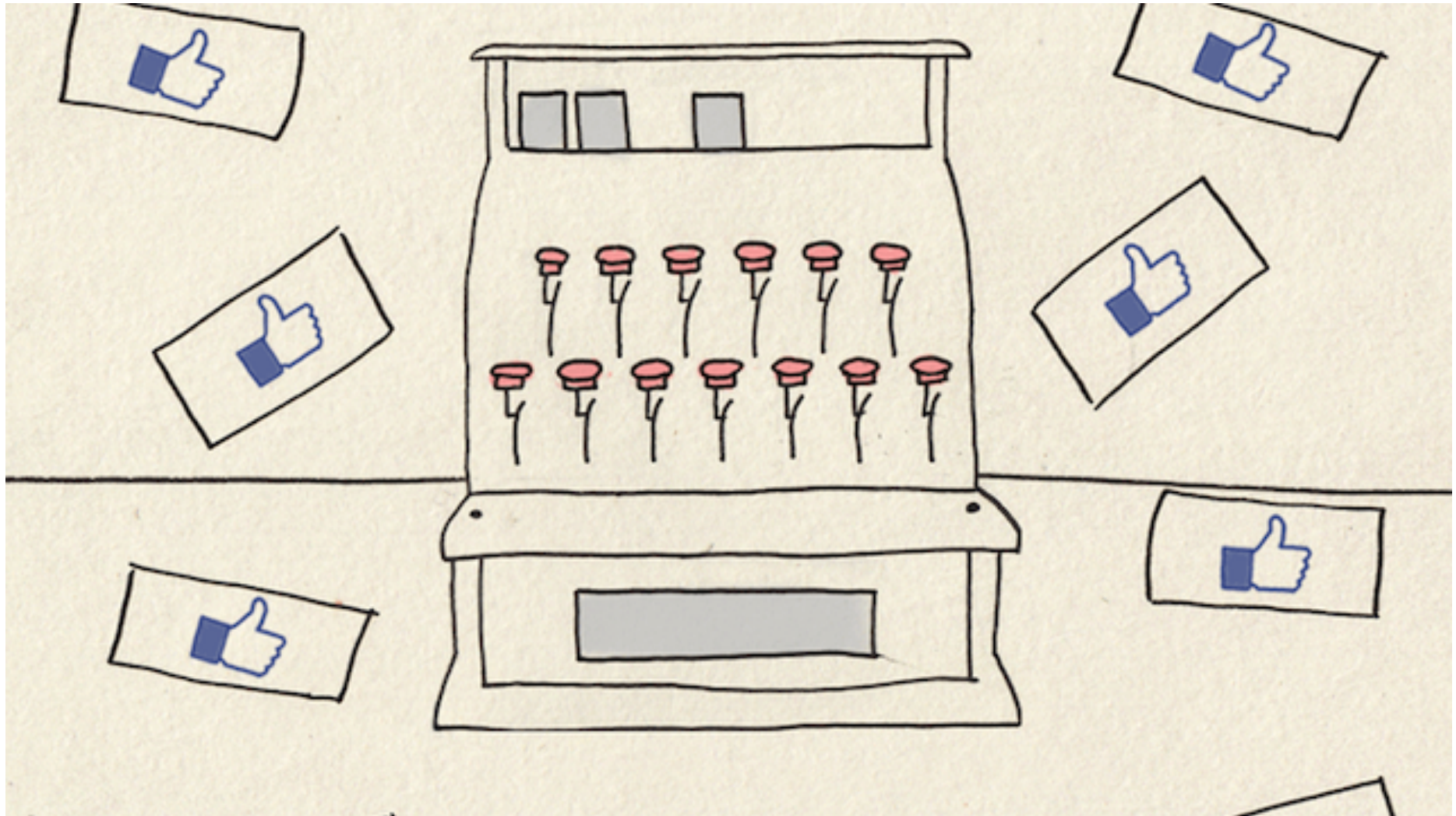
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The Social Network Effect: Good News for All Nonprofits

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ALLISON GAUSS

Social Media is Great for Nonprofits of Any Size

A [new study](#) on social media and crowdfunding uncovered some promising results for all nonprofit organizations, but particularly good for small nonprofits. “The Social Network Effect: Determinants of Giving Through Social Media,” published in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, investigated which variables affected the online fundraising success of more than 50 nonprofits using Facebook.

Professors Gregory Saxton of the University at Buffalo and Lili Wang of Arizona State University found that the size of a nonprofit’s social network (followers or friends) was more important to online fundraising than its financial efficiency or organization size (in financial assets), two powerful determinants in offline donations. This “Social Network Effect” suggests that small nonprofits would benefit by investing in their social media presence and web page.

More Friends = More Donations

One of the key findings from the study was that **an organization’s online donations were driven by the size of its social network and the reach of its website**. While these factors have been neglected in previous research, the prevalence of social media and online fundraising makes them increasingly relevant. Saxton and Wang measured an organization’s social network by the number of followers or “friends.” A [press release](#) about the study points out,

Online donations are driven by the number of ‘friends’ that a cause elicits through online sites. Friends often recommend a cause to other friends, which extends the reach the cause or group had.

Donations were also related to the number of users reaching an organization’s website.

These findings suggest that nonprofits can boost online donations by increasing the number of followers in their social networks and the number of users visiting their websites. [Search Engine Optimization](#), [responsive web page design](#), and consistent use of [social media](#) are a few strategies that can increase the reach any organization.

Are Social Networks the Great Equalizer?

In contrast to offline donations, the study found that organizational efficiency and size did not significantly impact online donations. “Donors on social media and crowdfunding sites do not seem to care how efficient the organization is or how large it is,” said Saxton. These findings bode well for younger and smaller nonprofits. The initial costs of launching a nonprofit may make an organization appear inefficient in its early years and small nonprofits are often competing with larger ones for donations. But social media and crowdfunding appears to negate these differences.

The discovery that organization size and efficiency aren’t significant factors in online donations could have important implications. With [increasing numbers](#) of people on social media, nonprofits who invest in social media and web design are poised to attract this growing pool of potential donors. While a nonprofit with an annual revenue of \$500,000 could never compete with a \$10 million organization in traditional advertising, social media and crowdfunding present a more level playing field.

Furthermore, the study concluded that online supporters are more likely to fund new projects or projects with a tangible result. This makes [crowdfunding a great match for nonprofits](#) seeking to launch a new program or to cover a one-time expense.

How to Build Your Social Network

Since nonprofits may attract more donations from larger social networks, we wanted to get you started on expanding your reach, both through social media and through your website. Here are three strategies that can help you [reach larger audiences](#).

STRATEGY #1: OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE

The best way to improve your website is to make it easy to find and easy to use. Search Engine Optimization, which uses URLs, titles, headers, key words, and more to make your site more visible can be used to help your site show up when users search a related term.

If you're new to SEO, [this guide from Moz.com](#) is a great introduction. To make your website easy to use, you should focus on attractive and [responsive design](#). If someone is interested enough to go to your website, don't give them a reason to leave. [61% of consumers](#) leave a mobile site if they can't find what they need "right away."

STRATEGY #2: CAPITALIZE ON CONTENT

If you're going to tap into the value of social networks, you will also need to add value to them. Social media relies on user-generated content, and people tend to follow and engage with users who create good content and post regularly.

Even if you will be doing all your organization's social networking by yourself, there are ways to maximize your presence. Find out which networks are most important to your audience and make [data driven decisions](#) on where to focus your efforts. You can also [recycle topics and content](#) across the different social networks you use.

STRATEGY #3: FIND MORE FOLLOWERS

To make your organization visible to more people and drive online donations, one of your goals should be to increase your followers. A key step is simply creating and posting great content, but there are some other best practices that can increase the size of your network.

For a detailed guide to gaining followers, read [this awesome post!](#)

Just like your website, your social network profiles should be easy to find and understand. Make sure you have a profile picture with your organization's logo or other branded image and your profile name matches the name of your nonprofit. Then, to give users a more personal experience, invite them to comment on your posts, follow back, and retweet people. You are trying to [cultivate an active community of support](#) and a community needs [conversation and engagement](#) to thrive.

With so many nonprofits operating these days, you not only have to convince a donor to give to your cause but to give to your organization instead of others. While large organizations often have greater resources

for [marketing](#) and development, the internet is a place where nonprofits of all sizes can [reach out to new audiences](#).

Image Credit: [SumAll](#)

The BIG Guide to Social Media for Nonprofits

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WRITTEN BY



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