

Nonprofits & Technology:

3 Dangerous Technology Practices that Don't Seem Dangerous at All





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xynoMedia Technology helps turn technology hostages into technology victors through a combination of technology planning and strategy. Technology can be frustrating and unnecessarily expensive but, we can help. Our nonprofit clients realize more results from their technology projects, make technology decisions with ease, and benefit from calling on xynoMedia expertise when needed. We understand nonprofits and how technology ideally fits in with the overall organizational mission. Our clients save time and money and experience less stress as relates to technology issues. The organization benefits from pain-free, comprehensive, creative approaches to its problems and needs.

Our mission is simple: to help our clients support their missions and expand their reach first through comprehensive technology planning and second, through the appropriate and effective application of technology. **With xynoMedia Technology, technology is not just an expense,** it's an investment in your organization's mission and longevity.

We've found that the chief concern that Executive Directors have about technology is that they want the benefits of technology minus the dehumanization factor.

Simply put, they don't want 'the cause' to get lost in 'the technology'. We hear you. At xynoMedia, our aim is not to have technology create more work for your staff or for it to serve as a barrier between your staff and the communities you serve. We understand that your organization was built on human contact and, you'd like it to stay that way. In fact, we will help you use technology to free staff from paper-pushing so they can get back to the business of helping the people you serve. We are proud to be human-focused.

We serve as the organization's outsourced 'in-house' technology counsel and guarantee that we will never use techno-speak, talk down to staff or make a recommendation that we're not fully prepared to implement, provide training for and support.

Welcome to the xynoMedia difference.

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It's all highly appropriate. A tool that makes it possible to do more with less is now being leveraged by the very sector that has had to do just that.

The nonprofit sector has realized that through the power of technology, they can expand their reach, support their missions, take advantage of online funding opportunities, protect their community's sensitive data, streamline their organization and get back to the business of providing services. In a sector that is strapped for funding both critical programs as well as technology initiatives, money and resource savings are an obvious gold mine.

However, with all the excitement and newfangled-ness of it all, the sector has somehow let the horse out of the stable and an incorrect technology approach has emerged. Here are the top three errors:

3

Being cause-focused and not business-focused.

Old habits die hard and traditionally, nonprofit organizations have focused on 'the cause' and identifying funding sources for 'the cause'. They have followed a keep-the-lights-on-and-ink-in-the-printer mentality and until now, that has worked. As the dynamics of the economy and the finance world shift, nonprofits can no longer afford to focus solely on 'the cause'. Nonprofits are businesses after all. Organizational and operating plans are needed. Online fundraising and compliance are now the norm. Broadband and Virtual Private Network (VPN) connections are all the rage. Case management software, accounting and online event planning and calendaring are but a small part of the vast landscape that is nonprofit technology.

The time has come to get rid of AOL, Hotmail and Yahoo! email addresses. Not owning a domain name for your organization says two things: a) it's not willing to invest \$9 a year to purchase a domain name and, b) it would rather have AOL or Hotmail on business cards than its own name. How can you further your reach without a web site? If you won't invest in your organization, why should anyone else? Clearly, these are not great messages to send to companies that can write big checks.

Truth be told, many funding sources are going digital – quickly! - and will only donate via an electronic gateway of some sort. Organizations that refuse to step up and play ball won't even get tickets to watch the game.

2

Putting the cart before the horse.

This is a challenge that finds its fault in both the technology and nonprofit sectors. At a recent seminar focusing on technology and the nonprofit sector, it was clear that technology vendors are not doing a great job of handling implementation, providing training, supporting or making a clear case for the technology enhancements they

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recommend. Clearly the two sectors are not speaking the same language – at least not at the same time.

Technology has been slow to take hold in the nonprofit sector and depending on who's speaking; the nonprofit community is either filled with slow adopters or cautious adopters. Either way, two things need to happen: technology vendors need to be sensitive to this dynamic by ensuring their conversations and recommendations include technology concerns specific to the nonprofits and/or the nonprofit community needs to be empowered to put the brakes on technology initiatives if return on investment, implementation, training and support are not crystal clear.

Consider this:

- More and more donors want the convenience of donating at their leisure – usually by Internet. They want to give when they have time and that doesn't always coincide with the 9-5 hours of the nonprofit. If nonprofits are not fully embracing electronic donations, how can they really expect to be supported? It's no longer enough to cry 'nonprofit'.
- Case management software is a great and critical tool - assuming organizations can install it with antiquated hardware and outdated operating systems.
- If this is the age of technology, how can an organization effectively expand their reach or funding pool without a web site?

1

Failing to plan.

It's a tried and true adage – Failing to plan is planning to fail. In a sector that continually suffers from 'down-sized' budgets and (understandably) burnt-out staff, the best way of keeping staff sane, avoiding costly technology enhancements and ending the recurring budget-reallocation dance.

A technology plan is a critical tool to any nonprofit – regardless of size. Don't misunderstand, this is not yet another document created to sit on a shelf collecting dust but rather, a critical blueprint to help outline specific technology goals, budgets, present and future needs and even training. It will help decide and define what technology the organization needs and when. Good technology plans also show how technology can be used to streamline tasks, achieve more with less and expand the services and programs of the organization.

Done right, technology planning is a relatively painless process that includes assessment, planning and implementation phases. This may sound like a lofty pursuit best left to larger, well-funded organization however, keep in mind that larger nonprofits usually have budgets to absorb the occasional slip-up and surprise – smaller organizations don't. The average technology plan shaves 10% off a typical nonprofit operating budget which means the cost of most plans pay for themselves well inside 6 months. With those statistics, can nonprofit organizations afford *not* to implement technology planning?

These are just a few barriers of which nonprofit organizations should make themselves aware. There are many others lurking and waiting to strike the unprepared nonprofit. Organizations that fail to move toward being technology-enabled, will find themselves ceasing operations sooner rather than later.

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