

Publication: *Fundraising Success*

Title: Adapt or Die: Fundraising Technology in the Post-Borders World

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[RIP Borders bookstore](#). I loved your comfortable sofas, tasty coffee, knowledgeable staff, spacious restrooms and the books, of course. But clearly I, and many others out there, didn't love you enough to prevent your demise. Ultimately, we preferred the convenience of getting the same books from [Amazon.com](#) without leaving the house to buy them.

We might look at [Borders](#) and think that can never happen to our organizations — we're far too savvy, right? But what are the lessons we can learn as nonprofits and fundraisers from this and other sad endings? Are our methods and technology threatening to make us the dinosaurs, while the Amazons of our sector plough ahead without us?

Borders' mistake, put simply, was an inability to adapt. Or possibly it was a failure to read the signs of the times, which would have told Borders how it should adapt. What matters to consumers most in this day and age is not what mattered in the '80s and '90s when Borders' brand (its uniqueness) gave it the edge. And that blind spot meant a large, healthy business evaporated in an alarmingly short space of time.

So what about your organization? Does it have an unassailable position in the market? Would your donors vote with their feet just because they couldn't interact with you online in a way that makes them feel good? Maybe we'd like to think that the donor-charity relationship has a bit more substance than the average customer-supplier equivalent, but we can't ignore the lessons of Borders and others like it if we want to stay relevant to this and the next generation of donors.

So how do consumers want to transact these days? It may be obvious, but it looks to me like consumers, our donors, are increasingly buying online. They research what to buy online. They have short attention spans when browsing. They like to discuss, blog, share their likes and dislikes, run events to raise money, register for our events, and join our memberships. They [tweet](#), create about 90 pieces of [Facebook](#) content each month and are ever more likely to use their mobile devices than PCs.

It wasn't like that 10 years ago — or even five, to such a degree. Clearly, there has been a technology-led paradigm shift in consumer behavior, which — if we're not careful — could leave charities high and dry. But does the technology that the average

fundraiser has at his/her fingertips today cut it in the new world? Or to put it another way, are we enabling our donors to interact with our organizations and one another in the way they want?

We could start by looking at our technology. One approach is to keep bolting on functionality to what we have. You already may have the website and the database connected. But then there's social networking (private or public), peer-to-peer fundraising, e-mail, texts and so on. One charity I spoke to recently counted 15 different feeds of data coming into the organization, and it was beginning to creak.

So here's another way to think about it: Start with the website. What if the database was in the website as part of its content? Staff, donors and public visitors all go to the same place. Staff members log in and get full database functionality, albeit with a friendly user interface. To donors and the public, it's just your website. They can log in or register. But they also can blog, share media, comment, share pages onto their chosen social-networking sites, donate, buy, raise funds and the like.

In one sense, it's just bringing together what already exists and simplifying it, but importantly, it swings the focus around from spending on back-office solutions to focusing on what the donor wants to see and do online. Which is what Amazon does.

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