CompuWerx
Ez Giving Online

How to Promote Electronic Giving

Casey O'Keefe - Vice President Marketing & New Product Development

How many 30-year olds still write checks on a regular communicate the congregation's financial basis? Unfortunately, very few. And that, in a nutshell, summarizes the stewardship challenge facing religious and financial leaders.

For many longtime congregation members, checks will always be the donation method of choice. However, a growing number of churchgoers don't even carry a checkbook. They prefer to conduct the majority of their financial transactions electronically. It is essential that churches prepare for these members who rarely, if ever, write checks.

Churches without electronic giving should be actively investigating new donation options, such as direct debit giving, credit & debit card giving, and online giving.

Meanwhile, those churches with electronic giving already in place need to actively promote their programs using church bulletins, pledge letters, and other readily available communication resources.

To assist in these promotion efforts, here are seven simple, yet effective ways to boost electronic giving.

1.   **Make announcements during services.**   Congregation members will participate in an electronic giving program that enjoys visible, top-down support from the church's religious and financial leaders. A few carefully chosen words delivered from the pulpit will have a powerful impact. Well-attended holiday services present the perfect opportunity to reach out to the largest possible number of worshippers.

2.   **Create bulletin or newsletter announcements.**   Even the most articulate leaders have difficulty bringing up money matters. Use bulletins and newsletters to regularly communicate the congregation's financial needs and remind members that the church offers an electronic giving option. Publish the same brief item regarding electronic giving in every issue.

3. **Emphasize electronic giving for pledge drives, holiday giving and year-end donation.** Make members aware of online giving anytime there is a pledge drive, fundraiser, or special appeal. Prepare a special bulletin message for these occasions, emphasizing the convenience of online giving for members and the importance of their contribution to the church.

4. **Include program information in mail and email communications.** Make it a standard practice to mention online giving in all written appeals.. For maximum impact, designate electronic giving as the church's preferred contribution method. Include an authorization form.

5. **Make information readily available.** Display program materials and enrollment forms in literature racks, resource centers, or anywhere else that congregation members typically turn for information. Widespread access to enrollment materials is essential whether launching a new online giving program or promoting an existing program to new member.

6. **Prepare offering cards for members to use during services.** The symbolic act of giving can be a very important part of financial stewardship-especially in congregation that have only recently adopted online giving. Give members a visible way to participate in the weekly offering by printing reusable "I give electronically" cards and placing them in the pews. Members may also simply write, "I give electronically" on their envelopes.

7. Use the church website. The church website is the perfect place to communicate the financial needs of the congregation and to encourage online giving. Tech-savvy members will not only seek information on the church website, they will appreciate an efficient, online giving option.

The recent crisis in Haiti has drawn considerable attention to the benefits of online giving. Churches already equipped to handle online offerings and contributions were able to quickly redeploy their websites to process one-time donation in support of the humanitarian relief effort in Haiti. Sums that would have required weeks and months to collect in the earlier era were collected in a matter of hours and days.

Two churches, similar in every way, can experience significantly different results from online giving. The difference lies in execution and promotion.

1. **Think location, location, location.** Most online contributors simply want a straightforward donation process. The home page should feature a prominently placed "Donate Now" button or text link leading to a donation page – an easy task for any webmaster. Place the button or link where it is visible without scrolling down the page.

2. **Offer multiple links.** Provide links to the donation page from several locations throughout the website. Ideally, place a tab or link, labeled "Electronic Giving," "E-Giving," or "Donate," as a fixed menu item on every page of the website.

3. **Offer a variety of online giving options.** Just as a business provides different payment options, provide congregation members with different online donation options. Credit card, debit cards, echecks may all be used to process online donations.

4. **Drive donors to the church website.** Promote the church website and donation page at every opportunity. The church web address should appear in all print communications, and the availability of an online giving option should be mentioned in all financial appeals.

5. **Adopt a more direct tone**. Personally asking for funds is rarely easy – especially for operation expenses and other items that lack a strong emotional tug. The church website is a perfect place to feature a well-crafted financial appeal.

6. **Encourage recurring donations.** For some congregation members, missing Sunday services means a missing contribution. Help member stay on track with annual pledges by encouraging them to set up automatic, recurring donations through the church website.

7. **Raise funds quickly in an emergency.** Whether raising funds for an urgent need in the community or for victims for a faraway natural disaster, an online giving page provides a church with a rapid way to respond to any type of emergency. Many churches with online giving maintain a generic "Disaster Fund" at all times just for these situations.

Going forward, churches will find it increasingly difficult to rely exclusively on check writers for their financial support. Fortunately, there are electronic giving options well suited for any congregation regardless of size or member demographics.