



NONPROFIT TECHIES FIND COMFORT IN THE FAMILIAR

Doctors are always asked which specialist they would entrust with a family member. Chefs are asked where they like to go to eat. Few will admit to the guilty pleasure of watching *Duck Dynasty*, *Hardcore Pawn*, *Storage Hunters* or reruns of *Leave It To Beaver*.

It is in that spirit that *The NonProfit Times* asked six nonprofit technologists where they like to hang

out on the Web. When you are home alone and wandering the Web, you migrate to the comfortable and to what you find entertaining.

Here's what is remarkable about how these technologists answered. It was the straightforward, basic, in-your-face sites to which they returned. They know where to go to be wowed. They don't go there on their own time.

Here's what they had to say. — *Paul Colery*



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PostSecret -- For All The World To See

By AMY SAMPLE WARD

I have many websites that I subscribe to via RSS or even visit directly regularly. Some are pretty typical: blogs, news sites, and so on. There's one that doesn't quite fit the mold, though. It might not be the sleekest design or the fanciest set-up, but I am a regular reader of PostSecret.com. Every Sunday I visit the site to read the new postcards selected from many mailed in each week.

I go back every week for a few reasons. First, I love the very real sense of community that Post Secret has developed over the years. (I'm one of many who visit the site every Sunday). You see postcards that reference cards sent in previously, posted emails or responses to particularly passionate or poignant postcards, and even stories of the impact the community has made on a single person's journey.

It is a great reminder that even in a

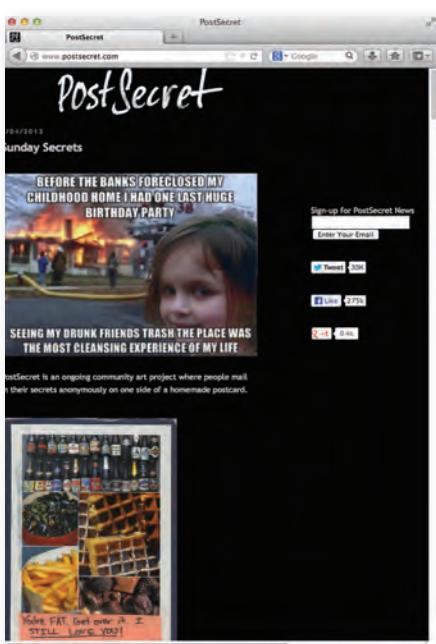
very simple design, if the community is the center of your work, you can still let the community shine through.

PostSecret.com is also a fun juxtaposition of handmade objects that are extremely personal and real, existing online where anyone can browse them. You can click on an image and see the near-to-real-life scanned size of someone else's postcard. When organizations think about storytelling online, I think it is important to find ways to bridge the on and offline world. That's what brings us closer together.

The thing that really keeps me going back, though, is that the content really is all new every Sunday. I know that there are new postcards waiting for me to read and I make sure to visit the site. Some organizations have created similar schedules with their communities, sticking to a content calendar and creating expectation and engagement with the community. For example, Idealist.org posts discussion questions about nonprofit jobs (hiring, looking for jobs, working in the sector) every Monday. Some community members might only be there for the question, but they know when it is coming and can participate. It's the same with PostSecret.

I'm not sure I've thought so much about PostSecret.com until now, but from the community visibility, on and offline connection, and regularly updated content, I think it's a great example to highlight. [NPT](#)

Amy Sample Ward is membership director of the Nonprofit Technology Network (NTEN), an independent blogger and a contributing editor to The NonProfit Times.



A Lap Of The Internet: Tech Sites For Nonprofits

By CHRIS BERNARD

Technology changes fast, doesn't it? And there are so many pieces to it that it's difficult to keep up with any one of them, much less all of them. But in my role at Idealware, I'd be remiss if I didn't try. To that end, there are a number of sites I visit regularly to keep up to speed on the ever-evolving world of technology, especially as it applies to the nonprofit sector.

Here's what a typical lap of the Internet looks like for me.

A number of individuals put a lot of time and effort into writing about technology for nonprofits, and I like to visit their sites regularly.

On Beth Kanter's blog (www.bethkanter.org), some of the sector's leading experts share their voices on wide-ranging topics from philanthropy to social media, all from the perspective of how nonprofits can use different technologies and mediums to better reach and serve the people they need to, from volunteers to funders to constituents.

John Haydon has a blog, too (www.johnhaydon.com), where he discusses social media for nonprofits. He's always thoughtful and smart as hell, and I always learn something. Marc Pitman, the "Fundraising Coach," writes about that topic on his site (<http://fundraisingcoach.com>), and often touches on the technology that can help. He's also a really good guy.

Over at TechSoup (www.techsoup.org), I scan the blog for news and information about technology, and usually learn a thing or two about specific tools. If you work at a nonprofit and you're not familiar with TechSoup and the discounted prices they offer on software, you're missing out.

I usually visit a few straight-up tech sites that aren't nonprofit-related, but that cover technology that is useful to everyone, including the people doing the boots-on-the-ground work at nonprofit organizations. Gizmodo (www.gizmodo.com) and Engadget (www.engadget.com) are good, as are ArsTechnica (<http://arstechnica.com>).

Tech is not the goal -- it's just one of the tools we can use to reach the goal. For nonprofits, the goal is changing the world, right? That's why so many of us spend so much of our time working within the sector. It's useful to read about all the great things nonprofits are doing to make the world a better place, so I check the latest news at *The NonProfit Times* (www.thenonprofittimes.com). Technology on its own is useless without context. I also read the technology sections of the *New York Times* (<http://nytimes.com>) and *Boston Globe* (<http://boston.com>) for information about how the for-profit world is using technology, because much of it applies.

If technology isn't your passion but a necessary evil, don't worry. You don't have to keep up with technology -- just with the people who do. [NPT](#)

Chris Bernard is the editorial and communications director of Idealware in Portland, Maine.





Feedly -- Satiating The Hunger For The Web

By DANIELLE BRIGIDA

When confronted with the question, "What is your favorite website?" I struggle. As senior manager for social strategy for National Wildlife Federation, I visit thousands of sites each week and rely heavily on multiple resources to do my job well. I love many of them, but it's not actually any one particular news, company or organization website site that gets my direct traffic every day.

My favorite site that consistently keeps me going back for more is my RSS (Real Simple Syndication) reader, Feedly.com, which aggregates information from my favorite sites into one place.

There are four things that keep me going back to Feedly (or an RSS Reader):

1. Personalized Organization: Most websites don't let you control how you see their content, but on Feedly (and

other RSS readers) I am allowed to create folders that organize how I see a large number of feed subscriptions. I also draw inspiration for social media updates from NWF.org content and other content available on the Web. To stay sane in this endeavor, I tend to pull my information from multiple sources and organize sites by topic or with extra context.

2. Monitoring Mentions: Part of my job is to pay attention to where National Wildlife Federation and our brands are mentioned online by subscribing to search engine results to certain keywords. This is vital in helping me not only see what blogs we are mentioned on, but also in certain social media sites. Without visiting my aggregator, I would have to do a lot of this manually.

3. Access to Multiple References in One Place: I was always taught to rely on many references, and I find that having access to multiple science, environmental and outdoor blogs in one place is too good to be true. This is constantly useful for me when I'm looking for content to share, comment on, or get inspired by.

4. Time Saving: There are times for exploring sites through navigation, but mostly I'm a search bar kinda gal. I usually need to reduce the amount of time I spend looking for content or relevant news. I rely heavily on Feedly to deliver me content in one place that will be relevant and helpful. It is for this reason I simply cannot resist logging into Feedly every day. **NPT**

Daniella Brigida is senior manager of social strategy and integration at the National Wildlife Federation in Reston, Va.



Meeting Up With People Of Like Interests

By ALLISON FINE

I love Meetup.com. I know it's not a sexy choice of this week's glittering, mind-blowing Four Square meets Pinterest multi-platform app. But, it continues to be one of the most important social developments of the past 10 years.

I met Meetup's founder, Scott Heiferman, in 2004 when he was just getting started. Meetup is a website that enables people to self-organize online around their passions, hobbies and interests and meet locally to discuss politics or knit together or kayak. As one of his first successes, Scott's organizing platform gained traction by enabling supporters of Howard Dean's candidacy for president to self-organize local efforts.

Meetup perfectly fit a need: It was free, easy-to-use, and allowed unmet people to self-organize when and how they wanted. It was completely counterintuitive at the time to the conventional wisdom that people were afraid of meeting strangers and didn't have the time and energy or interest in self-organizing.

Yahoo and Google then created Meetup-like features. Well, there's the end of Meetup, I thought. But Meetup continued to grow exponentially in the number of meetups organized around the country and the number of people participating in them.

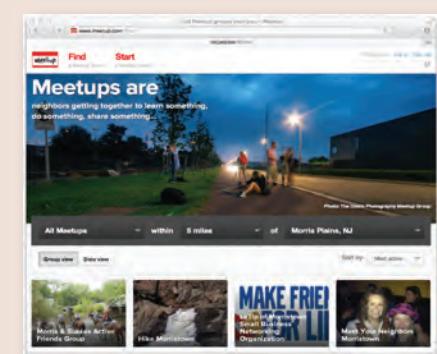
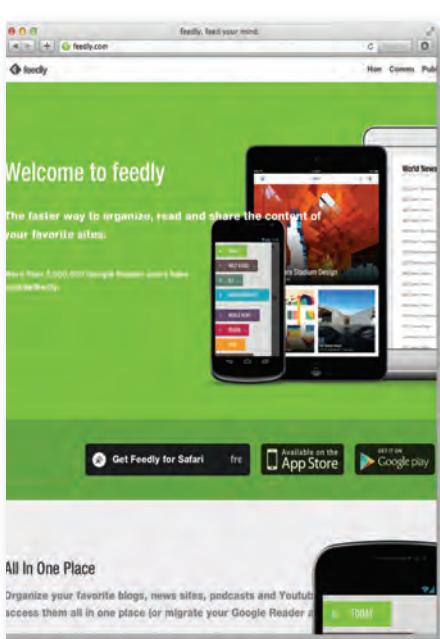
And then Meetup announced it would start to charge organizers a subscription fee for using the site. Once again, I imagined Meetup's death knell. Yet, once again I was proved wrong. Meetup continued growing at a rapid pace.

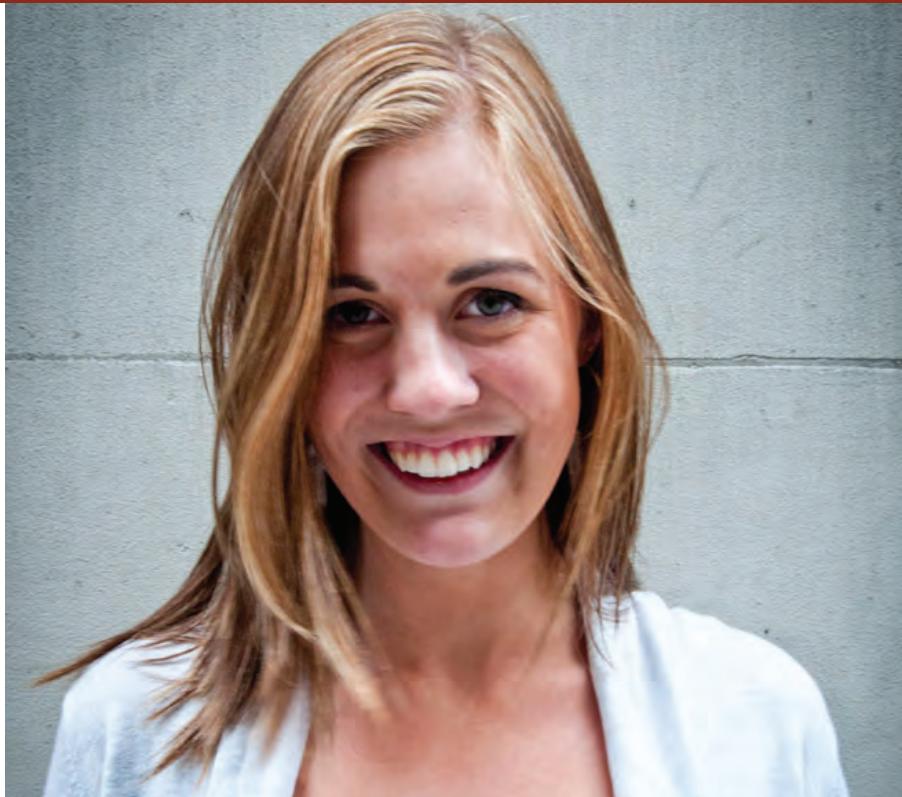
There is more to learn here than just my suspect prognostication skills. Meetup is simple to use, and it's fast and inexpensive. More importantly, it is home to a critical mass of people who are open to and enjoy meeting unmet like-minded people, and that makes Meetup a safe place to join.

This month, within five miles of where I live, there are Meetups for people interested in attachment parenting, for kayakers, wedding and event professionals, motorcyclists, meditation, single lesbians, the Tea Party, ballroom dancing and photography. That's just a sampling. There are many more.

Once people come together because of one shared interest, it is likely that there are additional areas of mutual interest. Maybe someone else has a daughter interested in botany school, and another bird watcher had a breast cancer scare last year. This is a community — a group of people who connected online, met on land and now care about one another. It is a source for a new kind of localness, the kind that used to be generated by bridge clubs or being a member of a church, but ones that aren't bound by agendas, bylaws, boards, annual dues, committees, or fundraisers. Meetup makes us free to connect with other people in real, on land, and meaningful ways first because of similar interests and hobbies, and then simply because of our shared humanity. **NPT**

Allison Fine is a senior fellow at Demos: A Network of Ideas and Action and is co-author of the best-selling *The Networked Nonprofit*, and author of the award-winning *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*.





DonorsChoose.org -- It's Back To School Time

By LIZ EDY

I recently caught myself looking at Facebook photos from a vacation in 2009 of a friend of a friend. How I got there was a blur. I couldn't help but feel slight shock at how quickly I was sucked into the black hole that is the Internet. I decided to be proactive and bookmark pages I could get lost in and not feel totally lame about. It was productive procrastination, if you will.

DonorsChoose.org is in my bookmarks.

In the time it takes me to walk to the subway, I am able to support a public school classroom with the supplies they need with the little money I have to



spare as a young New York City professional. The process is quick, transparent and meaningful. When a school reaches its goal, DonorsChoose.org sends the materials straight there. Each donor is then taken on a personalized experience that makes a donation feel valuable and appreciated. The return is even worth hanging on your fridge.

Three reasons I love this site:

1. Closed loop. They do a fantastic job of never having any dead ends. When you sponsor a project, you hear back from that teacher. It is a terrific experience. Each teacher sends a letter with insight into exactly where your donation went and how it has directly im-

pacted the students. They leave you with no questions -- so refreshing. Plus, if you donate \$50 or more you get hand-written notes from the students. Honestly, there is nothing cuter or way more rewarding than that. Not only are you supporting a class somewhere in the country, but you get to know each student and teacher personally.

2. Testing. It might not be apparent to everyone, but those guys are a/b testing everything. It's pretty impressive to see the minor changes they make every day that lead to increased conversion points and donations. They have simplified the process and regularly update to ensure the user experience is as flawless as possible. Big props to CTO Oliver Hurst-Hiller for this.

3. Use of photo. It's very visual. A picture really is worth a thousand words. When you donate, you get a photo of the project and students you supported. You can see their science fair or art show, as well as all of the students who learned and created because of your support. You are one step away from being right in the classroom. And, you don't feel so bad stalking these photos.

While I still love Facebook (and I'll even admit I liked an entire album of Boos photos) I've added a new option to my iPhone exploration. DonorsChoose.org wins with its specificity and simplicity. No matter what, they offer choice for donors to support classrooms nationwide. With this clear mission, donors can feel confident in their relationship with the organization and have fulfilled expectations every single time. **NPT**

Liz Eddy heads up special projects at DoSomething.org in New York City.



You Have To See Invisible People

By MICHAEL JOHNSTON

I think my favorite nonprofit website right now is www.invisiblepeople.tv. It's not the site itself that impresses me but how a brand has been created that meets the increasingly demanding requirement from the public -- to be authentic.

Any nonprofit is expected "to do what they say they are going to do" and to tell their mission-related stories as "close to the ground" as possible. Mark Horvath, the founder of Invisible People TV, has taken his personal experience with homelessness, his expert TV producer/director ability, and social media commitment to create an amazing online presence.

More and more, the place for nonprofits online starts with content. Mark has made a huge commitment to have homeless people tell their own stories. This constant stream of evocative, personal videos is the foundation for the organization's online marketing.

The contrast between Invisible People TV and other charities is obvious. The first difference is the veteran oversight and direction brought to the video content. Too many nonprofits either rely on video advice/creation from their own staff or from outside advertising agency video experts. The difference with Mark is his veteran, mainstream TV experience. He knows how to have video stories be authentic, heart-felt and mission focused.

And, he has found a way to keep the content fresh and never-ending. How many organizations agonize about whether clients should tell their stories to the public? Mark's leaped over that hurdle to the benefit of those helped by their own videos -- and the work of Invisible People TV.

He has taken this online video foundation and layered a strong social media presence on top of it. Mark has made sure that his email solicitations, his web site, Twitter, Facebook,



and other social communities are always active and given constant new content to keep the online community engaged.

And, back to authenticity. Mark is constantly tweeting and posting himself to keep the voice of the organization actually his. In contrast, there are so many nonprofit organizations with social media content that is obviously mediated and cultivated by professional social media staff who are interpreting and massaging the message from inspiring leadership. Supporters want to feel, and read, the actual words of leadership and they get that with Mark.

Finally, Mark takes his video content, social media presence and connects it to new crowdfunding opportunities. He is currently asking his community to help raise money to complete a broadcast quality documentary on the homeless and to finish a homeless-themed game to play on mobile phones. He's using his powerful video content and social media community to raise money through indiegogo.

I think www.invisiblepeople.tv is the future of nonprofit online success. It creates an authentic brand that relies on the direct stories of clients helped (the homeless in this case) to be the content foundation. And from that foundation, Mark uses his own voice in social media (with video storytelling) to drive brand building, community building and fundraising.

No more Soviet-style command and control online marketing and fundraising. Mark's way is the future. **NPT**

Michael Johnston is co-founder and president of HJC New Media in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.