

It's no longer your **father's** capital campaign

How technology and communications are changing church fundraising.

BY BEN STROUP

Church capital campaigns are hardly a new concept. For nearly half a century, pastors and their congregations have depended on opportunities for special giving to help them build buildings, pay off debt and fund their God-inspired vision. But the landscape is changing quickly — so fast that your father may soon not even recognize the process he perfected during his tenure.

Two things have dramatically influenced how churches approach capital campaigns: the economic crash of 2008 and the adoption of technology by the person in the pew. Both have provided opportunities to deviate from what have become hallmarks of the traditional campaign — one defined by a predetermined process, a large number of enlisted lay volunteers,

and heavily dependent on paper-based communications.

The transition to digital communications and its impact on ministry initiatives such as capital fundraising projects was already in full swing prior to the economic collapse of 2008. The challenging circumstances, however, accelerated the rate at which churches adopted new ways of communicating and connecting with their members and even the community at large. The seismic changes altering the way churches conduct capital campaigns are revitalizing the function and effectiveness of this proven and very effective ministry venture.

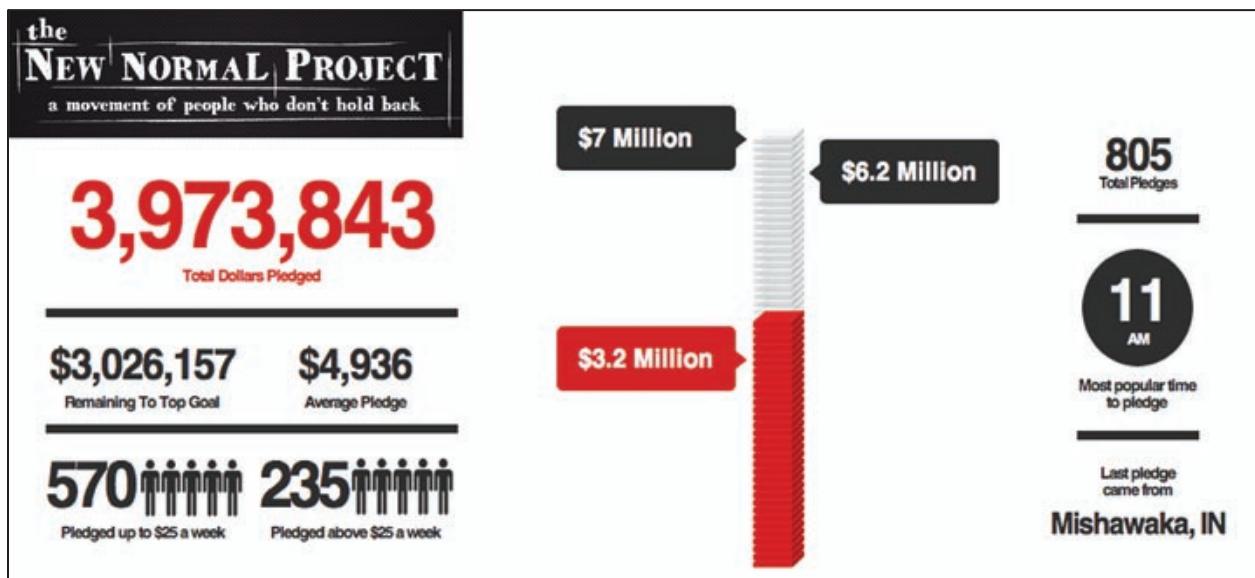
A tale of two churches

Two churches that have significantly benefited from this shift

are Eagle Brook Church (www.eaglebrookchurch.com) and Granger Community Church (www.gccwired.com). Eagle Brook is located in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota while Granger Community Church is in northern Indiana, just miles from the Michigan state line and close to the South Bend area.

Eagle Brook averages about 15,000 on any given weekend, and Granger averages 4,700 attendance. Both tend to have demographics that find the median age to be in the 30s with a blend of professional and blue collar workers. Each church was already dependent upon technology and digital communications.

When it was time to embark on another capital funds project, both turned to RSI Church >>



Granger Community Church created an infographic to help tell a story through numbers.

Stewardship, Dallas, TX, knowing that they not only could get the help to raise the money but also to incorporate the technology in the campaign. "People are much more connected technologically than we think they are, and they expect churches to honor their preferences," says Joel Mikell, president.

Scott Anderson, executive pastor at Eagle Brook, says "We needed help with a unique approach. Our goal was really big, and the economy was really bad." Anderson says that self-led campaigns had been their chosen path

prior to their most recent campaign, but they didn't want to go it alone this time.

When they set out in late 2009 to begin the *Not Without You* campaign (www.notwithoutyou.org) with a \$30 million dollar need, Anderson knew it was time to partner with people who they believed understood their church and could get them to their goal.

Tim Stevens, executive pastor at Granger says, "*The New Normal Project* (www.thenewnormalproject.com) was descriptive of the time in which the initiative was birthed. Everything

we were certain of was being challenged." In the midst of a community that reached 20 percent unemployment at the peak of the recession, Stevens wanted some perspective about how to approach capital campaigns in ways that were very different from how they had in the past.

Integrating technology

"Risky ventures often lead to innovative, breakthrough experiences," says Bill McMillan, executive vice president at RSI Church Stewardship.

DIGITAL CHANNELS FOR YOUR NEXT CAMPAIGN

1. E-newsletters. Create a separate e-mail list of subscribers specifically for the campaign. Most people still manage their lives through their inbox.

2. Micro-sites. Digital real estate provides a central place for people to come, learn, commit and

get involved in the work your church is doing.

3. Video messaging. YouTube has dramatically changed our expectations about video messaging.

Few people need to book time in a TV studio anymore. People want to hear your voice and observe

your posture. It's never been easier to do that.

4. Intranet. Separate from your external micro-site, create an internal digital launching pad where every leader can go to get the materials they need, make comments and ask questions and mark their

progress.

5. Online pledging and giving. Not everyone is on your campus every week. Not everyone carries cash or writes checks. Make it easy for people to pledge and give online and perhaps even through mobile technology.

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Campaign theme and brochure for Eagle Brook Church.

Both Stevens and Anderson agreed that their respective campaigns were both innovative and breakthrough compared to past experiences, especially in the midst of challenging economic realities.

Stevens believes e-mail communication strategy was a catalyst for the success for his campaign. "I'd never heard of a 'drip campaign' before RSI introduced it to us. This is where we divided the information we wanted to send out and shared it in small, regular installments throughout the campaign rather than all at one time." Stevens doesn't remember a campaign when more average, regular attendees and marginal members were engaged and knowledgeable about what was taking place than during this most recent experience.

"Our people were really 'leaning in,'" he says. "We felt like we had an empowered base of supporters who believed in what we were doing. Primarily sending communications digitally also made it easy for members to share details with others in their own spheres of influence."

"Post-campaign, our investments in digital communication strategy continued to pay off through new online pledges," says Anderson, "giving to the campaign that wasn't pledged, and email communication as a way to

follow up with pledges made."

Stevens feels the same way. He believes the micro-site that housed all critical information for their campaign became an online gathering place where people could learn more, get involved, and spread the word both during and after the defined campaign season.

Neither Anderson nor Stevens believe that technology and digital communications are the only two

keys to capital campaign success. They both recognize that clear vision, effective strategy, and personal relationships were critical to campaign success. CE

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