



FOCUSED

Case Study: Bread of Life Mission

Can an old mission survive in a new world?

Our world is experiencing massive changes in technology and donor behavior that have a profound effect on nonprofits, specifically in how they raise funds for their cause. The organizations that adapt quickly thrive; those that don't end up slipping into stagnancy, or worse, closing their doors.

Like many long-established organizations, Bread of Life Mission struggled to implement a strong online fundraising system to accommodate the modern donor. But even an old mission can flourish in this technology age with the right help. In 2015, Bread of Life was able to increase its online revenue by 122% within 9 months with the experienced guidance of FOCUSED.

Even though traditional channels like direct mail are certainly still viable fundraising tools, not-for-profit organizations must embrace a holistic approach that meets donors where they are and allows them to engage with the mission using the channels they prefer.

Willie Parish, Jr., executive director of Bread of Life Mission, felt the growing need to improve the organization's online presence. "Our website was okay, but it wasn't really robust or user friendly," he said.

Located in the heart of Seattle's historic Pioneer Square, Bread of Life Mission has provided food, clothing and shelter for the city's homeless since the Great Depression. With a total of 141 beds, Bread of Life provides guests with 116,106 meals and 35,540 total vacancies for overnight shelter each year.

One-size-fits-all fundraising agencies don't always come through in online fundraising.

For years, Bread of Life Mission had depended on a large third party direct mail firm to do the heavy lifting in their appeals. When the agency claimed to do just as well at online fundraising, Willie didn't second guess it.

Unfortunately, the results of having direct mail experts behind their online fundraising were stagnant at best and declining at worst.

The website was hard to navigate. The messaging was unclear. Giving online was a complicated process that deterred donors from giving. On the backend, the web platform the site was built on was proprietary, making future maintenance costly and sometimes impossible.

Bread of Life's email fundraising campaigns weren't effective and were comprised of mostly recycled language from the direct mail appeals. The poor results of the emails frustrated the staff, who decided to send fewer messages because of the low ROI.

It was clear to Willie that Bread of Life Mission needed an experienced fundraising agency who specialized in online giving. Willie began looking for a partner who not only had experience and proven results, but character. He wanted someone who'd tell the truth, even if it hurt.

Finding a Consultant with Solid Experience and a Good Reputation

Willie's search for a digital fundraising consultant yielded the normal Google results, but none of them looked like a good fit for the mission. The executive director sought someone who had a heart for the mission, and when the team met Brian Tucker, principal of FOCUSED, he knew their search was over.

From the beginning, it was clear Brian's knowledge of nonprofits and fundraising was expansive. Having been involved in fundraising for over 15 years with agencies like Russ Reid, Truesense, and DDB Seattle, as well as serving at World Vision—one of the 20 largest charities in the United States—Brian had extensive insider knowledge in direct response, digital, and social media marketing channels.

While the talent at FOCUSED was impressive, it was ultimately something much simpler that convinced Willie to pursue partnership. Brian's work at World Vision had earned a solid reputation for results, and people were talking about it.

“Somebody that I know gave me a recommendation, and I didn't even have to directly ask them, ‘What do you think about Brian?’ That was definitely a plus.”

—Willie Parish

In 2014, Willie and the board made a monumental decision to ask FOCUSED to be their primary digital fundraising council.

A Digital Solution Grounded in Timeless Fundraising Principles

FOCUSED gathered Bread of Life's data from all the different agencies and databases, distilling the information into clear, succinct reports. The comprehensive analysis of their fundraising efforts made the way forward clear.

“They were able to put together spreadsheets showing me what we were doing, what the costs were, what our ROI was at, and how we can do better in our appeals. Brian also helped me understand even more about the fundraising strategies we were using.”

—Willie Parish

Although the need for technological improvement was urgent, FOCUSED began first with the conceptual work of creating offers that resonate with donors.

For decades, the standard offer in every direct mail piece was "\$1.92 pays for a meal." This approach was yielding results in the mail appeals, but the old standard fell flat in digital solicitations. With the immediacy of online communications, the ongoing need of meals was stripped of its urgency.

FOCUSED helped Willie and his staff identify key organizational needs and the projects that could best meet those needs. These projects would be used to create tangible asks in their website and email messaging content.

With the newly created offers, the website could be rebuilt with a web host that made everyone's job easier... and more productive.

Bread of Life Mission needed a website that clearly showed their value, gave donors a clear path to action, and was easy for staff members to update. With that in mind, FOCUSED redesigned their website from the ground up using Squarespace, an easy to use web platform that performs well with search engines and is mobile responsive.

The new web platform was now simple to maintain, higher in search results, and beautiful on any platform or mobile device—an important feature since traffic to most rescue mission websites comes primarily from mobile browsers.

In the copy and design of the website, FOCUSED made Bread of Life's unique value shine through visual storytelling. The calls to action on the online giving pages were clear and compelling, and the donation checkout process was hassle-free and secure.

Finally, the email and social media communications got an upgrade in technology and strategy.

FOCUSED also introduced Bread of Life Mission to MailChimp, an email service provider conveying an intuitive user interface that staff and volunteers could learn quickly.

They integrated email solicitations with the direct mail appeals, and created real time emails with the latest news affecting the mission. In addition to cultivation emails, FOCUSED implemented an automated email series with "non-fundraising" content such as success stories, donor prayer requests or short video messages.

With all the changes being carried out, Willie appreciated how he was kept up to speed on the progress:

“Informed people are happy people. I don't have to make the decisions, but I want to be in the loop, and Brian has kept me informed. Whether the results were good or not so good with this appeal or that letter, Brian would always keep me informed.”

The Results

In less than a year's time, the results of the new digital fundraising strategy began to show. Bread of Life's email list grew by 269% and overall online revenue rose by 122%.

Contributions to Bread of Life Mission during Seattle Foundation's annual GiveBIG campaign, a one day online giving event raising money for Seattle-area nonprofits, increased by 298%.

“ Brian has met—and in some areas exceeded—our expectations. We praise the Lord for this, but we received so many gifts that we didn't have sufficient man power to enter all of them into our data base before the deposit!

But there's another part that's valuable that can't be put on paper. Brian has enlarged our footprint. We've had more volunteers come our way, and I attribute that to Brian's online work with our volunteer program.”

—Willie Parish

There's little doubt for Willie Parish that working with FOCUSED was one of the best decisions the staff had made for their online fundraising.

“ I've already recommended FOCUSED to my colleagues. Brian has a young mind who has the pulse on Millennials and what their needs are, he'll look to save you money, and his character is impeccable.”



Want to know how we can do the same for your organization?

Call Brian at **206.659.5754** or email him at **brian@focusednonprofit.com**