

# Translating Success in Sports to Children's Non-Profit Organizations: A Content Analysis of Organizations' Web Sites

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## Abstract

*This study attempted to find the correlation between the success of a non-profit children's organization that was founded by a professional athlete and the web site features available in the online representation of the organization. Measured variables included the number of features displayed on the web site, which were previously identified as having an impact on Internet success in other studies, and also the level of interactivity that the web sites displayed for the purpose of communicating with their online visitors. The findings of this study suggest that the success of a non-profit organization and the comprehensiveness of its web site in terms of features displayed are connected and work together to secure a solid position for the organization as it works toward its mission. The more developed an organization's web site in both number of features and level of interactivity, the greater the chance that the organization successfully works toward accomplishing its mission of helping children.*

## I. Introduction

Non-profit organizations have a common element to their missions: awareness. To get this in this day in age, a useful and efficient web site is just as important as the individual who is leading the organization to its mission. Without the public being aware of a non-profit organization, there is little chance that it will be able to sustain itself financially because the only source of income for these foundations is private fundraising. The way fundraising is accomplished most successfully today is through online collection methods and special events that are usually promoted through tools on the web site.

There is a specific type of non-profit organization that has received very little attention from past research reports. This type includes organizations that were founded by professional athletes primarily to reach and help children through their mission. The presence and involvement of one or multiple professional athletes is what sets this category apart from others. With the amount of money these athletes have to invest in the initial set-up of the organization, there is a distinct advantage that is given to the organization. Along with this financial edge, the high profile nature of the founders makes the possibility for success even higher. In many cases, having a professional athlete found an organization is even better than having a celebrity spokesperson, especially a youth organization, because these figures have already achieved iconic status among their target audiences. They can receive media attention more easily than other organizations. Their events and causes, if promoted the right way, are more likely to be supported by the community in which they

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work.

This study tried to identify the common web elements that are connected to the success of the foundations belonging to these types of non-profit organizations. It also examined whether the level of interactivity of the web site is correlated to the success of the organization. With this study's findings, a better understanding of the necessary elements for success will be available for future founders of non-profit organizations. This benefit is not exclusive to just professional athletes.

## **II. Literature Review**

The advent and subsequent support of the Internet has changed the world in countless ways. Tasks that once took hours to accomplish can now be completed in seconds. In addition, goals for raising money can be multiplied two or even three times with an online presence. The effects of the Internet can be seen in the functionality of both professional and personal daily projects by looking at the changes in how conversations are had (Olsen, Keevers, Paul and Covington 365).

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, provide an ideal example. Before the attacks, "the record for annual online donations was the American Red Cross's \$2.7 million in 1999" (Waters 60). After watching the events of that day unfold, Americans have "turned to the Internet to send donations to the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and other relief agencies" (Waters 60). That year alone, about \$110 million was collected online and the number of non-profit organizations with online giving capabilities soared from about 50 percent to about 80 percent (Waters 60).

Some would argue that the Internet, as a form of communication, has grown "redundant" and now lacks the faith or interest of the people who use it (Kenix 422). Despite this, its use and popularity has continued to soar.

Corporations have taken advantage of the Internet for their social responsibility projects, but non-profits seem to excel in providing more convenient ways of giving. Since corporations operate on a for-profit basis, they often have to justify their good deeds and online giving capabilities. This presents a major obstacle to the overall goal of the corporate social responsibility idea (Coupland 356). This has not gone unnoticed by the Federal Communications Agency (FCA), which has begun to worry about some of the similarities between non-profit organization and commercial web sites. Ideas have been proposed that many non-profit organizations should operate under the same government scrutiny as commercial sites (Hoy and Phelps 58).

Despite this attention from the FCA, non-profits continue to have one major advantage over most commercial sites, which is that "people give to people in foundations, and that simply means that there are unique personalities behind each foundations funding decisions" (Adams 82). In other words, more intimate relationships are able to be developed through the interactions between a non-profit organization and its donors. Corporations have stockholders to worry about while non-profits can have "an issue, constituency, and donor-investor focus" (Grace 11). For a philanthropy cause in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expectations are extremely high. So in order to meet them, all three partners (the community, the non-profit and the donor-investors) must be involved (Grace 11).

There have been three different types of giving identified that involve philanthropy projects and the change their mission moves towards:

- Amelioration—lessening suffering within existing systems;
- Adaptation—adjusting current system
- Restoration—returning things to their "original condition" (Karoff 27).

However, there are still some philanthropy projects operating through non-profit organizations which are not focused on giving, but rather disseminating information. Many of these non-profits focus around children (Cai 73).

Non-profit organizations that are open to new ideas have generated the most successful charity missions and tactics (Atlas 25). For example, celebrity golf tournaments and dinners used to be considered cutting edge but are no longer "the cash cows for which [non-profit organizations] hoped" (Atlas 25). The Internet drove many of these ideas, including the "shop for a cause" idea. These operate by donating a portion

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of profit from an online purchase to a charity through designated commercial web sites. Instead of going to Ebay, for example, a customer would go to a “shop for a cause” site to purchase their needed item and have part of the order go to charity. While not always the best option for every non-profit charity, it “can be a great first step to establishing an e-commerce presence” (Frenza and Hoffman 10).

Some studies are finding that while non-profit organizations are dealing with increased demand for their services and monetary support, there is a decreased public support of their causes, which is manifesting itself in a decreased willingness to donate money (Marx 137-138). A possible reason for this decline in donor-investor attention could be that there are more dual income families with less time available for outside concerns (Marx 138).

Numerous studies have shown that both commercial for-profit and philanthropic non-profit organizations can benefit from having strong interactivity incorporated into their web presence (Coyle and Thorson 75; McMillan and Hwang 30). The more interactivity and vividness of a web site’s interface, including the presence of warm colors and numerous pictures, have been shown to generate more positive attitudes toward the site (Coyle and Thorson 75). This is paramount when using the site to persuade visitors to give money to the cause for which the organization is advocating. Newsweek predicted this importance and emphasis that is now being placed on user interaction on the Internet in May of 1993. This issue declared that all aspects of our lives would be transformed by an “interactive revolution,” and has since been continually proven correct.

“Interactivity has been defined using multiple processes, functions, and perceptions” (McMillan and Hwang 30). There is no one definition of interactivity because it encompasses so many different elements that are constantly evolving. Just when we get used to blogs, Twitter is introduced, creating an all new learning curve. Despite the many different definitions, there are three elements that can be considered an “umbrella” for all of the possible features displayed by interactive capabilities: direction of communication, user control, and time (McMillan and Hwang 30).

At least one study has found that interactive capabilities are not always suitable or preferred for all situations or people. This study found that there are certain personal and situational factors that decrease user satisfaction with interactivity (Liu and Shrum 62-63). Reasons are that some people may not necessarily seek to be in control of their online experience. They may be on the Internet for a purpose that does not call for user control. A lack in user satisfaction may result in a loss of credibility, which could be significant for a non-profit organization seeking to use online interaction as a method of collecting donations.

A proven factor in credibility is the web site interface design. This testing suggests that the site’s overall purpose should influence how the site is designed. For example, “the symmetrical site was chosen as most credible for death penalty non-profits but the organic site was chosen as most credible for abortion non-profits” (Kensicki 156). This finding was explained by the possibility of having the site’s primary issues dictate how serious or symmetrical the site should be. In other words, a good designer understands that content is “integral in dictating design” (Kensicki 156). This study also found that warm colors and pictures increase the credibility of a web site.

In a recent study, 83.7 percent of analyzed non-profit web sites were found to contain a “press room” of sorts that was designed to enhance the media exposure of the organization. In fact, 75.6 percent of press rooms on these pages were located on the front pages of the web sites. However, only 48.8 percent of the sites that had a press room were clearly labeled as “press room” or “news room” (Yeon, Choi and Kiouis 77). These web site invitations for media are just another way that these non-profit organizations are looking to create relationships with those parties that can help them with their mission, which is why it is crucial to have them clearly labeled.

The media is a primary target of these invitations, but donors are even bigger targets. The lifetime value of a donor “is based on their average gift level, gift frequency, and expected retention rate” (Austin 24). “Connecting with donors and involving them in additional activities—such as advocacy, volunteering, and sending messages to friends—will help develop strong donor relationships” (Austin 24). Donor relationships are a common theme in articles that talk about online fundraisers. Another suggestion is to create profiles of the donors’ interests and then encourage and invite them to interact online with the organization (Austin (2) 23).

It is important to have tracking tools available to the organization that can measure the success of any particular aspect of the mission, whether it is counting supporting members, funds raised, or daily online visitors. “Tracking key metrics during a fundraising campaign will help you later determine the campaign’s success” (Austin (2) 24). When the metrics show that the goal of the organization has been achieved, less

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emphasis can be placed on collecting money and the organization can focus on the development of the relationships it created, which will only further enhance the organization's future goals (Sargeant, West and Jay 142).

The research of online interactivity, design and fundraising for non-profit organizations is extensive. Limited attention has been given to non-profit organizations founded by high-profile professional athletes who have relationships they can leverage, media exposure, visibility and money to make an immediate difference toward their cause. Children's missions are usually the most popular organizations and tend to garner the most support from the city in which these athletes play their sport.

With these separating factors between children's non-profit organizations founded by professional athletes from children's non-profits that were founded by non-athletes, there is a channel of research available to find out what online features and level of interactivity are associated with or needed for the success of the organization's mission.

### III. Method

For this study, children's organizations founded by professional athletes were chosen using multiple methods. In search for organizations that have been around for over 10 years, a sports charities article that appeared in USA Today was used. The article itself was 10 years old but had a very impressive list of all types of organizations and charities that were started by professional sports figures. The list was divided up into seven equal sections and one children's organization was chosen out of each section in order to create a random sample. In some cases, a section did not contain a children's organization or had one that either did not operate a web site or even exist anymore. In the end, five organizations were identified all of which have existed for over 10 years.

To match this set of older organizations, five more organizations were found that have been in operation for less than 10 years. This sampling was much more difficult because databases like the USA Today article all seemed to be outdated. To combat this trend, a manual search was performed to see which of the prominent athletes of recent years have built a children's organization. This research turned up five more children's organizations that were started by popular sports figures that have not been in the lime light for quite as long as the first group of athletes. Each of the 10 organizations selected had children as a central focal point in their mission statement.

The most important task that needed to be completed before beginning this study was how to operationalize the variable of success when it came to a web site that represents a professional athlete's children's non-profit. This measurement needed to be able to reflect the organization's accomplishment of its mission statement while allowing it to be compared with the other organizations. One point was given to organizations for each of the events or newsworthy actions hosted by the organization that were in line with their mission statement since 2008. These newsworthy actions were found from announcements, logos of annual events and calendar reservations on the organizations' web sites. This point system reflects a current reading of success that was as independent from the web site features as possible. When the score reached more than 5 points, "5+" was assigned. So the possible score for each foundation was 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 5+. The organization that scored 4 points or more was classified as a *more successful* one, while the others, a *less successful* one.

A total of 10 web site features were checked for this study: 1) Clearly labeled mission statement; 2) presence of news room or press room; 3) Newsletter sign-up or direct download; 4) Online donation capability (Measure of Interactivity); 5) Direct Message capacity (Measure of Interactivity); 6) List of programs and events; 7) Pictures of athlete with children; 8) Annual Report Available Online; 9) Interaction between athlete and online visitors (Measurement of Interactivity); and 10) Foundation merchandise available online. (See *Appendix for code used.*)

Each organization was checked to see whether its web site had each of the ten features of interest. The selection of these features was largely influenced by a 2007 study performed by Richard D. Waters, entitled "*Nonprofit Organizations' Use of the Internet: A Content Analysis of Communication Trends on the Internet Sites of the Philanthropy 400.*"

From the development of the rating system, two hypotheses were formed:

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- Hypothesis 1: If organizations are more successful, they will have a more complete representation of the mission statement, online donation and other programs on its web site.
- Hypothesis 2: The level of interactivity (features 4, 5 and 9) of the organizational web sites will have an effect on the success of the organization measured by their points scored.

## IV. Results

### ***Level of Success***

The children's non-profit organizations scored various points as shown below. Six organizations belonged to a successful group by scoring 4 points or more while the other four, a less successful group.

Organizations founded at least 10 years ago:

- Jerome Bettis (NFL, retired), "The Bus Stops Here" (4 points)
- Vince Carter (NBA), "Embassy of Hope" (5 points)
- Peyton Manning (NFL), "PeyBack Foundation" (4 points)
- Gary Player (PGA), "The Player Foundation" (2 points)
- Tiger Woods (PGA), "The Tiger Woods Foundation" (5+ points)

Organizations founded less than 10 years ago:

- David Wright (MLB), "The David Wright Foundation" (5 points)
- Dwight Howard (NBA), "The Dwight Howard Foundation, Inc." (0 points)
- Dwyane Wade (NBA), "Wade's World Foundation" (5+ points)
- Adrian Peterson (NFL), "All Day Foundation" (3 points)
- Ryan Howard (MLB), "The Ryan Howard Family Foundation" (1 point)

#### **Test of Hypothesis 1**

Out of the six more successful organizations, only three (50%) had their mission statement clearly labeled in a manner that made it easy to find and read. On the other hand, three (75%) out of the less successful four organizations displayed their mission statement. The less successful group is more likely to have this feature than its counterpart.

When it comes to the capability of collecting donations through the web site directly, only three (50%) in the more successful group had this feature, while only one (25%) in the other group.

When all 10 features were considered, the more successful organizations displayed 5.7 features on average, while the less successful ones, 4.0 features. As a result, Hypothesis 1 was supported overall, even though not on each of all features. To check whether this difference was big enough to be statistically significant, the sample size should be enlarged.

#### **Test of Hypothesis 2**

Unlike Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 (regarding Feature Nos. 4, 5, and 9) was strongly supported. As mentioned above, a half of the more successful organizations displayed Feature No. 4, while only a quarter of the organizations identified as less successful included it on their web sites.

When it comes to Feature 5, direct message capability, two-thirds of the more successful group had this feature while only a quarter of the other group had it.

Regarding Feature 9, interaction of athlete and online visitors, a third of the more successful group had it, in comparison with only a quarter of the less successful group.

Overall, all but one of the six organizations in the "more successful" category displayed at least one of the three interactive features, showing a display rate of 83 percent. On the other hand, the less successful

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category included only two organizations, 50 percent.

The following chart shows more details. The organizations are broken down into two groups: those formed before the year 2000 and thereafter. They are divided into another two groups by color. The green rows represent the more successful group, while the red rows, the less successful group.

## V. Discussion

There was not a strong correlation between the success of a children's foundation started by a professional athlete and the spectra and capabilities of its web site features, so only limited conclusion can be drawn from the findings. The organizations that scored high on the success scale did so probably because they were very active in working in line with their mission. With more activity occurring within the organization, more attention was likely to be given to the web site, which would result in the capability of more features being displayed. Similarly, the organizations that scored low on the success scale did so because they were not as active in accomplishing their mission in terms of events and contact with the group of children they were concerned with. With less activity, there would likely be much less attention given to what the organization did internally, such as the web site and its capabilities.

There were some exceptions to this idea that were revealed throughout the study. The Gary Player Foundation was one exception. This organization had six out of the 10 features and only scored a two on the success scale. The Player Foundation's web site was just a small part of the Gary Player Enterprise site, though. Golf course design, real estate, media, a golf pro shop and a magazine all helped to bury the Player Foundation under a pile of parts that make up the Gary Player Enterprise. The enterprise itself was very active, but the foundation was only a small part of that and did not receive the amount of attention it needed in order to become a successful organization that could stand by itself. Because its web site, while well-designed, was distracted with so many other initiatives, its web capabilities did not properly indicate how successful the foundation was.

Another exception to the correlation was Adrian Peterson's "All Day Foundation." Likely not the only one out of the 10 organizations to have outsourced the web designing task for the construction of the organization, it was certainly the most obvious. The web site was very well designed and extremely interactive with online visitors but there was simply not enough content and news about what the organization was accomplishing to make it successful.

One of the benefits that professional athletes have for creating their own non-profit foundation is the financial ability to gather what is needed to start the organization. Web sites, in this day in age, are an essential component to any successful organization and must be given not just money, but considerable attention so that the image of the organization can be passed along to potential donors. Another benefit that professional athletes have is that people are automatically drawn to them and what they are doing. They often have the connections, or at least the status, to make things happen if they want them badly enough. So if a professional athlete finds a cause great enough to start an organization around, it is usually not an issue of "How?" for them. The issue comes up when the maintenance work begins. Many of the organizations in this study operate with minimal staff members, which can limit how much attention is given to the mission of the organization.

Take Peyton Manning's "Payback Foundation" for example. Manning's own father, Archie Manning, is listed as the secretary of the organization, with Peyton's wife as the vice president. These are small operations at heart that rely completely on the dedication of only a few staff members and mostly volunteers.

With the rise in social responsibility arguments, many athletes may feel pressured to create a non-profit organization. It may be that they think having such an organization will help their popularity among the fans and increase their value with their current team if they help the community in which they play. While there is nothing seriously wrong with this possibility, simply having an organization that bears their name is not enough, it must be active and able to show fruits for their labors in order to truly be a success.

As for interactivity, there was a clear advantage to having a web site that offered visitors everything they would need to do in one place. This is important, especially when asking for visitors to donate their money to the cause. Interactivity gives visitors the freedom to contact the organization freely without the added work of sending a letter through the mail. The Tiger Woods Foundation was a great example of how

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an interactive site can be used to offer everything that a visitor may want or need in one place. This site used a video of Tiger Woods welcoming each visitor to the site and had a simple contact and donation method that could all be done without ever lifting a pen, printing out a piece of paper or even navigating to another web site.

Simply having an online donation capability can greatly increase the amount of funds that come in to support the organization, so long as the web site that is inviting them to do so is legitimate and professional enough to earn their trust before they decide to donate. The widespread use of PayPal in today's Internet society is an automatic signal of security and simplicity that is important for any non-profit organization to take advantage of. Adversely, to have a physical address in the description of how to donate denotes a lack of (what has become) basic technology that can hurt the credibility of the organization.

## **VI. Conclusion**

A non-profit organization founded by a professional athlete would do well to take advantage of a thoughtfully designed web site that can successfully display features to attract and entice visitors to become an interactive part of the organization. Visitors should be able to find answers to questions they may have as well as act out what they wish to do, whether it is to donate money or volunteer their time, without ever having to leave the web site. While these factors do not individually guarantee the success of the organization, as this study has shown, they will help offer a more solid foundation to any non-profit organization, not just children's organizations. Foundation's web sites can be used as mountain tops to share and display messages to relevant publics and can legitimize the business aspect of each organization. First and foremost, though, the organization needs to have the commitment from the staff so that strides are commonly and systematically taken to accomplish the mission set forth by the children's organization.

As is the nature of professional sports, athletes can be traded at virtually any time, which would impede the progression of their non-profit organization. Also, negative media attention, even on the athlete as an individual, can quickly shut down a non-profit organization that must be built on trust and character. This was the case with Kobe Bryant's organization, which was shut down while there were still only rumors of adultery being discussed by the media. This research was conducted before the controversy around Tiger Woods emerged. The effects of this controversy may not be seen on the foundation for some time as more details and truths leak out.

It is acknowledged that this study had a small sample of organizations to draw conclusions from. This drawback was inevitable because only a limited number of athletes were both still active in their sport and founders of a children's non-profit organization that was still functioning. Also, the success scale that measured the success of these non-profit children's foundations was new and unproven.

The reason that the operational measurement of the success of these organizations did not include the amount of money raised or number of children helped is that these numbers were not readily available for the entire sample. Taking these numbers straight from the organization, especially the number of children helped would not be a reliable source since these numbers could easily be padded to add the illusion of success. Measuring success with the number of events and newsworthy actions hosted by the organization is a measurement of the dedication that is present at the operational level of the organization, including volunteers, funds available and management, and is thus more representative of success.

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## Appendix

### Web Features and Code

#### **1. Clearly labeled mission statement (Waters, 66)**

Code: The mission statement must have an eye-catching element to it, whether it is titled in the body of one of the pages or given a link in the menu. It does not include statements in plain text that are hidden in the middle of a sentence. Plain text statements of the mission can only be counted if there is no other plain text on the page (for example, the home page), with nothing around it to distract the eye. The term “mission” must be used in the labeling of the statement.

#### **2. News room or press room (Waters, 66)**

Code: The news or press room can be included in a section of the web site other than the foundation itself if it is featured on the athlete’s personal web site. It must be clearly labeled with “news,” “press” or “media” appearing somewhere in the heading. RSS feed or E-News sign-up links do not constitute as a news room.

#### **3. Newsletter sign-up or direct download**

Code: There must be a link or online sign-up capability that will lead directly to the newsletter, either as an email or direct download. Newsletters for the athlete’s entire web site count as long they are for the foundation as well since they would likely include news about the children’s foundation.

#### **4. Online donation capability (Waters, 67) (Measure of Interactivity)**

Code: Within the foundation web site, there must be a way available to donate money to the organization without ever leaving the web site itself. The site must offer a method that does not include the use of regular mail. The use of Paypal is acceptable.

#### **5. Direct Message capacity (Measure of Interactivity)**

Code: Direct Message means that you can write the email within the context of the web page and send it directly to the organization. Email addresses (linked or not) and street addresses do not constitute as direct message capability.

#### **6. List of programs and events (Waters, 66)**

Code: The events listed must occur within the context of the foundation section of the web site. They can be in plain text and do not require a separate web page. Past events are acceptable, along with future and annual events.

#### **7. Pictures of athlete with children (Coyle and Thorson, 75)**

Code: Any picture within the foundation web site that includes both the athlete and children together is acceptable. Side-by-side pictures of a group of children in one and the athlete in another should not be counted. Videos that are embedded within the foundation site, as long as they include the athlete with children, can be counted.

#### **8. Annual Report Available Online**

Code: There must be a link provided that leads directly to the retrieval of the most recent annual report. It must be included on the foundation site and not somewhere within the rest of the web site if the main web site is the athlete’s personal site.

#### **9. Interaction between athlete and online visitors (Measurement of Interactivity)**

Code: This can include a short letter, video or any other message in which the athlete is speaking directly to the online visitors. Blogs constitute as interaction as long as visitors can comment on the posts. Also, if the site advertises that the athlete has or is answering questions originally posed by visitor email, this constitutes as interaction.

#### **10. Foundation merchandise available online (Waters, 67)**

Code: Merchandise for the individual athlete is not included in this category. The online store must be set up so that foundation-branded merchandise is being sold, or that the proceeds of the purchase go directly to the foundation.

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