

## WHITEPAPER

## The State of Digital Data in the Top 50 Nonprofit Organizations in the U.S.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The market research and consulting company, MarketsandMarkets, recently estimated the global big data market to be \$14.87 billion in 2013 and expects it to grow to \$46.34 billion by 2018, reflecting widespread adoption of data capture, processing and analytics capabilities in every sector from consumer packaged goods to financial services and healthcare.

While not at the leading edge of data analytics strategy adoption, the nonprofit sector has made inroads using their organizational data to improve research, service delivery, volunteer recruitment and donor retention programs in addition to awareness-raising of their mission.

Lucy Bernholz, visiting scholar at the Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society and author of the blog "Philanthropy 2173" recently wrote: "Nonprofits and foundations do all the same things with digital data that businesses do—they collect, store, use, share, mine, retain, and destroy it. They may not do it on the scale of business or government, although certainly nonprofit research universities, hospitals, and science centers are pretty big."

What has heretofore been unknown is to what extent the nonprofit industry has adopted data analytics practices, which platforms they use to capture and analyze data and what we can learn from nonprofit pioneers in the datadriven marketing and communications space.

This whitepaper sets out to quantify a snapshot of the \$316 billion philanthropic and nonprofit sector's maturity in online analytics by looking at the top 50 nonprofit organizations in the United States.



### The nonprofit landscape in 2013

Cardinal Path gathered data from the United States' top 50 nonprofit organizations to determine their use of online performance measurement tools to engage stakeholders, drive donations and measure success.

The goal was to identify how well this industry is tracking their online investments and effectiveness of the different channels in order to achieve their mission.

Many of these organizations have goals such as creating more awareness, soliciting donations and recruiting volunteers to support their cause, among others. But regardless of their individual objectives, all organizations can make use of data from their online channels to make better business decisions and improve their overall effectiveness.

## **Key Findings**

- 100% of the top 50 nonprofits in the United States maintain a digital presence on the web and are using some form of online tool or platform for gathering detailed data about their website traffic and visitors
- 98% (all but one) of the top 50 nonprofits accept donations online
- 96% (all but two) of the top 50 nonprofits maintain an active, branded presence on Facebook
- 94% (all but three) of the top 50 nonprofits maintain an active, branded presence on Twitter
- In all, the top 50 nonprofit organizations in the U.S. spend over 2.5 billion on their fundraising efforts (based on data from The Non-Profit Times and The Charity Navigator) which may include, and not be limited to, direct mailing, traditional printing and broadcast advertising, digital advertising, email outreach and the management of online communities, all of which can be tracked digitally with data analysis tools.

## **Analytics tool implementation:**

- 100% of the top 50 nonprofits in the United States are using Google Analytics to gather detailed statistics about their website's traffic and traffic sources and to measure conversions and other activities on their sites
- 26% of the top 50 nonprofits in the United States overlay ComScore audience demographics onto their website data to enhance their understanding of site visitors and behaviors
- 16% overlay Webtrends digital solutions onto their website data to enhance their understanding of site visitors and behaviors

- 8% (4 organizations) overlay Adobe SiteCatalyst's custom variable implementations onto their website data to enhance their understanding of site visitors and behaviors
- 2% (1 organization) overlay KISSmetrics analytics tools onto their website data to enhance their understanding of site visitors and behaviors

#### Implementation quality:

- 40% of organizations assessed had a basic installation of Google Analytics, meaning that they have applied the suggested tracking code from Google onto their site without any customizations
- 30% of organizations assessed had a poor installation of Google Analytics, meaning that they have attempted to apply the basic tracking code suggested by Google, but have not done so correctly (i.e. errors in code, inserted in the wrong locations within the page code, etc.)
- 16% of organizations assessed had a Tag Management System (TMS) containing Google Analytics, meaning that they may have some intermediate to advanced knowledge of tracking codes, but the quality is not immediately ascertainable
- 12% of organizations assessed had an intermediate installation of Google Analytics, meaning that they have a customized code-base for the tracking code, it appears to be operating correctly, and is in the correct spot within the page code
- 2% of organizations assessed had an advanced installation of Google Analytics, meaning that they have used advanced features and customizations throughout the implementation, it is well done, and the organization is likely benefiting from the insights

# IMPLEMENTATION QUALITY of Google Analytics

| Level of Implementation | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| Poor                    | 15     | 30%        |
| Basic                   | 20     | 40%        |
| Intermediate            | 6      | 12%        |
| Advanced                | 1      | 2%         |
| Within Tag Management   | 8      | 16%        |
| Total                   | 50     | 100%       |

#### **Tagged pages:**

Tags—sometimes called pixels or beacons—are the means by which data is collected on a website. Tags classify page content, mark ownership, note boundaries, and otherwise indicate online identity. A tag management system or solution (TMS) is used on web sites in order to easily manage the collection of multiple tags, thereby providing usable information about how visitors interact with pages on a site.

The extent and accuracy of tagged pages on a website provides insight into the level of sophistication of data gathering performed by an organization.

- 26% (13 organizations) of the top 50 nonprofits in the United States are using a tag management solution
- of the 13 nonprofits using a tag management solution:
  - 10 organizations use Google Tag Manager
  - 3 organizations use Satellite/Adobe's TMS

In auditing the websites of the top 50 nonprofit organizations, Cardinal Path attempted to scan 500 pages. The number of scannable, i.e., accurately tagged, pages ranged from a low of 286 pages to a high of 500 pages, resulting in an average of 492 pages scanned per site—which speaks to the high level of online analytics maturity of a great many of the organizations audited here.

#### Analysis:

Overall the top 50 nonprofit organizations in the United States are arguably some of the largest philanthropic and non-governmental aid agencies in the world. With excellent reputations, considerable political and social clout, and solid financial foundations, these organizations have clearly invested varying portions of their operational dollars toward embarking on data analysis strategies. They show great potential to make the most of their marketing investments while being good stewards of their donors' trust and gifts.

As such, each the following organizations reflect an online analytics maturity that has the potential to provide leadership and best-practice role modeling to other nonprofit organizations of varying sizes and geographic footprints.

## **Opportunities:**

Based on the relatively advanced nature of the digital analysis efforts of the top 50 U.S. nonprofit organizations, it's clear that the leaders of the organizations understand and value the insights their data can provide them in their quest to spend as few dollars as possible in the administrative and marketing tasks, that underlie their delivering life-altering services and experiences to the recipients of their philanthropy. The next step in their ability to do so most efficiently will depend on how quickly they can develop their data analytics maturity. Cardinal Path defines online analytics maturity as the state resulting from an organization's ability to function efficiently in the following six critical areas:

- 1. Sharp Definition of Objectives
- 2. A realistic Scope
- 3. Appropriate Analytics Team and Expertise
- 4. A rigorous Continuous Improvement Process and Methodology
- 5. The right Tools, Technology and Data Integration Management
- 6. An effective system for Governance and Adoption

Once these areas are agreed upon and put into play, the data gathering steps—i.e. a well-tuned data gathering platform, a system for managing the capture and analysis of specified data and the ability to use it in concert with demographic or other third-party information—can be used to increase the efficiency of an organization's engagement efforts.

Nonprofit organizations with mature data analytics strategies can:

- Connect offline engagement efforts to online activities to understand how potential volunteers or donors come to donate time or money to their causes
- Leverage data from social media platforms and third-party donor engagement platforms to understand how to reach the most potential mission advocates as efficiently as possible
- Refine their marketing and communications strategies to increase volunteer engagement or donation amounts
- Make the most of the Google Ad Grants program, which provides up to \$40,000 per month of in-kind AdWords™ advertising to promote their missions and initiatives on Google.com
- Segment site visitors/audience to better target them with differentiated messaging and content, and to better target them for off-site ads
- Remarket ads across the web or when they search on Google to visitors who have previously visited your site but did not take a next step, such as sign up for a newsletter or download a PDF
- Empower affiliate organizations to better understand and reach their specific geographical or demographic audiences
- Develop simple-to-understand dashboards for varied organizational stakeholders to demonstrate or gauge progress on mission-essential initiatives in near-real-time
- Use aggregated and disaggregated data to educate board directors as they undertake long-range, strategic planning for the organization

### **Conclusion:**

Cardinal Path has summarized data gathered on the top 50 nonprofit organizations and their use of online performance measurement tools.

The goal was to identify how well this industry is tracking their online investments and effectiveness of the different channels in order to achieve their mission.

Many of these organizations have goals such as creating more awareness, soliciting donations, recruiting volunteers to support their cause, among others. Based on the tools they are bringing to this variety of tasks, it appears that the largest organizations in the nonprofit sector are making inroads to maturing their online analytics capabilities. They appear to be well positioned, however, could continue to advance their analytics strategies to make the best use of data collected from their online channels to make better business decisions and improve their overall effectiveness.

Smaller nonprofit organizations stand to gain much from following in the footsteps of the top 50 nonprofits so that they too, can leverage their data to make the most of their marketing, communications and engagement investments. Industry studies have found that the online analytics maturity growth curve can be compressed by partnering with trusted service providers with proven expertise in data analytics.

### **Methodology:**

The top 50 nonprofits were identified by revenue as per the source sites The Non-Profit Times and The Charity Navigator.

Throughout the month of January 2014, Cardinal Path visited each of the websites, reviewed the sites, evaluated the code, and documented all findings related to the core information and metrics gathered.

The page scans were done with a variety of tools including Cardinal Path's WASP Web Analytics Solution Profiler, with the aim of crawling 500 pages on each of the sites and documenting the page tags from which some of the data was derived (i.e. "Percentage of site tagged").

Some assumptions have been made on the accuracy and quality of the data based on the data, information and metrics gathered during the study, with the primary focus on assessing the use of Analytics on the site. We aimed to identify if the organizations were using Google Analytics, Adobe Site Catalyst, WebTrends, ComScore, or one of the many other tools on the market.

Upon identifying the tool of choice, we extracted the code for the site and evaluated the complexity and quality of the implementation. For example, if it was Google Analytics code, we checked to see if the code was the base code as provided by Google, if it was customized, or if was a completely custom code base (such as Google Analytics on Steroids). We also identified if the code was located in the proper location on the pages. Base code in the wrong spot on the pages (which was only found on 80% of the pages, based on tag scans with WASP (among other tools)) indicated a low quality implementation and a strong likelihood of a lower level of maturity with respect to analytics within the organization.

Custom code implemented through a Tag Management Solution in a well-executed fashion demonstrated a more advanced analytics program within the organization. This often relates to the level of investment made within the organization for in-house experts, or that they are investing in relationships with 3rd party experts; either are great options.

## **Appendix A:**

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#### About the author:



**Tyler Gibbs** is a Director and Senior Consultant at Cardinal Path. With over twelve years of practical experience in the areas of information technology, online strategy development and implementation, search engine optimization, search engine marketing

and web analytics consulting, Tyler has undertaken multiple web site performance measurement and optimization projects which have involved development of key performance indicators, web analytics, search engine optimization, search engine marketing, and web site benchmarking.

Tyler has broad experience in the private and public sectors, and has led project management duties related to the design, development and delivery of online services. Fully bilingual, Tyler holds a Bachelors of Commerce degree with a specialization in Information Technology and Finance.

### **About Cardinal Path**

**Cardinal Path** is a premier digital data analytics firm that works with the world's most prominent organizations to create, implement and action advanced analytics. Known for its industry leadership with tools such as the Online Analytics Maturity Model, a framework for assessing enterprise-wide analytics maturity, Cardinal Path comprises dedicated teams of award-winning analysts, statisticians, academics, developers, and many of the top minds in the digital marketing space. We help our clients unlock the value of their data, sharing all that we know and empowering people to make confident business decisions for sustainable growth.

#### www.cardinalpath.com

**Our free, web-based online analytics maturity assessment** can be taken by any individual from any organization and provides a cursory assessment of an organization's analytics capability by generating a unique OAMA spider chart of strengths and weaknesses on the six key areas of maturity. Multiple stakeholders in your organization are encouraged to take it and compare results, serving as an excellent starting point for internal discussions.

**Contact us** for a more detailed and holistic assessment with one of Cardinal Path's analytics maturity experts. Through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and holistic assessments of your organization's analytics function, our experts can provide a basic roadmap for improvements and suggest other audits and reviews to uncover even more ways to get the most out of your analytics program

**Request** a detailed, enterprise-level review of your analytics efforts which includes individual interviews with key stakeholders, an interactive full-day OAMA workshop for all key personnel involved in your analytics program and a detailed roadmap for transforming your organization into an analytics-driven business.

Cardinal Path makes implementing the Google Ad Grants program a snap for under-resourced, socially conscious organizations that may not have the in-house expertise to make the most of the opportunity for up to \$40,000 per month of in-kind AdWords<sup>™</sup> advertising.

#### About WASP

Created in 2006 by Stéphane Hamel, WASP, the **Web Analytics Solution Profiler** is a Chrome Browser extension tool that comprehensively detects, accurately analyzes, and intuitively displays the various JavaScript tracking tags and scripts that are loaded by websites. It solves a key business issue of the digital age: preventing marketers from making important decisions on wrong, or faulty, data by ensuring that the tags that generate data are deployed correctly and sending accurate information.

WASP uses a revolutionary algorithmic approach to tag auto-detection, a "friendly names" feature that accurately reveals what data is transferred by the tags, unique visualization showing relationships between tags, segment leading detection speed, streamlined role-based views (developer, marketer, manager) and tag-blocking for advanced quality assurance. With over 10,000 active users, WASP is the industry leader in quality assurance testing for analytics tagging.

#### Sources:

#### http://www.thenonprofittimes.com

The NonProfit Times, the flagship publication of NPT Publishing Group in Morris Plains, N.J., is the leading business publication for nonprofit management. Geared to the executive suite, The NonProfit Times delivers news, business information and original research on the daily operations of tax-exempt organizations. Launched in April 1987, The NonProfit Times quickly became the go-to publications for news, business columns and original research. Each November issue includes The NPT 100, the ranking by revenue of the nation's largest nonprofits that receive at least 10 percent of income from public sources. The August issue unveils the annual NPT Power & Influence Top 50, a feature of the 50 movers and shakers in the nonprofit world during the previous 12 months. The NonProfit Times commission independent research several times each year, which is published as a special report. Nonprofit managers have come to rely on The NonProfit Times, with more than 300,000 unique subscribers to the various offerings.

#### http://www.charitynavigator.org

Founded in 2001, Charity Navigator has become the nation's largest and most-utilized evaluator of charities. In our quest to help donors, our team of professional analysts has examined tens of thousands of non-profit financial documents. We've used this knowledge to develop an unbiased, objective, numbers-based rating system to assess over 7,000 of America's best-known and some lesser known, but worthy, charities.

Specifically, Charity Navigator's rating system examines two broad areas of a charity's performance; their Financial Health and their Accountability & Transparency. Our ratings show givers how efficiently we believe a charity will use their support today, how well it has sustained its programs and services over time and their level of commitment to good governance, best practices and openness with information. In the not-too-distant future, we plan to also rate charities' reporting of their results. We provide these ratings so that charitable givers/ social investors can make intelligent giving decisions, and so that the nonprofit sector can improve its performance.

#### **Additional sources:**

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