



Start your own charity

Site helps raise cash for good causes

Thanksgiving, which is next week, shifts the holiday season into high gear. Even though Christmas creep keeps pushing the day we hear the first carol or spot the first yuletide decorations earlier every year, most people don't start seriously thinking about the holidays until Thanksgiving.

Besides spending time with family, giving gifts, attending parties and taking days off of work or school, many people also think of the less fortunate among us this time of year.

A weak job market and continued wage stagnation have many people who consider themselves comfortable a few years ago struggling to make ends meet. But in these tough economic times it helps to look at the global picture to put things in perspective. Cutting your cable bill or clipping coupons is a far cry from not having money for bread or a roof over your head. There are people around the world and in your backyard who are worse off than you.

Help yourself

One of the more profound benefits of the Internet is the ability to reach out and help people in need, wherever they may be. All of the major charities and most of the smaller ones have strong Web presences that allow users to research a cause and support it. **YouCaring.com** takes a different approach. Instead of being dedicated to a single cause or representing a single organization, this

site allows individuals to solicit help for their own personal troubles.

It's basically a crowdfunding site like KickStarter, but instead of raising money for inventions and products, the donations go to help an individual reach a goal. Of course, the goal needs to be altruistic. The site won't help you raise money for that Ferrari you always wanted, but it will help you cover expenses for a kidney transplant.

Worthy causes

The causes people and nonprofits can post on the site fall into seven categories:

■ **Medical expenses** — paying costs for major procedures that aren't covered by insurance.

■ **Memorials and funerals** — helping families with unexpected costs or setting up memorial scholarships

■ **Education** — helping with tuition and other fees for promising students with few resources.

■ **Adoption costs** — Agency fees, travel and other expenses can add up to a lot of money.

■ **Family emergencies** — Fire or storm damage to a home can exhaust a family's emergency funds.

■ **Mission trips** — Traveling abroad to help people in need can cost a lot of money.

■ **Pet expenses** — Medical care for animals can cost almost as much as for people. Shelters also are always in need of support.

While individuals and nonprofits can propose any goal for fundraising, the site's managers will refer them to more appropriate online venues if the goal doesn't match YouCaring.com's mission parameters closely enough.

Easy money

If you have a cause you want to raise money for, YouCaring.com offers a free and easy way to publicize it. The site allows you to create a profile page that gives a description of your cause. You also can add photos, videos and links. The profile page also has sections for updates, lists of supporters and comments. The amount of the goal is posted, along with how much has been raised to date and how many days are left to raise it.

You also can link your page to Facebook and Twitter accounts to help spread the word. A large Give Now button allows donors to give securely with a credit card or Pay Pal account. The site also has fundraising tips and resources to help you plan your entire campaign.

The home page has a slideshow of causes across the top, along with a more extensive gallery of featured fundraisers further down the page. Clicking on one of the gallery images takes you to the profile page. Buttons to create your own fundraiser are featured prominently around the page. A search function lets you browse the categories of fundraisers to find a cause that interests you.

YouCaring.com has a very welcoming and user-friendly design. The muted, earth-tone palette and clean typography give it a professional appearance that's not too slick looking. It's a good tool to add to your campaign if you need to raise money for a worthy cause.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.



KEVIN O'NEILL

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