

Static Strategy in a Dynamic Age:  
Nonprofit Web Missioning  
Throughout the 2000s

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nonprofit organizations engage in a continual process of missioning, or selling what they do to myriad constituencies. This is especially true for 501(c)(3) organizations that rely on donor support for operating funds. In the mid-1990s, the formality of missioning increased in tandem with the professionalization of the sector and diversification of revenue streams. As competition for dollars increased, nonprofits disseminated their formal mission statements to external stakeholders as a means of establishing credibility. By the late 1990s, leading nonprofit organizations began to downplay their formal mission statements in response to criticisms about their inability to tell compelling stories about their work. Instead, they crafted more nuanced narratives about the people they served and the issues they addressed. Widespread adoption of Internet communication occurred as the sector's print and face-to-face external messages were becoming more dynamic, or quasi-interactive (e.g., visual images that invited viewers to connect with clients). Yet, the earliest nonprofit homepages were highly formal and comprised little more than scrollable brochures and formal mission statements. A survey of 100 donor-supported nonprofits in New York City provides a baseline for analyzing nonprofit Internet missioning. Positioning of formal mission statements within the architecture of organizations' 2005 and 2008 Websites serves as a proxy for innovativeness in cyber-communication, opening up a discussion of how nonprofits utilize new technologies to tell their stories to external stakeholders. This study suggests that nonprofits have not fully embraced dynamic storytelling in their Web sites.

Nonprofit organizations engage in a continual process of missioning, or selling what they do to myriad constituencies. Donor-funded organizations routinely connect with their supporters to raise operating funds. In the mid-1990s, the formality of this messaging increased in tandem with the professionalization of the sector and diversification of revenue streams (Froelich, 1999; Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000; Phills, 2005; Young, 2001). As competition for dollars increased, nonprofits used their formal mission statements to establish credibility with external stakeholders. By the late 1990s, leading nonprofit organizations began to downplay their formal mission statements in response to criticisms about their inability to tell compelling stories about their work. Instead, they crafted more nuanced narratives about the people they served and the issues they addressed. Widespread adoption of Internet communication occurred as the sector's print and face-to-face external messages were becoming more dynamic, or interactive (see Sullivan, 1998). Yet, even as nonprofits were finding new ways to invite stakeholders to participate in dialogue, their homepages comprised little more than scrollable brochures and formal mission statements. Nascent nonprofit Web sites failed to exploit the potential of the technology for dynamic storytelling via images, sounds, and text. Early deployment of static homepage content represented a step back in strategic missioning for an evolving sector.

### *Missioning in the Nonprofit Sector: History and Controversy*

While for-profit enterprises rely heavily on branding and product placement, nonprofits survive by missioning, or pitching their existence to stakeholders. Though the mission is critical for any organization, for nonprofits the mission is often the purpose *and* the product (Dym & Hutson, 2005). If “building a human rights culture” is a nonprofit’s mission, for example, the ability to realize that aim is what it sells to stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> While a corporation’s mission statement largely guides internal communication, nonprofit mission statements compel internal and external stakeholders. These external stakeholders are diverse (Lewis, Hamel, & Richardson, 2001) and rarely claim allegiance to one nonprofit organization (Kramer, 2005). They get little information about the nonprofit sector from the news media (Kensicki, 2004), and are unlikely to encounter nonprofit messages as often as they encounter for-profit messages (e.g., via Billboards, on store shelves). This presents both a challenge and opportunity for nonprofits – their missions are their currency, and they are responsible for circulating that currency.

Nonprofits generally recognize this paradoxical opportunity/cost and embrace the discursivity of their organizations. That is, they recognize that many important external constituencies will view their work via messages about their organizations rather than direct experience with their services or clients. While scholars have described how discourse shapes every facet of for-profit and nonprofit organization life (Fairhurst, Cooren, & Cahill, 2002; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2001; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), for most nonprofit leaders, discursivity is self-evident. Take for example Doctors without Borders, an international relief organization which deploys medical professionals to crisis situations and solicits donations from individuals who will likely never witness their field operations. For most donors, Doctors without Borders is constituted entirely by the text and images contained in appeal letters, reports, and posters. Nonprofits such as Doctors without Borders cannot escape the fact that words solidify their relationships with donors. For these relationships to continue, nonprofits must craft consistent and compelling stories. Formal mission statements are one such means of storytelling.

In the nonprofit sector, formal missioning has proved a controversial subject. In the mid-1990s, the sector experienced significant growth and concomitant calls for professionalization (Blackwood, Wing, & Pollak, 2008). While nonprofit leaders sought additional credentialing in the form of M.P.A. degrees and management certificates (Wagner, 2004), boards demanded that organizations cast more formal images. Mission statements seemed a means of achieving professionalism quickly. At roughly the same time, Organization Communication scholars reported on the benefits of carefully-crafted meta-

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<sup>1</sup> “Building a human rights culture” is a key aim of *Breakthrough*, a New York City/New Delhi-based nonprofit.

messages such as formal mission statements (Fairhurst, Jordan, & Neuwirth, 1997). At their best, mission statements enabled nonprofits to chart consistent courses, monitor their progress, engage in feedback (i.e., are we doing what we said we would do?), and craft “identities... able to stand out and break through the clutter” (Christensen & Cheney, 2000, p. 246. See Dym & Hutson, 2005; Fairhurst, Jordan, & Neuwirth, 1997). In some cases, formal storytelling was the key to garnering scarce resources and keeping the doors open (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2000). As Ron Meshanko, a prominent nonprofit consultant, explained to boards throughout the country: “How can [nonprofit professionals] lobby on behalf of their organization [without knowing the mission statement]? How can a person who can’t communicate the mission of the agency ask for a gift?” (1996). With such advice circulating throughout the sector, mission statements soon became a hallmark of the professional nonprofit. Yet mission statements alone could not convey organizations’ stories; nor could they substitute for professional management.

Before long, formal mission statements fell out of fashion. Many nonprofits had invested too little in communications and professional development, banking on their formal mission statements to carry the weight of professional messaging. Critics felt that formal mission statements frequently detracted from organizational storytelling. As Meg Busse, Director of the Non-Profit Career Transitions Program for Idealist mused, “non-profits drone on and on and on about mission and... deliverables, rather than just telling their story” (2008). Some claimed that poorly-crafted mission statements and unsophisticated messaging contributed to a vapid “mission-statement culture” in which:

Nonprofit staffers talk about what they do as if they are reading mission statements, replete with jargon and multisyllabic words that make you want to run away from the person uttering them. (Salzman, 2003, p. 129)

Organizational Communication scholars also became skeptical of the ways in which formal mission statements were being used. Renowned scholar Dr. Joann Keyton explained: “there is no guarantee that the mission statement reflects the organization’s current practices... mission statements are often based on ideals or values that organizations are striving to achieve” (2005, p. 182). Keyton encouraged organizational leaders to begin with mission statements, but to realize the limits of their utility. Many nonprofit leaders heeded the advice, shelving their formal mission statements and investing time and resources in developing more sophisticated organizational messages. It was during this sea change that nonprofits began staking their claim to cyberspace.

### *The Nonprofit Internet Boom*

At the turn of the century, nonprofit World Wide Web communication was in its infancy. In the early 2000s, the vast U.S. nonprofit sector had little presence on the Internet (Carter, 2000; Long & Chiagouris, 2006). In 2001, a survey of Canadian nonprofits revealed that those that had websites “used [them] mainly as a means to share... electronic brochure[s]” (LeClair & Tam, 2001, p. 1). Tech-savvy entrepreneurs noted the same phenomenon in the U.S. (Our story, 2007). Early evaluations of U.S. nonprofit Web communication demonstrated that wealthier organizations were more likely to have homepages (Tuckman, Chatterjee, & Muha, 2004). Further, Web site adoption varied among sub-segments of the sector (e.g., arts vs. science, Tuckman, Chatterjee, & Muha, 2004) and geographical location (e.g., urban vs. rural, coastal, Forman, Goldfarb, & Greenstein, 2005; *Sacramento Business Journal*, 2003). As the first decade of the new century unfolded, the nonprofit sector continued to expand (e.g., revenues, paid staff positions. See Blackwood, Wing, & Pollak, 2008); so to did Internet adoption among nonprofits.

The nonprofit “Internet boom” happened in the early to mid 2000s, propelled by years of media coverage, peer testimonials, and scholarly reports. Early on, the Web was viewed mainly as a high tech marketing tool. Some of the earliest adopters realized huge gains in donations via relatively simplistic and static online campaigns, such as the 139 percent increase seen by the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago in 2001 (Berkofsky, 2002). The Chicago federation’s success, reported Joe Berkofsky of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, revealed a “virtual mother lode” awaiting the next wave of forward-thinking nonprofits (2002). Colleges and universities tapped into the opportunity stream, targeting prospective students/consumers via their homepages (Kang & Norton, 2004). Years later they would discover the revenue-generating potential of online classes for enrolled students (see Elgort, 2005). Like colleges, innovative arts organizations in major markets first viewed the Web as a means of increasing sales (Abuhamdieh & Kendall, 2007; Olson & Boyer, 2005), rather than as a mechanism for delivering dynamic content (e.g., streaming video of live performances). Both technological limitations and uncertainty about the Web bounded the sorts of content early adopters incorporated into their websites. Health nonprofits led the way in extra-marketing content delivery in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

While progressive health nonprofits enhanced their bottom lines through Web-based campaigns, they also harnessed the Internet’s client service potential. For example, the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation leveraged a \$70,000 grant from a leading for-profit Internet services firm to deliver health care information to children and families (Schultz, 2001). Health researchers were among the first to document the potential of the Internet for intra-system information dissemination and electronic patient care (see Bull, Gaglio, McKay, Glasgow, 2005; Lindberg & Humphreys, 1998). They noted that the Web enabled hard-to-reach clients (e.g., homebound elderly patients) to access information on their own so that they could self-assess or self-manage, as in the case of diabetes maintenance (Becker, 2004; Bull, Gaglio, McKay, Glasgow, 2005; Macias & McMillan, 2008). While the potential of the Internet to

negatively effect medical care was discussed in prominent journals (e.g., Lindberg & Humphreys, 1998), the momentum of adoption outpaced such concerns. The debates that occurred in the health sub-sector foreshadowed debates in other sectors, such as the human rights sector (See Kanter, 2007).

By the mid 2000s, most well-established nonprofits had crossed the threshold of Internet presence (Akst, 2006; *Business Wire*, 2005). Their growing concern was what to do with their Web sites (Kanter, 2007). At their most elementary, nonprofit Web sites offered a new channel for disseminating the mission. Curiously, nonprofits tended to lean heavily on their formal mission statements when launching Web sites - a move at odds with trends in the pre-cyberspace nonprofit sector. Though many nonprofits were minimizing the use of formal mission statements in their non-electronic external communications, they embraced the ready text for their Web sites. Of course, Web sites varied considerably within the sector. For instance, large nonprofits in major markets such as New York City led the way in dynamic content, because they had substantial financial resources to commit to Web design and they viewed themselves as innovators (See Panganiban, 2007). Still, many nonprofits' cyber-stories revolved around formal mission statements. As such, they represented lost opportunities for dynamic stakeholder exchange.

Web-based formal mission statements risk even greater criticism than if they were printed on paper or delivered in a speech. The typical mission statement page frequently fails to capture the complexity of the organization and can distance key stakeholders from the richness of the service-delivery environment. As e-content, formal mission statements lack the dynamism of sound, images, movement, and the like. As static messages, they fail to deliver on the promise of the Internet to immerse viewer-participants in the world of the nonprofit and enable participation in the organization or its programs (e.g., by posting feedback on an e-wall). Though they are but one element of an organization's Web site, formal mission statements signify a backslide that occurred as early adopters reverted to outmoded communications strategies in the early days of the nonprofit Internet boom.

### *The Formal Mission Statement Proxy: Measuring E-Innovativeness*

As a proxy for cyber innovation, this study documents the presence of formal mission statements in nonprofit Web sites. Because of the rapid change in nonprofit Internet communication commencing in the mid 2000s, this study analyzes formal Internet missioning at two key points in time: 2005 and 2008. While formal mission statements are neither inherently good nor bad, evidence suggests that the forward trend in the nonprofit sector was to emphasize other means of storytelling. By the mid 2000s, formal mission statements were often relegated to internal communication in leading nonprofits organizations. Analyzing their presence and prominence on nonprofit Web sites opens the door for a discussion of how nonprofits use cyberspace technology to convey their identities to external stakeholders.

Because Web sites occupy multiple pages, akin to rooms in a large building, it was important to discern both the presence or lack of a formal mission statement within the architecture of the Web site *and* the location of the text. In order to capture data on the location of the formal mission statement within the cyber-story, this study centers around the dependent variable “web classification,” a numeric indicator of the *prominence* of the mission statement within the architecture of nonprofits’ Web sites (or absence from the sites), as described in the methodology section.

Based upon past research, this study further analyzes two independent variables related to innovativeness: budget and sub-sector. These two independent variables enable us to compare late 1990s and early 2000s nonprofit communication trends to 2005 and 2008 Web practices. Literature equating wealth with innovativeness in the nonprofit sector (Tuckman, Chatterjee, & Muha, 2004) suggests the following prominence hypothesis:

- H1: Organizational budgets will positively correlate with web classification (i.e., prominence) scores, such that wealthier organizations will either exclude formal mission statements from their Web sites or place their formal mission statements further from their homepage/Web entry points than poorer organizations.

In addition to wealth, prior literature suggests that certain sub-sectors adopted Internet homepages earlier than others (e.g., health organizations adopted Web sites relatively early). Since there is no consistent ranking of innovativeness among the sub-sectors, this study seeks to ascertain:

- RQ1: Did web classification (i.e., prominence) vary across sub-sectors?

Because Internet adoption had taken off by 2005, but nonprofits were experimenting with the content on their new sites, a second research question assesses change over time:

- RQ2: Did web classifications (i.e., prominence scores) change from 2005 to 2008?

In addition to documenting formal Internet missioning at two points in time, the findings also contribute to an emerging discussion in both the Communication discipline and nonprofit sector. This discussion is captured by the question: Are nonprofits fully exploiting the capacities of Internet technologies? The implications of this study for that discussion will be explored in the conclusion.

### *Methodology*

New York City was selected as the study site, as its nonprofit sector serves as a hub of innovation for domestic and international organizations (Boris, 2001). Because previous research suggested that well-established nonprofits were early Internet adopters, the study sought to document the practices of these nonprofits. Additionally, because the study aims to inform nonprofit leaders reliant on donor support, a method for selecting only donor-supported charities was preferable. Though a number of institutions maintain records on the city's nonprofits, the CharityNavigator's [CN] New York City dataset met the desired criteria. CN nonprofits:

- hold 501(c)(3) status (i.e., eliminating lobbying organizations),
- filed 990 forms for at least four years (i.e., eliminating new organizations and those exempt from 990 filings, e.g., Salvation Army),
- received substantial capital (e.g., at least \$500,000 in 2008) in public donations in the most recent fiscal year (CharityNavigator, 2008)

In addition to these criteria, CN does not include hospital or University listings. CN's criteria restricted the New York City sample to a small listing (n=431) of relatively wealthy, long-lived, donor-funded organizations. A random sample of 100 nonprofits was obtained for the 2005 study and retained for the 2008 follow-up study.

The sample represented some of the oldest and relatively newest nonprofits in New York City. Annual operating budgets ranged from the hundreds of thousands to the hundreds of millions (as reported to CN). The organizations included various sub-sectors of the nonprofit industry, represented as nine categories within the CN listings: Animals; Arts, Culture, Humanities; Education; Environment; Health; Human Services; International; Public Benefit; Religion.

Once the sample was obtained in summer 2005, all available pages of each organization's website were analyzed, including online annual reports and attached documents. Evaluation occurred over a one-month period and involved multiple visits to each organization's Web site. A number of organization's Web sites could not be accessed consistently or changed considerably from day-to-day (e.g., construction issues). Those organizations (n=17) were eliminated from the study. The remaining 83 organizations were

analyzed in 2005 and 2008. They comprised nonprofits specializing in Animals (n=1); Arts, Culture, Humanities (n=9); Education (n=16); Environment (n=1); Health (n=7); Human Services (n=14); International (n=15); Public Benefit (n=12); Religion (n=8).

After reviewing notes for all sampled Web sites, the following prominence classification system was developed and deployed:

Category	
1	Mission appears on the first page/home page of the website
2	Mission is one link/click from the first page/home page of the website
3	Mission is two links/clicks from the first page/home page of the website
4	Mission is available as part of a downloadable document (e.g., press kit, online annual report)
5	Mission statement is not available via the website

Box 1: Prominence categories

### Results

Analysis of the 2005 and 2008 prominence ratings revealed no significant correlation between 2005 budget and mission statement prominence (2005 Pearson's  $r$  -0.036; 2008 Pearson's  $r$  0.014), thus yielding no support for H1. Organizations with relatively small budgets (e.g., \$5.5 million) and large budgets (e.g., \$16.1 million) were likely to post their mission statements one click away from their homepages, for example.

Similarly, there were no clear sub-sector trends in Web site formal missioning in 2005 or 2008. Equally varied were the nonprofits that positioned formal mission statements in relatively inconspicuous parts of their Web site or chose not to post mission statements on their Web sites. Of course, small values in a number of cells (e.g., Animals, n=1) precluded robust analysis of sub-sector differences. Further, CN's categories were not identical to those found in the literature (e.g., there was no CN "scientific" category). As such, additional data collection is needed to determine sub-sector trends. Currently, however, no statistically significant prominence (i.e., WC in Table 1) sub-sector trends were found. A full reporting of the data appears in Table 1.

Org #	2005 Budget (millions)	Org Type	WC 2005	WC 2008
1	3.047	Education	3	2
2	5.486	Public Benefit	2	2
3	3.790	Public Benefit	2	1
4	6.039	Human Services	1	1

5	22.622	International	2	3
6	38.353	Arts, Culture, Humanities	4	4
7	65.852	Religion	3	2
8	16.107	Health	2	2
9	4.125	International	4	4
10	1.732	International	5	3
11	2.236	International	2	4
12	10.541	Health	2	1
13	13.834	Education	1	2
14	4.608	International	3	2
15	8.614	International	2	2
16	1.188	International	4	4
17	3.040	Public Benefit	3	3
18	192.509	Education	3	4
19	1.947	Environment	4	3
20	7.148	Human Services	4	1
21	1.218	Public Benefit	2	1
22	1.756	Education	5	5
23	14.431	Health	5	2
24	121.457	International	2	2
25	16.754	Human Services	4	4
26	3.926	Arts, Culture, Humanities	2	2
27	2.570	Education	2	2
28	0.387	International	3	3
29	24.829	Human Services	2	2
30	3.107	Public Benefit	4	3
31	9.061	Human Services	4	4
32	43.452	Education	2	2
33	92.010	International	2	2
34	3.698	Human Services	2	2
35	1.427	Religion	4	4
36	3.087	Arts, Culture, Humanities	3	3
37	30.152	Public Benefit	1	1
38	448.582	Education	2	2
39	0.918	Human Services	1	4
40	21.222	International	1	1
41	7.340	Animals	4	4
42	3.917	International	2	2
43	20.360	Health	2	2
44	4.916	Human Services	2	2
45	7.828	Religion	2	2
46	3.872	Public Benefit	2	1

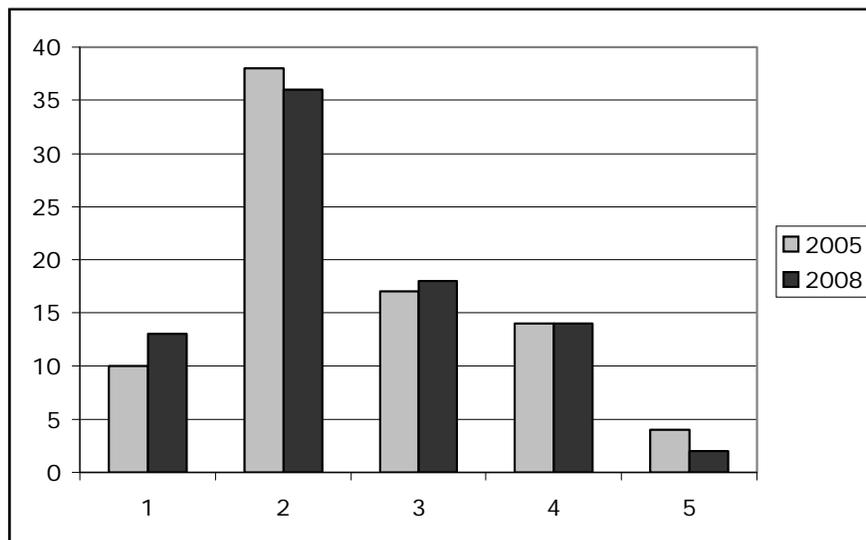
47	182.278	International	2	2
48	10.569	Arts, Culture, Humanities	3	3
49	1.602	Public Benefit	1	1
50	6.209	Public Benefit	2	3
51	18.901	Arts, Culture, Humanities	2	2

Table 1: Organizational data and prominence scores [WC] (cont).

Org #	2005 Budget (millions)	Org Type	WC 2005	WC 2008
52	3.830	Human Services	1	1
53	2.885	Religion	2	2
54	3.108	Religion	5	5
55	34.341	International	4	3
56	4.308	Arts, Culture, Humanities	3	3
57	5.297	Education	2	2
58	4.555	Public Benefit	2	2
59	3.262	Education	1	1
60	2.812	Education	3	3
61	0.325	Religion	2	2
62	2.849	Health	2	2
63	3.108	Health	3	3
64	1.901	Religion	2	2
65	47.554	Arts, Culture, Humanities	3	3
66	7.965	Human Services	1	4
67	4.038	Human Services	4	4
68	3.818	Arts, Culture, Humanities	2	3
69	314.050	Arts, Culture, Humanities	3	3
70	4.453	Religion	2	2
71	24.721	International	4	4
72	6.242	Health	2	2
73	11.738	Education	3	3
74	3.355	Human Services	2	2
75	3.774	Public Benefit	2	2
76	21.921	Education	3	3
77	4.984	Human Services	2	2
78	7.224	Education	1	1
79	3.324	Education	3	1

80	37.602	Education	4	4
81	3.199	Education	2	2
82	0.717	Human Services	3	2
83	13.318	Public Benefit	2	2

A small number of nonprofit organizations chose not to post mission statements on their Web sites or to make formal mission statements available only via downloadable documents. In 2005, four organizations omitted formal mission statements from their Internet sites and 14 included them only as part of print-based documents such as annual reports (i.e., essentially choosing not to actively incorporate them into their Web sites). Interestingly, by 2008 two of the organizations without online mission statements in 2005 (i.e., 2005 WC=5) added formal mission statements to their Web pages and no additional organizations removed their formal mission statements. Once again, 14 organizations included formal mission statements only via downloads, but they were not the same 14 as in 2005. Perhaps most interestingly, 10 organizations greeted visitors with their formal mission statements on the first page/home page of their Websites in 2005. The number rose to 13 in 2008. Despite these minor changes, there was no statistically significant difference in the prominence of formal mission statements between 2005 and 2008. As graph 1 demonstrates, nearly half of the established, urban nonprofit organizations surveyed featured their mission statements prominently (i.e., WC 1 and 2) on their Web sites in both 2005 and 2008.



Graph 1: Formal mission statement prominence, 2005 and 2008

*Discussion*

In the early 2000s, formal mission statements fell out of fashion in the nonprofit sector. Both internal and external observers felt that they were often

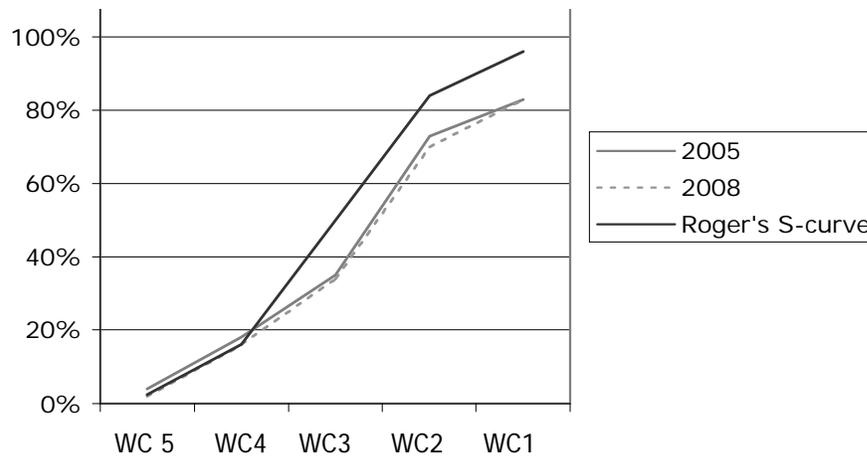
out of touch with what organizations actually did on a day-to-day basis. Frequently jargon-filled, formal mission statements tended to distance external audiences from nonprofits and their vibrant stories. As internal, foundational documents they were indispensable, but their utility in larger communications campaigns was dubious. Nonprofit organizations were counseled to ground their communications in their formal missions, but not to lead with them. As nonprofits began to stake their claim to cyberspace, the use of static formal mission statements became even more questionable. As this study demonstrates, nonprofit organizations are still adjusting to the dynamic nature of e-communication.

Though formal mission statements are but one element of nonprofit Web sites, their inclusion sends up a red flag. As static content in a dynamic world, they foreclose the sorts of exchange that draws audiences to Web sites. Rather than soliciting feedback and inviting dialogue, formal mission statements send the message, "What we do is already set in stone. You may watch, but you are not a participant." Especially for young audiences accustomed to contributing to newsmaking and community organizing via the Internet (see Ryan, 2009), such content can mark the organization as out-of-touch or behind the curve.

The curve metaphor is important, as innovation is often described in terms of an adoption curve. Those organizations ahead of the curve are considered innovators or early adopters of new ideas, practices, or technologies (Rogers, 2003). Those well behind the curve are seen as latecomers or laggards (Rogers, 2003). In the present study, those organizations with prominence scores of 4 or 5, who chose not to actively incorporate their formal mission statements into their Web sites, could be considered more innovative than their peers. As graph 2 depicts,<sup>2</sup> if prominence scores are indicative of overall cyber-innovativeness, then the sample closely resembles the classic diffusion of innovation S-curve, in which roughly 2.5% of organizations or individuals adopt new ideas or technologies first (i.e., innovators), 13.5% more join in the second wave of adoption (i.e., early adopters), 34% come on board during the third wave of adoption (i.e., early majority), 34% more implement during the fourth wave of adoption (i.e., late majority), and 16% adopt last or never adopt (i.e., laggards).

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<sup>2</sup> Graph 2 represents a theoretical depiction of the study data in contrast to Rogers' S-curve (2003), assuming that WC indicates overall cyber-innovativeness, or willingness to adapt messaging to the new medium. For example, WC 1 organizations are graphed as laggards. For the purposes of this graph, aggregate WC scores (e.g., four 5s in 2005) were divided by 100, representing 100% possible adoption. Most innovations never reach 100% adoption.



Graph 2: Theoretical nonprofit cyber-innovativeness for 2005 and 2008

While the theoretical graph cannot be used for statistical or predictive purposes, it raises an important question: Why was there little difference between the 2005 and 2008 data? Put another way, Why does it appear that nonprofit organizations are failing to move away from static content and toward dynamic content in their Web sites? Perhaps most importantly, If the prominent display of formal mission statements on nonprofit homepages represents a reversion to static content, are nonprofits missing an opportunity to network with tech-savvy constituencies in innovative ways? This study suggests that nonprofits have a way to go before they enjoy the full benefits of a medium centered on participatory exchange with external audiences.

### *Conclusion*

As of early 2009, most nonprofits have launched organizational Web sites. The content of nonprofit homepages varies dramatically. Some organizations feature dynamic material, such as *The New York City Ballet*, whose Web site greets visitors with music and videos of world-class performances, or the *National Resources Defense Council*, whose website features active blogs and opens with a series of moving pictures linked to news stories and campaigns (i.e., via a click). While there are static elements on both organizations' Web sites, these nonprofits incorporate many dynamic elements that engage visitors. Static text could not convey the artistry of one of the world's premiere arts institutions nor the complexity of environmental challenges. These institutions are vivid; their Web sites capture some of that dynamism. Of course, these are large, well-funded organizations.

Most nonprofits do not enjoy resources similar to the surveyed organizations. As such, they face greater economic challenges when launching and maintaining interactive, frequently-amended homepages. Assessing the cost benefit of investing in Web design and upkeep is difficult. Scholars are only beginning to assess whether donors to various sub-sectors are significantly

influenced by Web content when making giving decisions. Until a strong correlation between dynamic content and donations can be shown, nonprofits might not jump aboard the dynamic content bandwagon. Using the prominence of formal mission statements as a proxy for laggardly behavior, it seems that many organizations are presently content with maintaining relatively simple, static homepages. Their decision to delay the development of dynamic content risks four unintended consequences.

*Unintended consequence 1: The loss of potential future donors*

Today's college-aged generation is accustomed to finding both information and participatory opportunities on the Web. When they read a news story they find disagreeable, they expect a mechanism for publicly announcing their difference of opinion. When they visit a friend electronically via a social networking site, they can often leave a note, whether temporary or quasi-permanent, that marks their passage through that part of cyberspace. While tech-savvy 20-somethings are not the bulk of donors today, they will be before long. Researchers are only beginning to document how this generation builds relationships, but the early results highlight the importance of Internet-based networking, trust-building, and conflict resolution (See Bente, Ruggenberg, Kramer, & Eschenburg, 2008). That is, young people increasingly make meaningful connections in cyberspace and their e-communications matter. Organizations that fail to incorporate dynamic content into their Web sites are in many ways closing their cyber doors to the next generation. Nonprofits that seize this opportunity are creating flexible spaces in which to nurture future relationships.

*Unintended consequence 2: The loss of potential future sector jobs*

As creative responses to recent economic shortfalls demonstrated, public sector entities can save money by limiting the use of their brick-and-mortar facilities (e.g., 4-day work weeks, cyber-commuting). As work becomes increasingly electronic, employees become more mobile and in some ways, organizations become more flexible. Girding this transformation are the technical professionals that build and maintain servers, e-mail systems, and the like. Even as nonprofit leaders commit to running leaner organizations, many want to see the sector expand to include more highly skilled employees. Innovative nonprofits will boast increasingly smaller physical footprints and larger, highly-skilled staffs. Organizations that shift resources to Web-based communications now will be ahead of the curve as the employers of the future. If the nonprofit sector as a whole does not move in this direction, it risks losing the best jobs and people to other sectors.

*Unintended consequence 3: The loss of valuable feedback*

As nonprofit leaders well know, surveying the attitudes and behaviors of potential clients, donors, staff, and volunteers is prohibitively costly and difficult. Consequently, organizations often become closed systems, influenced almost entirely by current participants. Valuable environmental information is lost and nonprofits act on incomplete and highly-biased data. Dynamic Web sites can provide a valuable feedback loop. Participatory features can yield information from passers by who might never stop to take a paper survey or answer questions about their perceptions of the organization. Inter-organizational linking can increase cross-traffic and outreach. Organizations that exploit the interactive potential of the Internet to garner information from external audiences will likely make better decisions than those with fewer entry points.

Unintended consequence 4: The loss of a service-delivery avenue

As nonprofit health care providers have demonstrated since the late 1990s, the Internet provides a means of reaching clients and patients who might otherwise be underserved. Yet, nonprofit leaders have long recognized that Internet usage is lower among older and poorer populations. Today, with the spread of new technologies (e.g., Broadband) and the diminishing cost of hardware, the promise of greater Internet equity seems closer than ever. As at-risk populations become increasingly connected, nonprofits can provide these clients with valuable information and opportunities via the Internet. This is perhaps the most important reason that nonprofits need to invest in their homepages - the Internet can help them to reach more people, better, thus supporting their missions.

This baseline study provides a means for analyzing nonprofit cyber-innovativeness via a mission statement prominence proxy. While formal mission statements on organizational Web sites are but one content element, they provide a focal point for discussing the largely static content seen on nonprofit Web sites today. As nonprofits consider how to invest their limited resources in the future, they should seriously consider allocating substantial resources for their Web sites. These cyberspaces can serve as locations from which to serve clients and reach external audiences.

As scholars seek to support nonprofit leaders, they should continue to document Internet trends and best practices in the sector. Further, longitudinal studies of young donors' Internet usage and giving behaviors will assist nonprofit leaders in making cost and content-related decisions. Finally, because nonprofit Web sites are different from for-profit sites, scholars can assist nonprofit leaders in crafting relevant assessment instruments for e-campaigns and Web sites. These measures will assist nonprofit leaders in adapting their messages for new audiences and a dynamic medium.

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