

# **Add Charity Shopping to Your Website**

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### **Shop online and generate funds for your nonprofit**

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Imagine a shopping mall contributing 5 to 10 percent of its sales to your nonprofit. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it?

It's not as far-fetched as it might seem. With an [online charity shopping mall](#), your supporters can do what they'd already be doing (shopping) and provide additional funding to your organization at the same time.

This is how a charity mall typically works: someone buys an item, a percentage of the item's cost goes to the mall site, and the mall passes the other portion of its profits onto a selected charity.

Charity malls establish relationships with online retailers and act as liaisons between the shoppers and charitable organizations. Your organization won't have to pay any fees because mall sites don't charge nonprofits that list with them.

If you'd rather forgo the middleman, your organization can set up its own charity mall. Doing so means you'll have a lot more work to do: designing the mall, administering account setup, and establishing relationships with retailers.

By administering the charity mall in-house your organization receives 100 percent of the commissions from purchases, you can select the appropriate retailers, Web pages will match your site's existing design, plus you'll have access to Web site statistics and click records from your site logs.

### **Is a Charity Mall Right for Your Nonprofit?**

A charity mall is a potential source of year-round funds, with a relatively small upfront investment.

On the downside, convincing people to visit your site and return to do their shopping can be a challenge. Of course, if your employees, volunteers, clients, and supporters are passionate about

your cause, they'll make the extra effort to use your site. Continued reminders through e-mail and newsletters will keep the program fresh in visitors' minds.

You should also let your supporters know about IRS guidelines which dictate that charity mall shoppers won't get a tax deduction on their purchases. Shoppers would only receive a deduction if the amount they paid were greater than the fair market price of the item. Typically, charity malls items are priced the same as retail.

It's possible to make good money using a charity mall. The Larkin Street Youth Center in San Francisco made \$1000 worth of profits in a few months with iGive.com, according to the SF Gate article [A New Way to Give](#).

But don't expect the money to just start pouring in when you sign up. "Since commissions are fractional, it takes many sales to produce a sizeable chunk of money," according to the Grantsmanship Center article [Grantsmanship Center article](#).

## **Do It Yourself?**

Before you decide to design your own mall, consider how much time and Web design resources you can dedicate to the effort.

Design and implementation of your mall site will vary depending on your knowledge of Web design and the detail of your site, but expect to spend about six hours setting up your mall and about an hour a week maintaining it initially. After the first month or so, you won't need to perform as much maintenance -- just updating links occasionally and changing the display showing the amount you've raised (if you decide to display this information).

Before creating your mall, first contact potential merchants to find out whether they offer affiliate status, also called associate status. Though you can expect to spend about 10-15 minutes asking each merchant to sign up for your program, you may have to wait hours or days to get confirmation of acceptance. Not all affiliates will want to be a part of your charity mall.

Merchants that want to participate will give you a shopping link to use on your site. For every sale generated through that link, your organization will receive a commission.

Once they're on board with your mall, merchants will track your commissions, but you should also keep track of the sales information yourself. A simple spreadsheet with monthly figures from each retailer is sufficient.

Be sure to offer your customers some variety in your affiliate links and add new retailers as you get a feel for what visitors want.

## **Designing Your Site**

The design possibilities are endless, but the best strategy is to design your charity mall site to look like your organization's own site.

In terms of layout, the best approach is a simple two-column table with a row for each retailer. Put an affiliate link or logo in the first cell and in the adjacent cell, put a retailer description.

If the table becomes long (more than one screen), consider placing a legend or a horizontal list of your affiliates' names just above the start of the table. Make sure that when visitors click each retailer name, it jumps to that retailer's row.

Be aware that merchants have their own rules regarding how you can use their names, links, and logos. Some don't want their links within close proximity to or on the same page as a competitor's link.

Many retailers stipulate that you cannot model your page to look like theirs, you can't buy domain names similar to theirs, and you can't imply that they endorse your charity. Displaying specials or sales using a retailer's supplied graphics often produces good results. Honest testimonials or small articles describing products and services are also effective.

In a very prominent place, be sure to include the percentage of a visitor's purchase being donated to your organization.

Some additional features to consider adding to your charity mall are: methods for suggesting stores, a page indicating how much money has been raised for your organization, and a disclaimer. In the disclaimer, you may include a message indicating that the donations from purchases are not tax deductible. (This is something you can link to on your mall's main page.)

Whether you decide to add a charity mall using in-house resources or through an existing service, attention to layout, design, and advertising is a must. If you've already got a strong Web presence, you've already got a built-in audience for your charity mall in place.

## **Promoting Your Mall**

The time and money required to promote and market your charity mall should be the same whether you are doing it in-house or using a mall site.

Treat the mall as you would another form of fundraising: That is, be sure to promote it. Unless you decide to run a special event, like a virtual shopping day, your costs for promotions will be small.

Market your charity shopping mall through links on your Web site, try advertising in your newsletter or in another publication, send out e-mail announcements, and create fliers to post on bulletin boards. Consider creating virtual shopping campaigns asking supporters to make an extra effort to shop your site on a specific day or week.

With some time, effort, and marketing, your charity mall can be a source of a small, but steady stream of revenue.

## Charity Malls

There are plenty of charity malls online, here are a few of notable ones. (TechSoup doesn't endorse any of these malls.)

- [GreaterGood.com](http://GreaterGood.com) Sells merchandise from Barnes and Noble, Nordstrom, Dell, Office Max, and others. The site gives 100 percent of its commissions to charities on the site. At the time this story was written the site was longer accepting new charities.
- [eBay Giving Works](http://eBay Giving Works) eBay Giving Works lets you buy items being auctioned and support nonprofits, too.
- [MyCause.com](http://MyCause.com) Sells products from all sorts of retailers, including: Kmart, L.L. Bean, Travelocity, Sephora, and Amazon. The commission percentage varies.
- [iGive.com](http://iGive.com) Donates up to 40 percent commission from every purchase made in one of its 609 stores.

### About the Author:

Andrew Murray is creator of MurrayCharityMall.com, which supports scholarships and other charities.

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