

Spring 6-2022

Branding in Motion: How Animation and Branding Intersect to Support Nonprofits in Need

Shannon M. Steed
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorsthesis>



Part of the [Graphic Design Commons](#), and the [Marketing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Steed, Shannon M., "Branding in Motion: How Animation and Branding Intersect to Support Nonprofits in Need" (2022). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 1280.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.1311>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Branding in Motion: How Animation and Branding
Intersect to Support Nonprofits in Need

by

Shannnon Steed

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Fine Arts
in

University Honors

and

Graphic Design

Thesis Adviser

Meredith James

Portland State University

2022

Abstract

Nonprofits often don't receive the kind of attention needed to garner a wide audience. Especially during the pandemic when the world has largely gone online, it can be a challenge for many of these organizations to adapt to the fast-paced digital landscape. This is largely due to a lack of access to resources and modern design practices to create more community visibility. This thesis is an exploration of how thoughtful design can bring these nonprofit events a new life. I created design systems for two nonprofit events, each with a digitally-focused approach and a focus on deeply considering the audience. I employed a motion-oriented approach as well, with animation integrated throughout to immediately grab attention and attract an audience.

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of how modern design practices can bring nonprofit events a new life, with an approach that prioritizes high-impact and engaging design. In my research, I found that a lack of resources, a lack of strong digital presence, and a need to target a more pointed audience are primary factors that contribute to a nonprofit's struggle to increase engagement. I'm interested in exploring the potential of digitally-centered branding to discover how it can elevate these events to create more community visibility. The key question at the center of my thesis is this: Can motion and modern design push a nonprofit campaign to a new level and get more engagement for organizations deserving of a bigger public presence?

I created the branding and digital outreach for two nonprofit events to explore what it would look like if these organizations had access to modern design practices. Both of these branding projects are largely motion-focused, with animation integrated into the branding system and an emphasis on social media and other digital means to support this innovative approach to brand. I created one brand system for a very digital campaign, and one for a physical, completely in-person event. As the digital landscape is more important than ever for gaining an audience, creating a heavy online presence for both systems became a key element to my research.

Research

As the world transitions largely online due to the constraints of the pandemic, key considerations have surfaced that deeply impact the world of design in the nonprofit sphere, from execution to access. It's no secret that nonprofits often aren't able to dedicate their efforts to design due to a lack of finances, but there are other factors that contribute to the challenge of garnering engagement for these organizations. In my research, there are three key findings that hinder the ability for nonprofits to engage with the public: a lack of resources, a lack of social media usage, and – from a design perspective – a lack of focus on one specific targeted audience for individual events. A lack of resources for nonprofits is largely financial, with the ripple effects of budget cuts and a lack of donors being felt in every part of an organization, including the marketing and engagement teams. Nonprofit organizations also don't leverage social media as a tool for engagement, when it has deep potential in the digital age to garner a wide-reaching audience. Lastly, with a lack of resources, many nonprofits aren't able to create pointed design campaigns that target specific audiences. This results in a lack of a clear voice, with less reach and influence in the digital space. Many of these problems originate from one overarching problem: nonprofits simply do not have the money or manpower to commit to wide-reaching engagement efforts. However, there are ways that these organizations can expand their reach despite financial constraints.

One contributing factor to a lack of financial security for many organizations is a lack of donors. Since the Great Recession, charitable donations have made a steady decline and fear and insecurity surrounding the pandemic has not helped the comfort of many Americans. Now, more than ever, nonprofits are in need of financial support but in a time of great uncertainty, that type

of support isn't granted in the way it once was. According to the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, in 2018, only half of U.S. households donated to charity, the worst rate in decades. "We've seen a downward trend in households' participation in giving since the Great Recession, but this is the first time that only half of U.S. households donated to charity," said Una Osili, Ph.D., Associate Dean of Research and International Programs at the school, "This new research offers clear evidence of a substantial decline in formal charitable giving rates prior to the unprecedented events and challenges of 2020." The study suggests several reasons for this decline in donations – from a lack of trust in institutions and in each other due to the troubling political landscape to a lack of habitual giving due to Americans not attending nonprofits events that urge them to donate. Osili brings up the question "What are the factors that will bring them into giving? Especially if they are not attending services, and not participating in networks that will lead to giving," (Osili)

This decline in charitable giving prior to 2020 has revealed another significant challenge for nonprofit organizations: appeasing wealthy donors. With income inequality rising nationwide, much of the funding that runs nonprofits is coming from wealthy donors with a lot of power in how things are run and a vested interest in where their money is going.

"The overall pie [in charitable donation] is slowly moving towards the ultra wealthy," said John List, an economics professor at the University of Chicago who studies philanthropic giving (List). List suggests that this shift in profit from many low to middle income donors with smaller contributions to a wealthy few can be dangerous for the financial security of these organizations. When this shift occurs, the few wealthy donors with a larger stake often assume more control over the use of their funds – do they want their money to be used for flashy events and

community projects or necessary day-to-day operations? The marketing and outreach for events to ensure their success for other potential donors or the event itself and all of the prestige that comes with it? “Donors don’t want to pay for an organization’s rent, or phone bill, or stamps,” says Ben Paul, president and CEO of a nationwide nonprofit organization that provides programs for at-risk youth, “but those are essential components of everyday work. You can’t run a high-performing organization from your car” (Paul).

One very accessible avenue that can contribute to an event’s visibility is social media usage. In an era where the world is largely transitioning online, with many jobs and schools going remote, social media remains an avenue of connection for those apart from their loved ones in the pandemic. This is true for events as well. Not only are digital events more accessible than ever, but digital outreach for events of all kinds is becoming more and more commonplace. Social media isn’t just a place to post photos of your vacation anymore, it is truly an avenue of connection for people in a time where isolation is the norm. People are looking for an opportunity to connect online, and this is a space that “Nonprofits are no different in this respect than for-profit brands: people want to connect with causes and nonprofit organizations,” says Stacy Landreth Grau, PhD Professor of Entrepreneurship & Innovation Practice in the Neely School of Business, “Nonprofits are paying more attention to the ways that social media can be used to increase awareness of issues, motivate and recruit volunteers, and locate and engage donors globally” (Grau).

Social media is an opportunity for strategy and outreach, with room to connect with donors and volunteers alike to facilitate social change. “Social media [has] been instrumental in improving

the ability of many nonprofit organizations to communicate effectively. Nearly all organizations want a presence on Facebook or Twitter, but few really know how to leverage these resources,” said Grau, emphasizing the often overlooked potential of social media food nonprofit use, “it is expected that these media will continue to be an important way for nonprofits to connect with donors and other supporters” (Grau). Social media is a tool, not an accessory. It can be used in powerful ways to reach an audience and, if leveraged properly, it can garner the attention that other communications can not.

To get some more valuable insight on the power of social media in nonprofit outreach, I interviewed Renee Resko, the Vice President of Development at Helen Woodward Animal Center, a large nonprofit organization with over 50 years of operation. She has over 25 years of successful fundraising and event management experience. She works closely with event strategy teams to organize the very well-visited animal center events like the annual PAWmicon, Surf Dog, and Chichella in San Diego, California. A large part of these events’ success, she says, is due to their consistent social media presence. The Helen Woodward Animal Center has over 30 thousand followers on Instagram, promoting their events and using the platform as a necessary tool for outreach. “Social media plays a large role in outreach for HWAC events. We use Instagram and Facebook to promote all of our events and we purchase ads, as well as posting for free,” says Resko. “The more public the event, the more important social media can be to drive attendance, for example our Surf Dog event and our PAWmicon event draw a large audience from our targeted ads on social media” (Resko).

On top of emphasizing the importance of a strong social media presence, Renee Resko also stressed how instrumental catering their outreach to a specific audience has been to their success as an organization. A key part of successful strategizing is being deliberate in your approach – being intentional about who you connect with and making sure your content will really resonate with that specific audience. Especially when engagement and attendance is the goal, reaching out and catering your messaging to 10 people it will really click with is much more impactful than reaching out to 100 people that aren't moved by your organizational goals. “Every event hosted by [Helen Woodward Animal Center] has a target audience, so the design of the marketing piece has to fit that audience. A black tie gala needs to have marketing pieces that are sophisticated and formal while a PAWmicon doggie costume and trivia contest needs to look fun and whimsical. We also know the gala is attended by older donors while PAWmicon is younger cosplay fans that are into COMIC-Con and Star Wars” (Resko). This approach continues to be successful to the organization, with a huge variety of events reaching different audiences, from wealthy donors to volunteers to potential adopters.

From the perspective of a designer, creating for a target audience can be a challenge. Not only does it require an intimate knowledge of the community you are trying to reach, but it also requires the ability to adapt to fit different audiences without projecting too much of your own creative style. It requires putting yourself in the shoes of a community member you're trying to reach and thinking “how can I meet this person's needs through design” despite your own preferences or ideologies. Ideally, the audience would have a role in co-design, but with the pandemic, this is not currently a viable option. Therefore, it requires a certain level of sensitivity to be able to voice stories and experiences outside of your own. Especially for nonprofit

organizations that support communities in need, it's imperative to communicate the stories and needs of these community members with clarity and intention, uplifting those in marginalized communities without injecting your own narrative. "Community engagement requires 'cultural appropriateness,'" says Andrew Shea, designer, writer and educator in his book *Designing for Social Change : Strategies for Community-Based Graphic Design*, "Let your final design mirror the voice and style of the community rather than your own to ensure that it speaks to community members and portrays the community to the world in a convincing and authentic way" (Shea).

Project

Since many nonprofits lack the resources needed to make intentional design campaigns that target specific audiences through digital means, I decided to put my interests to use to explore what it could look like if these organizations did have that access. I created the brand systems for two nonprofit organizations to explore the potential of modern brands to uplift these communities to more visibility. The main goal of these design systems was to deeply consider the audience in order to create brands that were impactful and pointed, while using the digital space (social media and websites) as a tool for engagement. This project took the form of one physical event and one digital event to explore the potential of these systems to drive attendance, both online and in the real world. We're currently in a transitional space with the pandemic, so creating a campaign that has this flexibility and versatility is appropriate for the times.

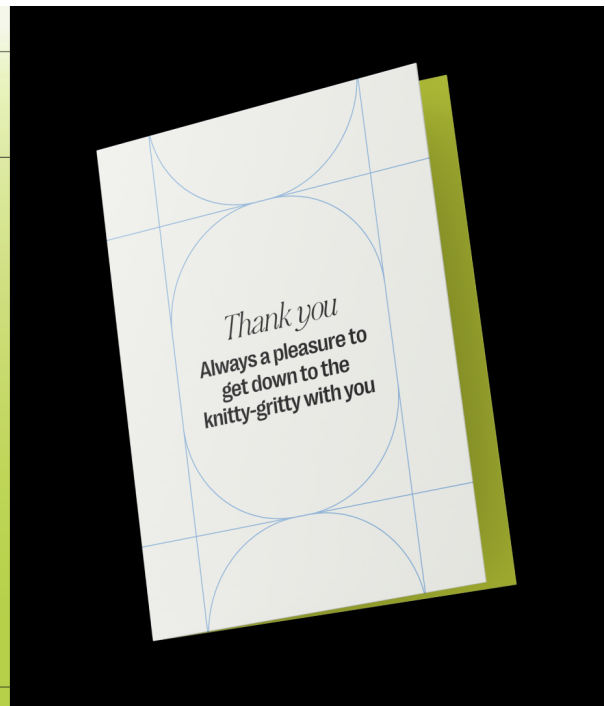
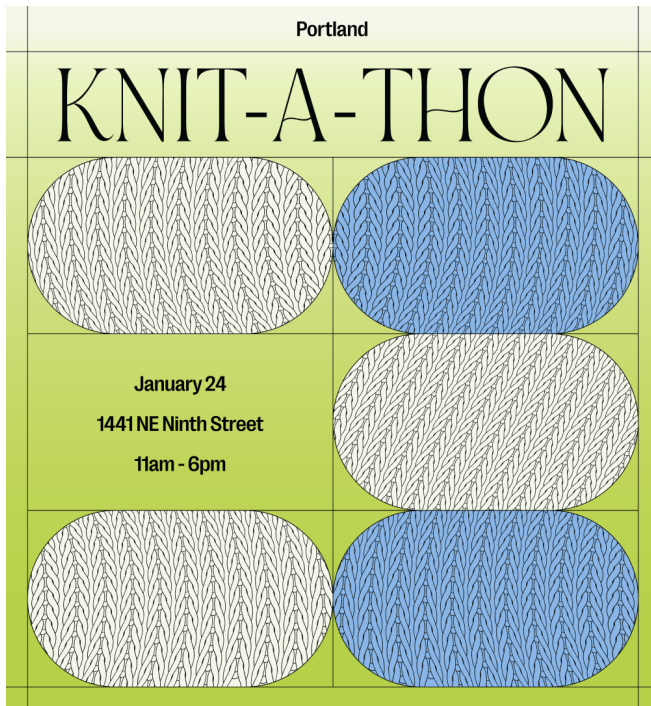
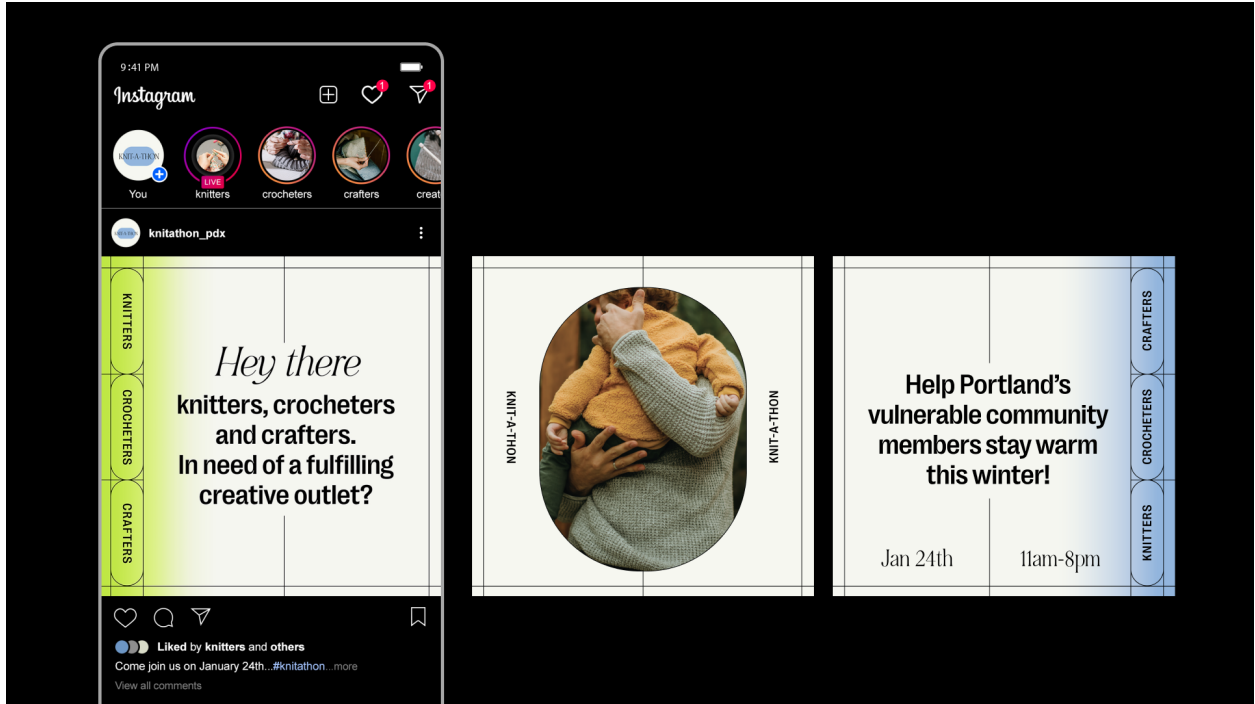
Project 1: Portland Knit-a-Thon

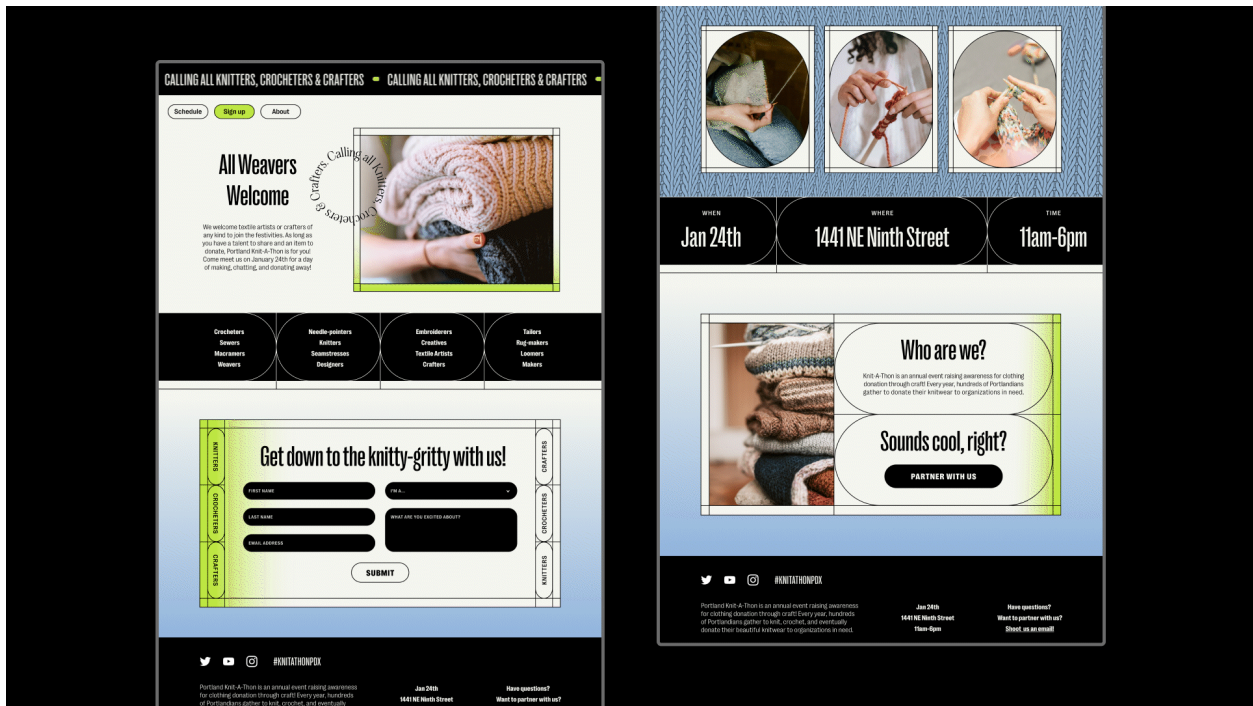
When researching local nonprofits in the area, a common theme I came across was events that cater towards supporting the local houseless communities. Many of these initiatives like local Community Centers and Youth Shelters focus on providing space, resources, and community for folks in need. I wanted to find a way to uplift this local initiative in a new way, with an event that is accessible and provides support to these local Centers. The physical event I created the branding for is called the Portland Knit-a-Thon. It's an annual event where knitters, crocheters, and crafters get together to create knitwear and run knitwear donation drives for local houseless shelters. For both of these projects, I put an emphasis on deeply considering the audience while designing. This was a challenge for this particular project since it was important to create a brand

that appealed to both the Gen Z resurgence of crocheters and older people with many years of knitting experience. The brand needed to be modern yet accessible, trendy yet practical.

Here is a link to the full animated brand system in motion: <https://vimeo.com/715866921>





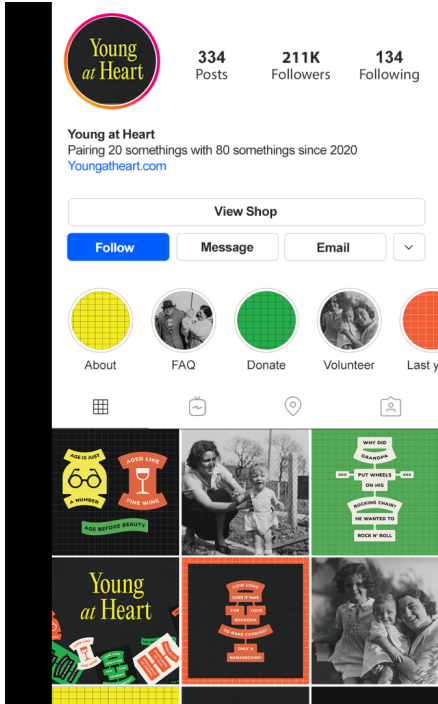


Social media can be a great tool for nonprofits to increase visibility and accessibility on a global scale. I used this to my advantage when creating this brand by creating a deeply digitally-focused

brand system that prioritizes social media. The system employs a high contrast color palette with hints of neon to immediately grab attention and peak interest. This contrast accentuates the imagery throughout, with weavers' hands and handmade knitwear breaking up the clean and organized designs with a sense of comfort and familiarity, creating unity with the concept. There's an elevated type system integrated as well, bringing a more sophisticated feeling to the system. Another primary issue when promoting nonprofit events is a lack of attention to the target audience. I combatted this by deeply considering both groups that would be the most interested in attending The Portland Knit-a-thon, the Gen Z resurgence of knitters and crocheters and older folks with many years of experience in their craft. The brand needed to be accessible and approachable enough for the more experienced knitters, while maintaining a modern and elevated aesthetic to appeal to the new wave of weavers. I accomplished this by using copywriting that was direct and sincere and photos of knitters at work, while maintaining a very modern aesthetic throughout and engaging motion design to cut through the noise on social media. The brand maintains accessibility with a clear tie to knitwear through imagery, while the type, color, and layout feels youthful and elevated.

Project 2: Young at Heart

Another important initiative that is deeply relevant to me during this isolating time is supporting communities through the pandemic. It's a scary time for many people and I know from personal experience that the isolating effects of quarantine, especially without the company of close family, is very real. I wanted to find a way to connect people who were experiencing the same kind of pandemic woes that I was to help them feel less alone in their struggle as this experience is deeply relevant for people of all ages right now. Most importantly, I wanted this event to live





Young at Heart's primary audience is younger people that are experiencing isolation during the pandemic, especially those who miss their older relatives and want a way to connect with others

in their community. I wanted this system to remind this audience of their own grandparents and the comfort that comes from that inter-generational connection. During the pandemic, there was so much social isolation for anyone living in an assisted care facility as well, with a need for strict quarantining resulting in a lot of deep isolation. This event is an opportunity to rekindle those intergenerational bonds while maintaining a safe distance through an online approach. I wanted the people seeing these designs online be reminded of the comfort and warmth of their relatives, and to give back to others that are also experiencing a similar sense of isolation. This system, with old photographs and paper textures, emulates the look of a handwritten letter or a family scrapbook from a loved one. This makes the whole system feel more intimate and nostalgic, while maintaining a level of youth with a motion-oriented digital approach and a younger aesthetic to “speak the language” of that generation. The cascading type lockups throughout ties this idea of balancing modernity and nostalgia together, with a type structure that mirrors the shape of a traditional family tree while using lighthearted copywriting to keep it feeling youthful. The old photographs throughout are a direct reference to intergenerational bonds and the importance of close relationships in times of isolation. A high contrast and youthful color palette is used throughout the system as well to bring an unexpected vibrancy that immediately grabs attention. Along with deeply considering the audience, this system combats the other problem of nonprofit outreach by utilizing social media as a tool for engagement. This system is designed with the digital space in mind, with type elements and photographs that bring hand-made nostalgia to your computer or phone. The youthful copywriting is used throughout the digital marketing to grab attention immediately through humor while the old photographs tie the messaging to the organization’s original mission. The website is a testament to this deeply

digital system, with one continuous scroll that grabs attention and provides all of the necessary information quickly.

Conclusion

The world is going digital. Especially during the pandemic where in-person marketing potential is severely limited, social media outreach is booming and the world of design is largely shifting online. Nonprofit organizations can deeply benefit from this shift to the digital space if utilized properly. This shift can garner global attention and reach donors and volunteers much quicker than ever before. This shift to the online space requires intention and motivation to be successful, with work that speaks for itself and is immediately impactful, condensing the event's mission into something accessible and interesting. It also requires a deep understanding of the organization's audience, with work that has a more pointed scope and a clear goal. Young at Heart and the Portland Knit-a-thon are examples of what this could look like if nonprofits had the resources to fully engage this initiative, with a deeply digital approach and a targeted message to reach those it's meant to impact. In the saturated digital age, it takes modern design practices to cut through the noise, take up space, and reach an engaged audience. Modern nonprofits deserve to take up space. Not only the digital space and space in the community, but they deserve the space to be heard.

Works Cited

Grau, Stacy Landreth. *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations: Insights and Innovations*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

IUPUI Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2021, pp. 1–27, *The Giving Environment: Understanding Pre-Pandemic Trends in Charitable Giving*.

“The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle.” *Bridgespan*, 24 Aug. 2009,
<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/initiatives/pay-what-it-takes-philanthropy/the-nonprofit-starvation-cycle>.

“Only Half of U.S. Households Donated to Charity, Worst Rate in Decades.” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 27 July 2021,
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/charity-donations-us-households-decline/>.

Shea, Andrew. *Designing for Social Change: Strategies for Community-Based Graphic Design*. Princeton Architectural Press, 2012.

Steed, Shannon, and Renne Resko. “Renee Resko on Marketing in the Nonprofit Space.” 11 Apr. 2022.

Stinson, Liz. “Shira Inbar on the Power of Motion in Graphic Design.” *Eye on Design*, 5 Oct. 2018,
<https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/shira-inbar-on-the-power-of-motion-in-graphic-design/>.