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## **Growing the Fundraising Campaign Experience**

by Reagan Jackson

Perhaps one of the greatest on-going difficulties a non-profit organization or political campaign faces is fundraising. In any economy, and particularly a poor one, the efforts to raise funds to support a cause can be strenuous. The facts, however, remain the same. Non-profit organizations and political campaigns need funding. That's where Ginger Whitwell steps in.

When Whitwell, of Jackson, conceptualized The Donor Tree, she imagined a fundraising experience that goes beyond the monetary exchange. "It engages and motivates donors and gives organizations the value proposition of finding new donors and tracking the influence of existing donors," she said.

The Donor Tree is a software tool that can reach groups of people previously unidentified. The method attracts potential donors in a secure and friendly environment by crafting personalized messages from supporters to their friends and contacts. An initial notice is launched by The Donor Tree to known contacts and potential supporters, allowing those original contacts to then find other donors. The original contacts can include personalized messages, making their email more likely to be opened and responded to.

The Donor Tree also places a unique "online bumper sticker" on display with the name and emblem of the candidate or cause with a tracking device. The bumper sticker can be clicked on by a potential donor who is then led to a secure website to make a contribution for that candidate or cause. The donor can then use the bumper sticker on Facebook or attached to emails. When their friends and contacts click on the bumper sticker displayed by the donor and then financially contribute to the cause, the original donor is given credit for raising those funds for the campaign. As inquiries become donors, they then transition to active participants, raising additional funds through their personal points of contact.

In addition to the traditional fundraising techniques of phone calls and mail outs, The Donor Tree offers a new solution. "As a fundraiser, I saw the need to take the same model to the online world as more and more people are choosing online as their method of giving," Whitwell said. The Donor Tree is not only staying on trend, but revolutionizing the way groups fundraise. "It takes a proven model online, making it more simple, user-friendly and fun!"

This past May, Whitwell competed in Mississippi Technology Alliance's New Venture Challenge, a business plan competition that saw 37 participants pitch their innovative ideas. After pitching The Donor Tree to a panel of judges, Whitwell took

home second place in the commercial division. Whitwell also received \$2,000 and access to service providers specific to her company's needs.

“Pioneers like Ginger Whitwell and ideas like The Donor Tree are the innovative components the New Venture Challenge and MTA seek to unearth and then encourage along their route to success,” said Tony Jeff, president and CEO of MTA.

The Donor Tree is designed for political campaigns, non-profit organizations, fundraisers, church donations, alumni groups and many other organizations. It provides organizations with the opportunity to offer rewards for the largest amounts raised or instill competition by the desire to match what another donor raised. “The Donor Tree can turn your online fundraising effort into a viral campaign,” said Whitwell.