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About 1 month ago [Geoff Livingston](#) 12

How Non-Profits Should Approach Making iPhone Apps

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[Geoff Livingston](#) co-founded [Zoetica](#) to focus on cause-related work, and released an award-winning book on new media [Now is Gone](#) in 2007.

Much has [been said](#) about Apple's policy barring [iPhone](#) and [iPad](#) application donations. The company cannot guarantee donations will be received by said non-profit, and as a result, [donations to charities cannot be mentioned](#) in any Apple application description, support materials, or the application itself. Certainly, this impacts the ability of non-profits and cause applications to collect donations. But how much?



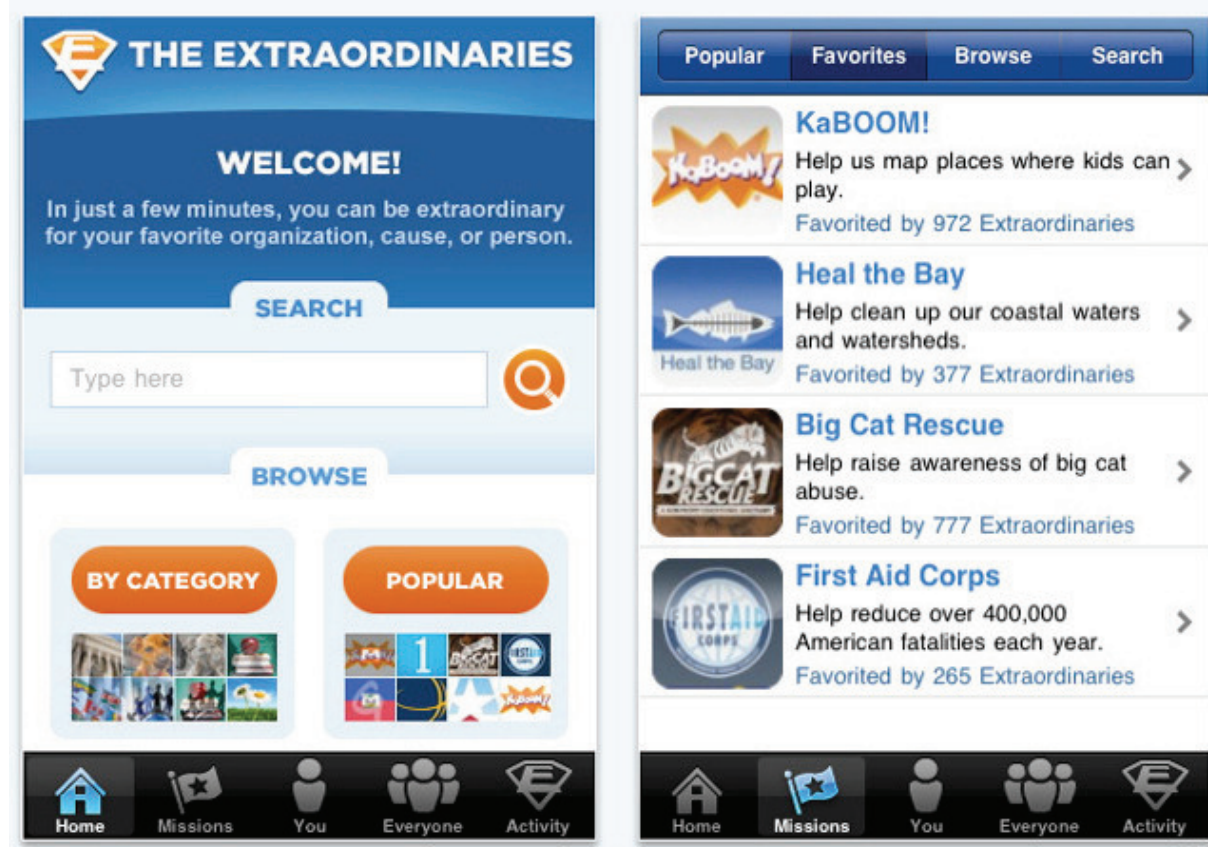
Before considering that, it's important to note that the use of mobile applications for social good has increased dramatically. Two good examples are [CauseWorld](#) and [The Extraordinaries](#).

According to CauseWorld, in the past five months their location-based iPhone and Android apps have been downloaded 550,000 times. Further, it has helped provide 272,000 meals to people in the U.S., plant 74,000 trees, and provide 27 million liters of clean water in developing countries via [Children's Safe Drinking Water](#).

"The Extraordinaries are a great example of how to use this type of platform," said Marlie Webb, Co-CEO of [TechSoup Global](#). "Their basic model, which harnesses the energy of many people to help solve a problem — whether it's identifying missing people or tagging photos from museums — is one that other non-profits could easily use. The difficulty is that it requires non-profit organizations to think about volunteerism very differently than they have for the past 200 years or so."

Are these apps being hurt by Apple's policy?

Does Apple's Policy Harm Non-Profits?

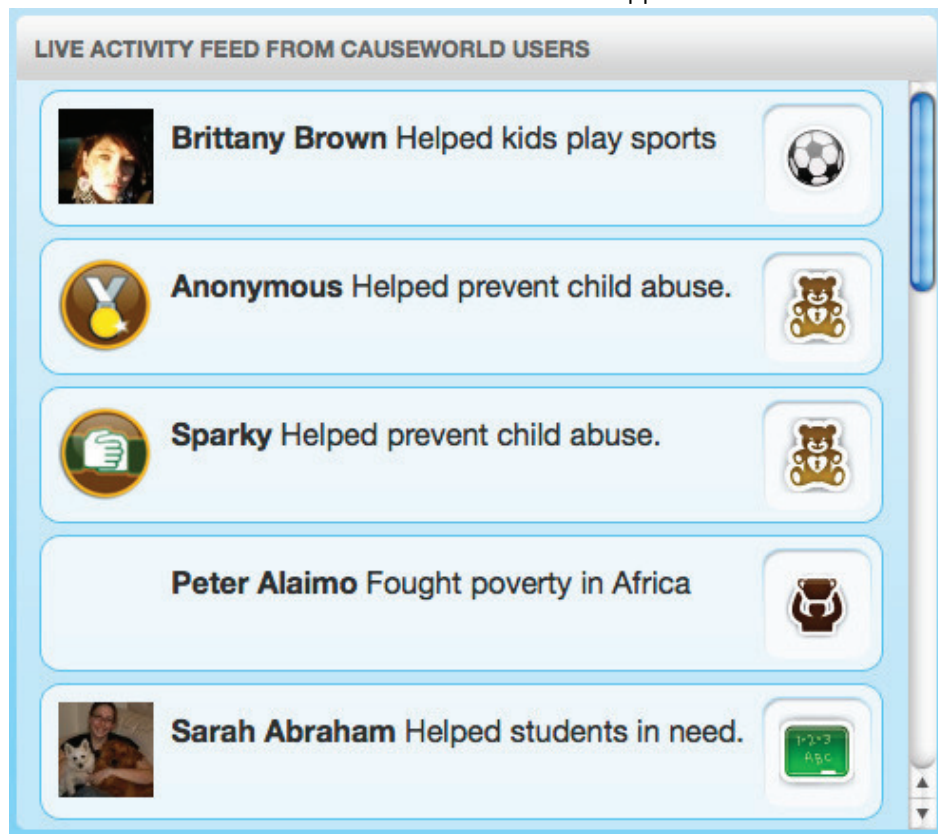


In some ways, Apple's policy can be seen as prohibitive and harmful. One can question the real impact of a controlled approach to non-profit donations. Experts had mixed views.

"It makes it exceedingly difficult for a non-profit to make use of the platform," said [Ben Rigby](#), CTO of the Extraordinaries. "However, we also need to think about the future — and the future will [offer] more immersive devices that make the data around us accessible in many ways ... and right now, iPhone is dominating the field of "ubiquitous data" — so we should work now to make sure it's going to work for non-profits in the future."

"No [it does not hurt them], because I do believe that Apple *will* provide a way for non-profits to accept donations in the long run," said Holly Ross, executive director of the [Nonprofit Technology Network \(NTEN\)](#). "They just do everything at *their* pace. Yes, it will hurt them because I have to assume that donations will have to happen in the highly controlled Apple environment, meaning that there will be little room for innovation and it will cost a lot."

How Should Non-Profits Approach Apple Applications?



Apple's [iPhone market share](#) makes it too big of a force to be ignored. Non-profits seeking a mobile presence will need to address the platform, with a combination of volunteering, activism, and information approaches. For donations, they will need to rely on click through contributions.

"Create a model where non-profits benefit from mobile users' behavior without requiring any payment system," said Cyriac Roeding, CEO and founder of [shopkick](#), the creator of CauseWorld. "The CauseWorld app is completely free to consumers, and so are the donations. So this system works, without going through the direct donation raising from consumers. It's a win-win-win-win for users, sponsors, participating companies — and ultimately, the non-profits who benefit."

"The real answer, of course, is that mobile is an opportunity to engage constituency," said TechSoup's Marnie Webb. "Smartphones allow people to connect and add the element of location. So, organizations, I think, can be thinking about these platforms as an opportunity to connect their constituency to local community needs."

Can Android and Blackberry Fill the Void?



The beautiful thing about competitive markets is the ability to opt for a different platform. With [Android's stunning impact](#) this year in the smartphone marketplace, and [BlackBerry](#) 's continued prevalence, it's conceivable that non-profits could opt to go elsewhere.

"Non-profits should develop apps for the devices their target audience uses," said NTEN's Holly Ross. "If they are targeting trendy moms, it's the iPhone. If they are targeting business folks, it's the BlackBerry. Nerdy guys? The Android. That should still drive how non-profits are making these decisions."

Beyond Apps

The mobile web has so many more aspects to it beyond the application marketplace. Consider the American Red Cross's incredible [text donation campaign for the Haiti crisis](#), for instance. And [according to ComScore](#), mobile web browsing is used by 28.6% of America's 200 million+ phone subscribers.

"You shouldn't even think of building an app before you've considered a text messaging strategy," said Ben Rigby from The Extraordinaries. "Texting is much more popular, cheaper to implement, and there are many success stories. It's the first place to go mobile."

"Mobile is everywhere, all around the world, and becoming more essential to more types of transactions and interactions each day," said shopkick's Cyriac Roeding. "Whether using simple SMS to text in support for Haiti, a direct in-app payment system (but with the right controls [to ensure] that the money is actually donated as claimed), a more indirect solution like ours, or something that hasn't yet been conceptualized, mobile should be a part of every non-profit's strategy."

More social good resources from Mashable:

- [5 Real Challenges For Non-Profit Texting Campaigns](#)
- [4 Social Media Efforts to Aid the Gulf Coast](#)
- [Are Social Media Giving Contests Good for Non-Profits?](#)
- [HOW TO: Turn Slacktivists into Activists with Social Media](#)
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