



Give & Take

A roundup of blogs about the nonprofit world

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The 'Dark Side' of Online Charity Contests

Beware the “dark side” of online contests for charitable dollars, says Kjerstin Erickson, a charity leader.

In recent years, the number of corporations offering contests, in which people vote online for their favorite charity to win money, has grown. [Chase Manhattan Bank’s \\$5-million competition](#) is perhaps the most recent example.

While these events offer financial reward for cash-strapped charities, Ms. Erickson, who runs Forge, an antipoverty that works in Africa, cautions that organizations should consider how much effort they put into these contests.

For example, she writes on [the Social Edge blog](#) that “each request for a vote (whether fulfilled or not) represents an opportunity cost to the organization doing the asking.”

She suggests that corporations can improve the contests by showing how many votes the nonprofit groups have garnered during the competition and ratcheting back how much they use the events as a marketing tool.

Philanthropy experts have raised other concerns about the contests.

Public voting pushes philanthropy toward “a soft, safe center,” Peter J. Frumkin, a professor of public affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, told *The Chronicle* in 2007. “It will take the edge off philanthropy. You’re never going to get a large number of people agreeing on a radical solution.”

Read [The Chronicle article](#) about online charity contests. (A [paid subscription or temporary pass](#) is required to view the story.)

What do you think? Are online giving competitions worthwhile? Click on the comment button to share your views.

— [Ian Wilhelm](#)