

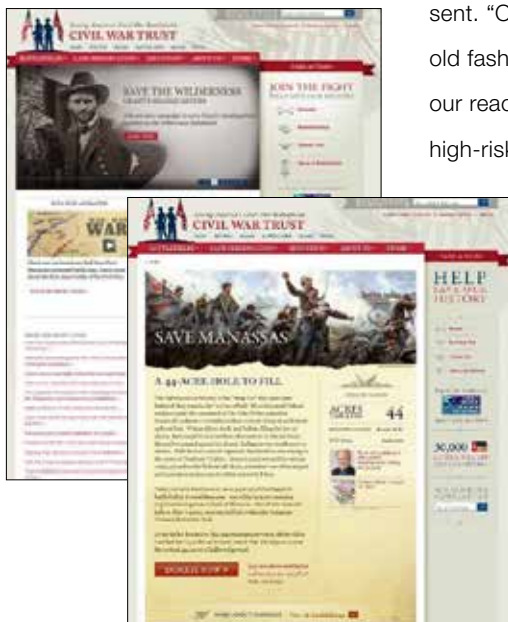
## The Civil War Trust Increases Website Traffic by 73 Percent with Luminare Online

The Civil War Trust (CWT) is the largest nonprofit battlefield preservation organization in the United States. Its mission is to preserve our nation's remaining Civil War battlefields and to promote appreciation of these hallowed grounds through education and heritage tourism. Since 1987, the organization has helped save more than 30,000 acres of battlefield land in 20 states.

### Challenge

Although CWT had a strong brand and an established offline communications strategy, including a successful direct mail program, the organization's online presence was weak. "We had a failing, third-rate website that was doing the organization little credit," said Rob Shenk, Director, Internet Strategy & Development at CWT. "It was not functioning as an effective communication platform, and failed as a prospecting tool." Built using hand-coded HTML, the website required technical expertise to maintain. Without adequate resources in-house, the content was rarely updated leaving a stale and dim view of what was really a vibrant and successful organization.

CWT's website included a complex and cumbersome multi-page online donation form, which only allowed visitors to make a general gift to the organization. E-appeals, which were sent infrequently to a list housed in an Excel spreadsheet, were used to drive traffic to the page. Unable to track important email metrics, such as open rates and click-through rates, CWT had no insight into the performance of the emails they sent. "On the advocacy front, we had always done things the old fashioned way," explained Rob. "We were ready to further our reach, and bring focus and attention to high-profile, high-risk campaigns."



CWT needed to find a platform that would enable the organization to have a more sophisticated online presence, which would help them deepen existing relationships and find future members. "We had definitely fallen behind in what was best-in-class," explained Rob. "Direct mail has been the bread and butter of our organization in many ways, but it was showing its age and is definitely not a growing category."



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Director, Internet Strategy &  
Development  
Civil WarTrust

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## Solution

After extensive research, CWT concluded that Blackbaud offered the best technology to advance their online efforts. According to Rob, “We selected Blackbaud because we needed a top-notch, battle-proven platform one that we could easily operate — to give our organization much greater reach, superior online fund raising capabilities, and really burnish our stellar brand in a cost-efficient way.”

CWT placed **Luminate CMS** at the heart of its overall communications strategy. The organization’s sophisticated content-rich website is now fully integrated with its fund raising, advocacy, and email communications, providing a complete view of supporters’ interactions with CWT. “Our old website was difficult to navigate, contained a narrow set of content offerings, and did a poor job of connecting visitors’ broader Civil War interests to our specific preservation campaigns.” In contrast, the new website provides a wealth of historical and preservation content, which allows CWT to truly connect and energize not only their base, but also new prospects looking to learn more about the Civil War and the organization’s preservation efforts. Everything from animated maps and sophisticated photo galleries to an array of giving opportunities are now available. Donors can now designate their online gift to a specific battlefield or campaign. “Today, our website is a vastly improved tool that is able to help prospects visualize the scope and history of the land that we are looking to save, and then connect them directly to efficient, online giving opportunities,” said Rob.

Within CWT’s small, close-knit organization, the Luminate platform has reinforced the ability for departments to work together in a highly integrated and coordinated way, rather than in silos. Direct mail pieces often refer to web content, enabling recipients to obtain a much richer perspective of the organization’s diverse efforts.

Email has proven to be an effective way to communicate with the organization’s membership base. To reinforce a multi-channel communication strategy, CWT’s messages often reference direct mail pieces. In one case, a supporter who had not donated to the organization for several years, made a six-figure donation via check after receiving an email about a campaign to save a battlefield. That same year, an individual who visited CWT’s website many times, became impassioned about the organization’s work to save the land adjacent to Gettysburg from becoming a casino. Through the online donation form, he donated six figures. After his donation was received, a follow-up phone call was made by CWT’s development department, using the offline channel to strengthen the relationship that was formed online. CWT’s two most recent board members made first contact through the website. These individuals, one of whom made a record-setting gift, believe strongly in the use of technology to support CWT’s mission.

CWT has established a strong and growing presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Vimeo, and YouTube, which is helping them to better understand the social network dynamic and how it can be used to further

“The Luminate platform enabled us to significantly ramp up our online communications channel, and use it in parallel to our offline efforts. Both channels work well with each other, targeting the same supporters, and yielding impressive results.”

— Rob Sherk  
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their mission. The organization is also using Blackbaud's APIs to implement online quizzes.

"We are constantly trying to find new ways to engage our members," said Rob. "We are excited to keep pushing to see what Blackbaud can enable us to do."

## Results

CWT's results have improved across the board. Unique visitors to the website rose 73 percent in one year, and increased another 67 percent. Strategic use of content has the site well-positioned from an SEO point of view, and helps the organization draw in individuals based on their initial interests, and attempts to translate those interests into long-term support. The rich, engaging website content has also helped to increase the amount of time visitors spend on the site.

"Once we started to use Blackbaud, we had the ability to manage an online database of contacts and prospects, and send targeted emails to them," explained Rob. "We now reach out with fundraising appeals, follow-ups, and a host of other online communications that helps us to strengthen our relationship with our supporters."

Open rates average 40 percent for online newsletters, and 25 percent for e-appeals. Within the first year of using Blackbaud, online fund raising increased 45 percent, and was up 88 percent the second year. "Now, in a good month, our online gifts surpass what we received online in a year before **Luminate Online** was in place," stated Rob.

The organization has also made considerable progress with its advocacy efforts. A high-profile advocacy campaign pitted CWT against Wal-Mart that planned to build a supercenter on the Wilderness Battlefield; another campaign had CWT battling against a proposal to build a casino on the land adjacent to Gettysburg National Military Park. Up against people with deep pockets, CWT made a coordinated multi-channel effort to reach individuals with broad interests and garner their support. In both cases, letter campaigns to local politicians, online polling, and fundraising led to positive outcomes, and also helped to build CWT's email list.

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For more information about Blackbaud, contact us at [solutions@blackbaud.com](mailto:solutions@blackbaud.com). ►