DonorsChoose:

DonorsChoose was one of the first crowdfunding nonprofits. Crowdfunding involves gathering small amounts of money from a lot of people to finance a project, business, new idea, group, or just about anything you can think of.

DonorsChoose took that concept and applied it to a cause - education. It’s not just "BIG" education, though, but small targeted projects from teachers who often dip into their own pockets to finance the basics of their classrooms.

Donors love crowdfunding platforms because they can give directly to recipients, bypassing overhead costs and achieving the satisfaction of knowing exactly where their money is going and who will benefit. Each donor receives (at a minimum) a letter from the teacher, a picture of the project, and a progress update until the project is completed. DonorsChoose has been fabulously successful and uses all the digital dynamism of the Internet to help kids.

The Mission Statement:

"DonorsChoose.org engages the public in public schools by giving people a simple, accountable and personal way to address educational inequity. We envision a nation where children in every community have the tools and experiences needed for an excellent education."

The History:

DonorsChoose.org was an idea that was brainstormed by Charles Best, a history teacher at a Bronx high school in NY. He and his colleagues were spending their own money on school supplies. They could not get the resources their students needed or do the projects that would get them excited to learn...does this sound familiar???

Mr. Best figured there had to be people out there who would want to help them if they could see where their money was going. So, Best drew up the website and then a programmer developed it. The site launched in 2000. Best got his colleagues to visit the site and post a project by bribing them with dessert. Then he anonymously donated money to the projects. His colleagues thought the website actually worked and the rumor spread across the Bronx.

From 2000-2004, the website connected donors with schools in New York City. The website expanded to schools in North Carolina, Chicago, San Francisco Bay Area in 2004. In 2005, it was available to schools in South Carolina and Los Angeles. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the site was open to the Gulf Coast by the end of 2005. By the end of 2006, it became available to schools in Alabama, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, and Texas. It then expanded to DC in early 2007. By the end of 2007, the site had opened up to all 50 states.
How It Works:

DonorsChoose.org is a website that connects individuals directly with classrooms in need.

Teachers in the United States post project proposals on the website for free. They post requests for books, supplies, technology, instruments, field trips, or guest speakers.

Individuals search the website to choose which projects and what school to donate to. They can search by subject, resource, or age. They also choose how much money to give to a project. Once a project reaches its funding goal, the materials are shipped to the school. Each donor receives photos of the project taking place, a letter from the teacher, and information how the money was spent.

Projects remain on the site for 5 months. If a project does not reach the goal, the donor can choose a new project to support or send the teacher they supported a DonorsChoose gift card. Moreover, in addition to donating to a specific project, individuals can also purchase a DonorsChoose gift card on top of the donation. The gift card recipient then chooses which project to support.

Individuals can also create a giving page. The page shows which projects an individual supports and encourages others to support the projects.

Statistics and Impact:

- 70% of the projects posted are completely funded
- The average cost of a funded project is $548
- The average wait time of a fully funded project is 27 days
- 53% of high poverty schools have participated in DonorsChoose.org
- 83% of funded projects are from high poverty schools.
- The average donation size for new donors is $62.
- Over 205,000 projects have been funded since Donors Choose began
- Small projects that cost less than $200 have a 90% chance of being funded

Cause Marketing/Partners:

DonorsChoose has partnered with many companies including SONIC Drive-In and Microsoft Bing.

SONIC Drive-In launched its five-week Limeades for Learning campaign in September 2009. SONIC customers who purchased a fountain drink received a unique voting code on their cup. The customers used this code to vote for their favorite DonorsChoose.org classroom project on www.LimeadesforLearning.com. SONIC funded projects with the most customer votes, up to $120,000 every Friday of the five-week campaign. Over $600,000 was donated to support 1,420 projects.

In 2010, SONIC removed the purchase requirement and allowed everyone to vote once daily throughout the five-week campaign for the classroom project of their choice. Over $700,000 was donated to support 1,594 projects. Since 2009, SONIC has donated $2.7 million dollars to teachers' projects and this award winning campaign returns every year.
Microsoft Bing launched many campaigns in 2010 to support Donors Choose and donated more than a million dollars. Donorschoose.org was featured as one of Oprah’s favorite things and Bing was one of her favorite ways to shop.

Bing celebrated this by providing a $100 DonorsChoose.org gift card to each in-studio audience member. Viewers at home were directed to a special Bing site where they could either ask Bing to make a $1 donation to public school classrooms or receive a $5 gift card by making Bing their default web browser. Bing held another campaign which was called "Our School Needs." It was a contest where teachers and students described their school’s needs with videos, pictures and an essay.

Visitors to the Our School Needs website voted for their favorite schools and received a $3 gift code to apply to their project of choice at DonorsChoose.org. The grand prize winner $100,000 for their school and the 3 first prize winners in each grade category got $50,000 for their schools.

Awards:

- 2012 Google Global Impact Award
- 2012 Silver Halo Award for Best Transactional Campaign by Cause Marketing Forum
- 2011 Golden Halo Award by Cause Marketing Forum
- 2011 Gold Halo Award for Best Digital Marketing Campaign by Cause Marketing Forum
- 2011 Fast Company - named to its list of "The World's 50 Most Innovative Companies"
- 2010 Silver Halo Award for Best Broadcast Video by Cause Marketing Forum
- 2008 Fast Company/Monitor Group Social Capitalist Award
- 2008 Silver Halo Award for Best Transactional Campaign by Cause Marketing Forum
- 2008 Elizabeth M. Priefm Civic Leadership Award by the Bridgeport Public Education Fund
- 2007 TechCrunch Crunchies, "Most likely to make the world a better place"
- 2007 Time Magazine 50 Best Websites 2007
- 2007 Fast Company/Monitor Group Social Capitalist Award
- 2005 “Most Innovative Charity in America” by Amazon.com and the Stanford Business School
- 2005 BusinessWeek Best of the Web
- 2004 Tech Museum Global Technology Laureate and Microsoft Education Award