



Direct Relief International

Google Grants recipient Direct Relief International uses AdWords to help support its mission to provide humanitarian medical aid to people adversely affected by poverty, disaster, and civil unrest.

Who they are

- Direct Relief International
- www.DirectRelief.org
- Santa Barbara, CA
- 49 employees
- Deliver medical assistance to improve the quality of life for people victimized by poverty, disaster, and civil unrest



What they needed

- To reach a global audience despite limited resources
- To increase donations

What they did

- Applied for a **Google Grant** in 2003
- Developed an ad campaign with **Google AdWords**

What they accomplished

- Increased website traffic:** Increased website traffic by more than 2000% in 2 months
- Drove investment:** Increased online donations by 785% over 5 years
- Improved communications channel:** Use AdWords to test messages and raise awareness of emergency relief events

“How do you connect with a global audience when you’re this smaller sized non-profit?” asks Annie Maxwell, COO of Direct Relief International. “With limited resources, the undertaking can be truly daunting.”

It’s an undertaking that runs through Direct Relief’s history. In the aftermath of WWII, William Zimdin, an Estonian immigrant, began sending thousands of relief parcels containing food, clothing, and medicines to relatives, friends, and former employees in Eastern Europe. Zimdin’s efforts led to the formation of Direct Relief International. Based in a warehouse in Santa Barbara, California, the nonprofit organization has since provided medical aid to people adversely affected by poverty, disaster, and civil unrest in more than 140 countries worldwide.



“AdWords quickly became one of our most powerful communications tools and most efficient funding channels.”
Annie Maxwell, COO, Direct Relief International

In 2003, Direct Relief’s staff of 27 was efficient and effective at delivering aid to people in need, but it didn’t have the budget or the human capital to invest in other functions. “I was heading up IT, communications, and serving as chief of staff,” says Annie. “And by heading up I mean there was no one else to do it.”

One of Annie’s projects was to develop and better leverage Direct Relief’s online presence. “There wasn’t much to leverage,” she recalls. “We had a basic website and were getting about 9,000 visitors a month.”

When it was suggested that she consider online advertising with Google AdWords™, Annie was hesitant. “We didn’t do advertising, not because we didn’t see the value, but because we didn’t have the money to do it.”

Did someone say free?

Shortly thereafter, Annie learned about Google Grants, a program that awards free AdWords advertising – up to \$10,000 per month – to qualified nonprofit organizations.

“We thought, ‘Why not?’ It looked like an interesting project,” Annie remembers. “The grant structure relieved the financial barrier, and then I just needed to invest the time. I’m kind of a geek in that I like to learn stuff, so I took on the application process, which was pretty straightforward, and discovered exactly what AdWords was.”

AdWords enables organizations to advertise on Google by developing a campaign consisting of ads and keywords related to their offerings. When people search on Google using one of these keywords, the organization’s ad may appear next to the search results. Using AdWords, nonprofit advertisers can inform and engage their constituents online.

About Google AdWords

Google AdWords™ is a performance-based advertising program that enables businesses large and small to advertise on Google and its network of partner web sites. Hundreds of thousands of businesses worldwide use AdWords for text, image, and video ads priced on a cost-per-click (CPC) and cost-per-impression (CPM) basis. Built on an auction-based system, AdWords is a highly quantifiable and cost-effective way to reach potential customers.

For more information, visit
<http://www.google.com/adwords>

About Google Grants

Google Grants is a unique in-kind advertising program, providing free Google AdWords text advertising to select non-profit organizations. The program harnesses Google's products, technology and resources to support groups that share Google's philosophy of helping the world through community service in areas such as science and technology, education, global public health, the environment, youth advocacy, and the arts. To date, grants have been awarded to thousands of non-profit groups whose missions include animal welfare, literacy, supporting homeless children and HIV education.

For more information or to apply for a Google Grant, visit
<http://www.google.com/grants>

Annie read through the AdWords material and submitted sample keywords, ad copy, and a brief statement about how Direct Relief would benefit from a Google Grant.

"Our application was approved, and we launched our first AdWords campaign in August of 2003," Annie says. Two months later, monthly traffic to its website had grown more than 2,000 percent to 200,000 visitors. "The campaign's impact was immediate and exponential. Before our Google Grant, our most successful online fundraising year had been 2001, when we received \$56,000 in donations. In December 2003, we received \$59,000 in online donations. In that one month we exceeded the best previous annual online total."

Unexpected benefits

Over the next year, Annie devoted more time to learning how to best use AdWords features and optimize Direct Relief's campaigns. "AdWords quickly became one of our most powerful communications tools and most efficient funding channels," she explains. "We wanted to make sure we understood how to get the most out of it."

The increased visibility also led to unexpected benefits. "One donor, who found us online because of Google AdWords, gave us a significant donation, but he felt there was a disconnect with the quality of work Direct Relief was doing and the quality of our website. So he gave us additional funds to redo the website." In June 2007, the new website launched, which has in turn helped to fuel donations and better articulate Direct Relief's activities and mission.



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More than advertising

Since receiving a Google Grant over four years ago, Direct Relief has grown in many ways. It now has 49 staff members, with three employees in IT and one dedicated solely to online communications – which means Annie can focus on her duties as COO.

"Google AdWords has helped drive investment for us as an organization," says Annie. "We don't look at it solely as advertising; we use it to test messages, increase fundraising for specific initiatives, and drive internal investment. And it's part of our emergency response plans. If a significant natural disaster or emergency happens, we immediately run a campaign to draw attention to it."

And what would she tell other nonprofits considering Google Grants? "I would absolutely recommend they apply. In our 60-year history, there are five events that have really affected us, and our relationship with Google is one of them. It's been incredible to take this leap in online visibility, for Direct Relief to move forward as an organization and develop sophisticated advertising in such a short period of time."

In Fiscal Year 2008, Direct Relief provided over \$200 million in direct aid through medical material assistance and targeted cash grants providing more than 49 million courses of treatment to people in 59 countries worldwide.

