

## Facebook generation: 10 tech revolutionaries

### Contribute profiles those redefining the power and face of philanthropy

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Time was, the Internet just distributed information. Then it evolved into a sort of electronic connector, linking everyone in a person's social circle. Now? Fasten your seatbelts. Think social networks, dozens or hundreds of them — yours, your best friend's, your coworker's, your company's — all connected together digitally by six degrees, then organized around a single cause or idea, or a multitude of causes and ideas. Save The Whales. Pave My Street. Elect John Doe. End Global Warming. But don't stop there. Raise some money. Ask each one of these dozens, hundreds, thousands whom you've cause-wired to pitch in a dollar, an idea, a Saturday afternoon — from Delhi to Detroit. And then keep everyone posted by the hour or by the day on how much money they're raising, how their ideas are being harnessed (or not), or how their time translates into someone else's health or opportunity, or into everyone's clean air. Show them perpetually — with the simple click of a mouse.



Sound far-fetched, like some warmed-over 60s' social change rhetoric? Guess again. This stuff is already happening, and maybe faster than you think: As of June, some 41 percent of all Facebook visitors were over the age of 35. Suddenly, it seems, the world of philanthropy doesn't look or feel the same anymore. Maybe your favorite charity now seems a bit out of touch — or, if it's just as connected, it's now the coolest thing on the planet. Call it the Cause Web. It's turning the philanthropy world on its ear. Are you ready for the revolution?

Contribute's Tech 10 is not a hot list. It's a selection not of the most powerful or the most glamorous or the most famous. There aren't presidents of established foundations, nor celebrities. They're not even the most vocal. Rather, they are a handful of some of the most influential new leaders at the very front lines of advocacy today, all using the power of the Cause Web to reshape the reach, impact, and experience of what it means to make a difference. They are innovators like Suzanne Seggerman, who founded Games for Change, to use video games to raise funds and awareness for those caught in the crossfire of global strife. Or Ailin Graef, a Chinese-born entrepreneur who is the first philanthropist in the maturing new world of Second Life. Or Charles Best, whose simple online auction model matches specific individuals on both sides of the give-get divide — a Manhattan banker, say, with an impoverished public school teacher in South Central Los Angeles — and completely removes the middleman to more quickly help those in need. But the real magic of our Tech 10 is the array of new technologies they represent.

## **ONLINE AUCTIONS: Charles Best**

DonorsChoose.org matches donors directly to need — no nonprofit middlemen or experts required. Teachers post their wish lists for supplies, projects, and field trips; donors troll the listings, and when they find something inspiring, they donate a sum of their choosing with a few quick clicks of a mouse.



Best, 29, dreamt it up seven years ago, while teaching at a public school in the Bronx, where he shared his colleagues' frustration over chronic underfunding for even basic learning tools. Since then, DonorsChoose has grown exponentially, raising \$13.5 million to fund more than 29,000 projects in eight states [plus four additional cities]. In September 2007, every public school in the country became eligible for support through DonorsChoose.

While some compare DonorsChoose to a kind of philanthropic eBay — matching, say, a Manhattan millionaire with a public school teacher in South Central LA — Best says Wikipedia is an equally apt comparison. “In the same way that nobody thought an encyclopedia could be produced by laymen,” he says, “we’ve had a democratizing effect. Donors become their own program officers.”

This rise of the “citizen philanthropist” hasn’t made everyone happy. “Some foundation executives have reacted a bit territorially,” says Best, and at least one big-city principal threatened to fire a teacher who posted a request for money to buy dictionaries because he was embarrassed that kids in his school didn’t have them already.

Best, though, is forging ahead. He’s already planning to apply the same model to other causes — and other countries.

— *MATTHEW MCCANN FENTON*