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**An interview with Kirt Manecke, founder and president, LandChoices, Milford**

by Laura Blodgett | for Oakland Business Review  
 Thursday November 13, 2008, 3:45 AM

Kirt Manecke, who launched non-profit land conservation organization LandChoices, knows what it takes to market non-profit organizations. A full-time publicist for wildlife photographer Carl Sams, he has applied his promotional expertise to get the name out for his fledgling organization. Their recent tagline "Helping Preserve the Places you Cherish" was selected as an award winner in the 2008 Nonprofit Tagline Award Competition.



Kirt Manecke

**Business Review: First, what is LandChoices?**

**Manecke:** Up to 90 percent of landowners don't know any option for their land besides selling it for cookie cutter subdivision development. We help them learn about conservation subdivisions, which look like golf course developments without the golf course. Instead of fairways and greens, there are natural woods and fields and houses are strategically placed so everyone has a view of open space and access to a trail system. It is forecasted that 40 million people will move to the countryside in the next 20 years. Wayne State just did a study that proved these lots are less expensive to build and sell more quickly.

**Are any of these developments in Oakland County?**

There are some in Hamburg Township such as Teehan Meadows near the Brighton State recreation area. The problem is we are still in the Model T era with development. One of the reasons we started this organization is to change these outdated ordinances, most of which came out in 1926.

**Why is branding so important for non-profits?**

Something like 1,000 new non-profits are started every day. You have to differentiate from all of those competing to reach donors. Most non-profits don't do a good job of branding. They are good, well meaning people but they look at marketing almost as if you are trying to connive something. Right now donors want to know they are getting a return on their investment. You owe it to them to be as effective as possible and you can't afford to have a passive message.

**What are some mistakes non-profits make when marketing?**

The number one mistake I see is that you cannot figure out how to make donations on their website within 1 or 2 seconds. People are used to Amazon where you put money in and leave in one click. There are a lot of abandoned shopping carts with non-profits--people are confused. You need a Donate Now button above the fold and on every page because you don't know where people land when they search for your group. The other thing is that many non-profits are science-based and speak in jargon. It is very important to use language that a lay person uses so they understand the organization.

**What are some other ways to enhance promotional efforts?**

Some non-profits are starting to get blogs, although they are effective only if you have something to blog about. Newsletters can be one of the most profitable programs although, again, most non profits do a really poor job, unfortunately. The lead story about how they came up with a solution will be buried in the back. There is no reply envelope enclosed to encourage a donation. Another thing is that statistics show the longer you make a donation letter, the more revenue you raise. Most people only read the opening paragraph, the salutation and the 'PS' but the more pages you

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*Laura Blodgett is a freelance writer.*

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