

New site, app, links celebrities, charities and donors (Update)

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This Thursday, April 16, 2015 photo shows Todd Wagner in his company office, Chideo, in Los Angeles. Wagner, a billionaire-turned-philanthropist, is seeking to build his new company into a network devoted to charitable causes. Chideo has already signed on more than 100 VIPs from the entertainment, sports and political realms who are sharing exclusive videos and making themselves available for experiences ranging from red carpet meet-and-greets, intimate concerts and other encounters once reserved only for rich donors. (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

Chatting on the red carpet with Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence; recording a country song with Clint Black; working a relief mission with Patricia Arquette; receiving a serenade from Michael Bolton on a Caribbean island. These are just some of the WOW! moments possible for everyday donors through a new online charity service that combines star power with digital marketing savvy to contribute millions to celebrity causes worldwide.

Its name is Chideo—a mashup of the words charity and video—and it's already enlisted more than 100 VIP participants, ranging from YouTubers and sports figures to Academy Award winners like Arquette, who gave a shoutout to the effort at this year's Oscars.

The aim is to move charitable fundraising away from direct mail pleas, teary telethons and heart-tugging commercials and into the digital age of short, entertaining videos, online fan contests and donations sent from web browsers and smartphones. In the near future, Chideo's content will appear on newscasts of Sinclair Broadcast Group's 162 television stations.

Chideo is part of founder Todd Wagner's plan to build a network not unlike the ones that have made him one of the country's richest men, except that this one would be devoted to causes.

"If you can have a Military Channel and a History Channel, I don't see any reason there can't be a 'Cause Network,'" said Wagner, who started his own foundation for underprivileged children in 2000, the year after he and sports and media tycoon Mark Cuban sold their startup Broadcast.com for \$5.7 billion.

An announcement Friday by the Muscular Dystrophy Association to end its long-running Labor Day telethon underscored the challenges facing traditional fundraising methods. The group said it was shifting its efforts

online because its airtime has been dramatically scaled back in recent years. The group said it's in discussions with former host Jerry Lewis about ways to release some of the star-studded telethon's archival footage online.

Wagner, 54, said he tried to engage charities years ago to become more tech-savvy, but found that while groups listened politely to his ideas, they were more concerned with getting his donation.

"I felt that I had more to give than just writing a check," he said. "More than anything, (Chideo) is me saying, 'I'm just going to build this thing. I'm going to build what I believe will help these organizations and they just need to plug into it.'"

Online donations remain a fraction of the money raised by charitable causes. Wagner said online giving accounts for only eight percent of total charitable contributions, and some estimates peg the number even lower.

"Every month, there's a new amazing (technology) thing. Well, how can a (charity) possibly keep up in that world," Wagner said during a recent interview in Chideo's Los Angeles office.

In many ways, Wagner is building on past business successes. He's co-owner, along with Cuban, in a variety of companies, including 2929 Entertainment, Magnolia Pictures, AXS TV and Landmark Theatres. That provides access to sports and entertainment stars and other dignitaries.



In this Feb. 22, 2015 file photo, Patricia Arquette arrives at the Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. Arquette has agreed to take the winner of a Chideo contest on an upcoming international relief mission as part of her charity, GiveLove. The Academy Award-winning actress touted Chideo's work on the red carpet of this year's Academy Awards in an interview with Ryan Seacrest that occurred hours before she won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her role in "Boyhood." (Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP, File)

Chideo is making an impression beyond its smartphone app and website. On Monday, hours after TLC's Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins performed a

private fundraising concert at the Grammy Museum, celebrity blogger PerezHilton posted videos provided by Chideo from the show. Arquette plugged Chideo during a red carpet interview with Ryan Seacrest before winning her supporting actress Oscar for "Boyhood" in February.

"We haven't even started. We're still in preseason as to where I think this can go," Wagner says.

Most of Chideo's video content is free, but the site encourages donations to enter contests such as last month's "Serena" premiere event where two fans met Cooper and Lawrence on the red carpet. Eighty percent of the revenue goes to the charity, while the site keeps the remainder for its operations. Donations above the asking price go completely to the charity.

Brooklyn, New York, resident Michelle Aguda's entry in Chideo's "Serena" contest earned her and a friend a spot on the film's red carpet, standing between stars Cooper and Lawrence. The film was released by Wagner's Magnolia Pictures.

Aguda, 23, set out to win the event after learning about it from Lawrence's Instagram feed. Aguda's \$100 bid got her 40 entries.

"When I found out I won, I was speechless," Aguda said. She brought a longtime friend to the premiere and spent several minutes talking to the actors. Aguda then spent time at an after-party.

The site's linking of celebrities, philanthropy and technology appeals to Aguda. "It's not just blindly donating to something," she said.

The experience benefited a fund in Cooper's father's name at a New Jersey cancer treatment hospital, while Lawrence's participation raised money for the Special Olympics World games.

"It brings awareness not only to our event, it introduces us to audiences who may not be aware of what we're doing," said Steven Vanderpool, a Special Olympics senior vice president.



In this Tuesday, April 21, 2015 file photo, Bradley Cooper attends the TIME 100 Gala, celebrating the 100 most influential people in the world, at the Frederick P. Rose Hall, Time Warner Center in New York. Cooper met Michelle Aguda, winner of a Chideo contest, at the March 21, 2015, premiere of the film "Serena." The actor partnered with Chideo to raise money for a patient care fund established in his father's memory at a New Jersey cancer treatment hospital. (Photo by Evan Agostini/Invision/AP, File)

Chideo's model, and the online-focused efforts of similar ventures such as CharityBuzz and Omaze, can be a good deal for nonprofits, said Harry Freedman, owner of Strategic Fundraising Initiatives in Philadelphia, a producer of celebrity charity events.

Freedman said the cost of hosting a charity event can reduce an organization's fundraising earnings by more than 40 percent. Teaming up with a group such as Chideo would give a charity more money and a greater reach than packing a ballroom, Freedman said.

Non-monetary benefits to organizations are an important consideration for Wagner.

"I think awareness is equally as important as just dollars, he said.
"Awareness leads to the next donor."

He said the company wants to have six to eight media partners within the next year to help get Chideo's content out to the widest possible audience.



In this Saturday, March 21, 2015 file photo, actress Jennifer Lawrence attends a special screening of "Serena," hosted by The Cinema Society and Dior Beauty, at the Landmark Sunshine Cinema, in New York. Lawrence met Michelle Aguda, winner of a Chideo contest, at the premiere. The actress partnered with Chideo to raise money for the Special Olympics World Games, which will be held later this year in Los Angeles. (Photo by Evan Agostini/Invision/AP, File)

"Let's face it, to cut through clutter with a website and an app by itself, which is what many have taken as an approach, is really difficult," he said.

Wagner is hoping to simplify the experience, especially for stars who want to maximize their fundraising efforts.



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"If they truly care about something, they've already tried to raise money," he said. "They already know what goes into it. They already know the complications.

"It costs them nothing," Wagner said. "There's no real downside to them."

More information: On the Web: www.chideo.com

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