



GrantSpace > Resources > Blog



7 Best Practices to Engage and Retain Donors for Nonprofits

Posted on July 6, 2017

This post originally appeared on the TechSoup blog.

Many express "fatigue" from the over-messaging or clumsy communications they receive from nonprofits they support. Those nonprofits often neglect to properly acknowledge appreciation for the donors' support, or to cultivate their ongoing interest.

From the nonprofits' vantage point, direct response managers are challenged to get donors to make repeat gifts. These staffers are frustrated by the constant churn of donors who "leave the list" after only making a single gift.

I'd like to provide some useful best practices for nonprofits to engage and retain donors. This guidance is also helpful to donors to allow them to recognize nonprofit organizations that are using effective techniques to keep them engaged and appreciated.

Thank Your Donors After Each Gift

I challenge every nonprofit I meet to make that thank-you email as special as possible. It's not just a donor receipt; it's the start of a new stage in your relationship.

Think of ways to make that message as creative as possible and focused on the donor and their impact to the organization. Avoid generic emails; instead, make sure it's signed by a specific person, and include their photo and signature.

Offer a phone number or "reply to this email" so the donor can quickly be in touch. It's important to review that message on a quarterly basis to make sure it's the very best it can be.

Create an Email Welcome Series for New Donors

Speaking of creating something truly special, I strongly recommend an **email welcome series** for all new donors, even if they've been on your file for a while. What differentiates a donor from other people who are engaged with your organization, and how do you want to communicate that?

Your donor welcome series could include a series of emails from key stakeholders in your organization, including board members. If you mail materials to new donors, be sure that your mail and email materials are consistent with each other and tie together well.

Create Balanced Communications with Your Donors

A common complaint from donors is that organizations ask for money too often. I think that's a symptom of a different problem, which is that the balance between fundraising, cultivation, and engagement has not been achieved. This balance in communications should allow the donor to experience a broad variety of communications and engagement activities.

Consider doing a communications audit with your current donors and email subscribers to assess how people currently perceive that balance. You'll find it invaluable to involve constituents and donors in critiquing and developing your communications practices.

Offer Your Donors a Choice in the Volume and Types of Email Communications

Not all donors are alike, and the reality is that they have different interests and different levels of commitment. It's important to not overwhelm your donors with too much communications or with content they have no interest in.

Create a communications plan so you can offer a choice in the content of email communications. Your donors will often respond positively to that choice with deeper engagement.

Rethink Your Email Newsletter as a Donor Engagement Tool

The email newsletter is the most dangerous tool in your email communications arsenal. The danger comes in underestimating its potential and wasting it with casual monthly "news" content delivery.

The true power of this monthly opportunity is to rethink your email newsletter as a donor engagement tool. Focus your messaging efforts each month on how the organization is achieving its mission, who is being helped, and how donor support matters. Your challenge is to reframe the e-newsletter so it's focused away from news delivery and towards deepening donor engagement.

Invest in Messaging with Donors Through Your Social Media Channels

Your donors are very interesting people, and you should be keeping tabs on them via any social channels where they are active. Consider your donors as a special class of "social media influencers" and be sure to retweet their content and engage in direct messaging with them. This sort of cross-channel communications will allow you to deepen relationships with donors.

Donor Retention Is the Responsibility of the Entire Organization

The challenge with donor retention is to find ways to break it out of the traditional silo of the "development department." You want to move toward a broader conversation among your whole staff, board, and volunteers.

Have quarterly discussions at staff meetings and board retreats to explore the issue of donor retention. Invite donors to visit with you during a staff meeting.

Michael Stein has been a writer and digital strategist for progressive social causes for over two decades. He is the author of three books and numerous articles chronicling the rise of digital marketing, mobile, and online fundraising. He works as a consultant and coach to nonprofits, foundations, and educators, with a focus on marketing and fundraising in a multichannel and multiscreen world. Find Michael Stein on Twitter at @mstein63.

Subscribe to Our Blog

When we publish a new blog post, you'll get notified by email.

Subscribe

Interested in being a guest writer for our blog?

Learn How

Sign Up for Our Newsletter

Sign Up



FOUNDATION
CENTER

Knowledge to build on.

📍 32 Old Slip, 24th Floor, New York, NY 10005

☎ (212) 620-4230

Copyright ©2018 Foundation Center. All Rights Reserved.
[Privacy Policy](#) [Copyright](#)