

20 Ways to Be Donor-Centric

Here are some ways to reach the demanding new donors of our time — don't worry, it's nothing you don't already know.

March 11, 2011 [BY Jeff Brooks](http://www.fundraisinguccessmag.com/article/20-ways-be-donor-centric/1); <http://www.fundraisinguccessmag.com/article/20-ways-be-donor-centric/1>

Today's donors are more demanding than ever. But they're really not demanding anything you don't already know how to give or do — or should already be giving or doing.

1. Receipt promptly

If your donors are waiting weeks or (heaven forbid) months for receipts, your message to them is loud and clear: Your gift doesn't matter. Aim for 24-hour turnaround, 48 hours at worst.

2. Receipt relevantly

We work so hard to motivate people to give. Sadly, it appears most of us fling out our thanks with little or no thought. The thank-you language of the receipt should close the loop. Use the same terms, specificity and emotional intensity you use when you ask.

3. Get the data right

Obsess over this. Don't spell names wrong. Don't have duplicate records. Above all, don't get the amounts or timing of gifts wrong. Good data is the key to raising more funds (knowing whom to ask and how much), not wasting money (knowing whom not to ask) and, most important, treating donors like they matter.

4. Let donors say where their money goes

Most nonprofits reserve the privilege of designating gifts for their top-most donors. Let every donor do that. Response usually jumps when you do. Whether it's making specific asks or offering choices, it's just common courtesy to give donors control over their generosity. Here's the secret: When you make "where most needed" an option, most donors choose it.

5. Give donors choices on use of their names

For many donors, the fact that charities "sell" or exchange their names is a sore point. If you do this, give your donors the chance to opt out. They'll appreciate it. (If you don't share names, let them know you don't.)

6. Say 'you' a lot

Make it a habit. When you ask, thank or report back, use the word "you" constantly. Whatever story you're telling, your donors are the active ingredient. Don't forget that. Don't let donors forget either.

7. Send a newsletter

It's your chance to tell donors their giving makes a difference. If you aren't sending a newsletter, your fundraising is like a dysfunctional relationship: You ask, they give, you ask. You never give back what they're looking for: proof that giving to you makes a difference.

[NOTE: Judy Anderson would suggest that this could be e-newsletters, personal update letters—which I think are important--and paper newsletters]

8. Make your newsletter about donors

Not about you. Your success is their success. Don't use your newsletter to brag. It should always be about the change that's happening because of your donors.

9. Respect your donors' tastes

Donors are typically older than you and almost certainly less attuned to the latest trends in design. If you create a look that resonates with you, that makes you happy and proud, you've most likely missed your donors.

10. Don't project yourself onto your donors

How many times have you said, "I wouldn't respond to that"? That's only relevant if you're fundraising from yourself. Pay attention to what your donors do and don't respond to. Using yourself as the standard is egocentric. And it always fails.

11. Be easy to read

If you use sans-serif fonts for body copy, reverse type, type over color or images, or super-wide leading, your stuff probably looks great. But it's hard to read, and that's just rude.

12. Make everything about your donors

Don't be full of yourself. Donors don't give because you're great. They give because they're great.

13. Be specific

Let donors be insiders. Tell them specific problems, and ask them to be part of specific solutions.

14. Be incredibly transparent

Give donors access to all the financial and governance information possible. Post your financial statements, 990s, even minutes from board meetings. Answer their questions honestly and in detail. The watchdogs require a certain level of transparency. Do more than they require. Few donors want or need that much detail. Your willingness to be open is what matters.

15. Let all your donors make a difference

When you ask, find ways to make your cause bite-sized for donors at every giving level. If you ask a million-dollar donor to fund your mission, it might be in her scope to do so. If you ask the

same of a \$100 donor, you make him a tiny fish in a gigantic pond. Ask Mr. Hundred to do something meaningful that costs around \$100. Every donor wants to do something big. But big is defined by his or her capacity, not your mission.

16. Make giving easy online

Most fundraisers have mastered the mechanisms of direct-mail giving. However, complex, confusing and crazy donation forms are common online. Giving online should be easier than giving through the mail, not harder.

17. Make it easy for donors to find a human

If a donor has a question, can she quickly and easily get an answer? Through phone, e-mail and mail? Make it easy to find those channels, and don't send them to busy signals or unmonitored inboxes.

18. Encourage donors to talk to you

Good fundraising is a relationship, and that means communication. Ask donors to comment or question. Give them specific prompts. Make room on your reply forms for them to write.

19. Listen to complaints, but don't let them drive the ship

Every complaint is an opportunity to strengthen the relationship. But don't take complaints as marching orders. Remember: Three or four people complained. Hundreds or thousands wrote checks. Talk is cheap. Donations aren't. Pay more attention to affirmations that actually cost people to make than complaints that don't cost anything.

20. Do great work

Donors deserve and expect the best. Be an organization that does its mission effectively and efficiently. Multiply their impact. Magnify their compassion. Do your fundraising that way too.
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