

Not-for-Profit Industry

Want to Keep Your Donors? Then Answer These Unspoken Questions

The days of the infinite pool of new donors available to quickly and inexpensively replace those who have stopped their support are long gone. Today, as more and more donors abandon ship, the cost of replacing them has grown so great as to be no longer affordable for most nonprofits.

Highlighted below are four questions that are lurking in donor's mind which need to be answered if you hope to inspire loyalty.

Do You Understand How I Feel?

For nearly thirty years the commercial world has understood the importance of a customer's attitude and has spent billions of dollars in understanding how to drive customers toward greater loyalty and commitment. The result? According to Bloomerang.com, the commercial world enjoys customer retention rates approaching 90 percent. The national average of nonprofit retention rates is only 41 percent. The lesson is that understanding how donors feel about your organization and what role they want you to play in their lives is the starting point for improving retention rates.

Can You Help Me Make a Difference?

In every donor's mind resides a subconscious question: How does this organization best enable me to make the difference I want to make? This is why it is so important to discover which of the experiences you are providing are seen as positive or negative. To put it another way, to improve your retention rate, you have to understand what job the donor is hiring you for. You can't infer it by segmenting your donor base by demographics or by past giving behavior. The best way to discover which experiences matter and which don't is to ask. And the best way to ask the donor is with a survey custom tailored to your organization.



Do You Know How to Strengthen My Commitment?

If you really want to improve the commitment of your donors and retain them for years, you must understand which of your actions are building loyalty.

In a DonorVoice study of more than 250 organizations, donors were asked to rate 32 organizational factors in terms of their importance to them. Among the most influential were:

- The donor perceives the organization is effective in carrying out its mission
- The donor receives timely thank-yous
- The donor receives opportunities to make his or her views known
- The donor is given the feeling that he or she is part of an important cause
- The donor receives information showing who is being helped

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Can I Trust You?

Often it is the little things that cause you to lose donors. Gifts that go unthanked. Requests for information that are not heeded. A telephone call not answered promptly, or worse yet, dealt with by a rude or unknowledgeable representative.

Consistency and reliability are essential pillars of strong relationships. If donors can rely on your organization to be responsive, whether that means updating a change of address, effectively answering an inquiry, or consistently stating your mission, you will win their trust and loyalty. If you fail, you will lose them. It is that simple.

Closing Thoughts

Is donor retention the problem organizations are most interested in fixing? Some would argue that the answer is categorically “No!” Most experienced fundraisers, particularly direct response fundraisers, believe that acquisition is a lot easier than retention. They simply do not buy the adage that it is easier to keep a donor than to find a new one.

And, in truth, some would argue that donor acquisition is still easier than retention. Not less expensive, not more valuable, but easier. Retention requires time to analyze and measure. Time to improve donor experiences. Time to test and evaluate improvements. A lot more time compared to the very short-term tactics and measurement involved in acquisition.

Surveying your donors’ attitudes, creating effective messages, providing good donor service—these combined activities require considerable effort and planning. Regrettably, few organizations have either the stomach or the resolve to implement them.

The preceding article is adapted from Roger Craver’s book, [Retention Fundraising: The New Art and Science of Keeping Your Donors for Life](#). You can also find information by clicking the following link [emersonandchurch.com](#).

Contact Us

If you would like to discuss how Cole, Newton & Duran’s not-for-profit team can help your organization with your accounting, tax, or consulting needs, please feel free to give me a call.

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