

The Best of....

Building Relationships

Articles reprinted from Augment's Newsletter



Building Relationships began as a newsletter for Augment's clients. Later, I distributed issues to students in classes I taught and to colleagues in the fundraising profession. My original intent was to post past issues of *Building Relationships* on the augmentdirect.com website. In reviewing the content, I found that at least one article in each issue included information that was dated. Not wanting to share statistics that are two or three years old, I decided to select the Best of *Building Relationships* articles and share those. I hope you find these articles as interesting and helpful as past readers have found them.

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Communicating with Donors — Using Your Newsletter

Research reveals that donors would give more to charities — if they knew more about the charity.



In one study, donors reported that their relationship with a nonprofit would be improved if they had the chance to express views, ideas, and concerns to key staff members regarding the organization's work. Donors also prefer being asked how the organization might most effectively and appropriately communicate with them. Many donors enjoy and welcome being

invited to participate in projects related to the organization's mission. Donors also reported they would like a personal reply in response to their feedback.

A survey of lapsed donors questioned why they stopped donating. Among the top responses were:

- "The organization did not tell me how my donation was used."
- "The charity did not remind me when it was time to give again."
- "The organization's communications with me were not appropriate."

Donor communications that address the concerns uncovered by these surveys are a good investment. Donors want

communications that inform and explain and give the donor an opportunity to respond and become involved.

The Printed Newsletter

Nonprofits often rely on a printed-and-mailed newsletter to keep donors informed. The newsletter has distinct advantages

— you control the timing and content *and* you can fill your publication with photographs and illustrations.

No one has yet disputed the often-quoted adage, “*A picture is worth a thousand words.*”



Three drawbacks to the printed newsletter can be managed for greater success.

- Most organizations distribute their newsletters according to a calendar-schedule, perhaps monthly or quarterly. *Suggestion:* time the newsletter to coincide with special events, major donor campaigns, and/or direct mail drops.

- It's difficult to define the audience for the newsletter because donors have a variety of interests. *Suggestion:* survey your donors to determine their interests. Include stories in the newsletter on the most-often-cited aspects of your programs.

- There's little that's personal about the content of a newsletter. *Suggestion:* enclose the newsletter in an envelope and include a personal message for the donor.

Enter the Email Newsletter

Most email newsletters today are sent as a regular email communication. Technology-savvy nonprofits may include graphics, but not all donors will have the capability of viewing and printing your graphics. A few organizations are sending newsletters as email attachments — which some donors won't download. And, there are still donors who can't or don't want to receive email. They will self-select by not opting in when you ask for their email address.

The drawbacks associated with print newsletters can more easily be overcome with an email newsletter — if you have the right technology.

- **Distribution** — Email newsletters take less time to format, no time or cost to print, and less time to distribute. Organizations might still want to schedule them monthly or quarterly, but it's quicker and easier to send an email newsletter when you have good news or an urgent request.

- **Audience Definition and Personalization** — Using donor relationship software or a constituent relationship management vendor, organizations can conduct online surveys and use the information to customize communications with donors. You can inform, educate, involve, and solicit donors via personalized email.

For now — for most nonprofits — both printed-and-mailed newsletters and email newsletters will be part of your communications plan.

DONOR SURVEYS

Donor Surveys can include questions about donor communications. You can use donor responses to help design a focus for your newsletter. Many nonprofits assume they know what their donors want. In fact, many don't even know if a donor wants to be Miss Smith, Ms. Smith, Mrs. Smith, or Kathy. There's only one way to find out. ASK.

What can a donor survey do for you? It will help you to:

- Discover the demographic profile of your donors.
- Find out how to address your donors. Which donors are doctors? Do two people living at the same address want to be considered a couple?
- Determine which of your programs are most appealing to your donors.
- Uncover donor relationships with your organization.
- Learn why donors support your nonprofit.
- Discover which type of communications donors prefer.
- Find out which donors have made a planned gift with your nonprofit in mind and which donors would consider doing so in the future.

The Best Story to Tell in Your Newsletter

- Is personal and real.
- Appeals to a wide audience.
- Touches the reader's heart.
- Describes a real person — a client — helped by your nonprofit.
- Explains your vision as it connects to your clients and the gap between what you can do with the resources you have and what you could do with more resources.
- Is timely.
- Impresses the reader with your good work.
- Inspires the reader.
- Includes real people engaged in critical work.

People give to people.

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