Engaging the Christian Community

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7 Fundraising Metrics *Every Nonprofit Should Track*

By Darrell Law

How do you determine the effectiveness of your nonprofit or ministry fundraising program? I believe that specific metrics are necessary to objectively reveal how well you are doing. Without them, you are unable to identify both areas of success and areas that need attention.

I have compiled a list of my top seven fundraising Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)—ones I consider essential to monitor the overall health and effectiveness of any fundraising program: to the point, a vague ask is hard to salvage.

1. Donor Growth (year-over-year)

You definitely want to see steady growth in the number of donors who support your ministry or nonprofit year-over-year. If this indicator is negative, you face a significant problem that needs to be addressed promptly.

2. Gifts Received

This indicator is simply the number of gifts your organization received within a defined time frame (e.g., month, quarter, or year). If you notice that your number of gifts drops during a specific time of the year, then implement initiatives to counter the trend. Gifts received should grow year-over-year as well.

3. Average Gift Amount

One of the best ways to improve fundraising results is to increase the average gift amount. To calculate average gift size, divide your total revenue by the number of gifts you received for the same time period. You will also gain insight if you calculate average gift size by channel (social, direct mail, phone, television, online) or by campaign.

4. Donor Retention Rate

Donor retention rate is the percentage of donors who are repeat givers year-over-year. Efforts to gain new donors are always costlier than to cultivate existing ones, so track the percentage of donors who continue to donate to your cause after the first year. And remember: look at all the metrics to get an accurate assessment.

For example, suppose your nonprofit had 20,000 donors last year and 25,000 donors this year. This can appear that you are doing a fantastic job with donor growth. However, if you lost 5,000 donors this year but gained 10,000 first-time donors, then your acquisition numbers look great, but there is definitely a donor retention problem.

Specific metrics are necessary to objectively reveal how well you are doing.

5. Recurring Gift Percentage

Track the percentage of donations that are recurring gifts from donors who give multiple times. If you confidently expect you will continue to receive those gifts and you recognize where they are coming from, you may be able to leverage that information: begin a small, targeted campaign to increase gift amounts, increase the frequency of giving, or increase the number of donors who will give recurring gifts.

6. Cost of Donor Acquisition

Finding new donors is an ongoing and necessary part of fundraising because you need a consistent flow of new donors, if only to replace those who leave every year. Unfortunately, donor acquisition campaigns almost never make money, so you should not evaluate your efforts on ROI percentage. Instead, compare the acquisition cost per donor for each campaign. The profitability occurs when new donors turn into recurring donors and give multiple gifts.

7. Conversion Rate by Channel

This indicator tells you how many donors took an action when prompted by your organization and where they took the action. Compare donation conversions by channel (social, email, direct mail, TV, radio, etc.) to determine which efforts are most responsive. i

About the Author

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Darrell is a 20-year veteran leader of a multi-campus megachurch and international television and radio broadcast ministry. Darrell specializes in maximizing results out of limited resources.

THE TOP 5 PR MISSTEPS YOU SHOULD AVOID

By Karen Hepp

Public Relations has changed greatly in the last decade. The best practices that worked well for you or your organization 10 years ago likely seem ancient and irrelevant now. As PR professionals, it is our goal to communicate effectively and efficiently to make sure our clients' messages are heard, despite the changing climate around us.

Here are my top five common PR missteps you should avoid in your efforts at clear communication:

1. Is your story relevant?

We all want to find placement for our clients, but the truth is, sometimes the story simply is not relevant. A few reasons why your story or pitch might be irrelevant:

- It is not timely. COVID-19 is the perfect example of this. During the first few months of the pandemic, if your story was not COVID-19-related, readers conveyed little to no interest. Always consider the timeliness of your pitch.
- It is of no interest to the journalist or outlet. Be picky when building your media list—select journalists and outlets with an affinity to your topic or brand. If they are already interested in what you are selling, they will be more likely to respond.
- It is simply not newsworthy. Sometimes a story just is not newsworthy for a larger audience. As part of your PR strategy, consider if a topic has a strong hook, is interesting, and will make a successful pitch.

2. The wrong target audience

Start with social media and Google when thoroughly researching your target audience.

Find out their likes, dislikes, preferred types of articles, etc. Take a little time to see what journalists are writing about or find more information on an outlet before you send a pitch. The more time you put into research at the beginning, the more effective your PR strategy will be. Specifically, the better you can target an audience with a proven interest in your organization, brand, or niche, the less likely your message will be ignored.

AS PR PROFESSIONALS, IT IS OUR GOAL TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY TO MAKE SURE OUR CLIENTS' MESSAGES ARE HEARD, DESPITE THE CHANGING CLIMATE AROUND US.

3. Too much—or too little—follow-up

A follow-up email to a pitch is an important practice. But give your contacts a few days to read and respond to your initial pitch before you send that brief but friendly follow-up communication. If you wait too long, your story is likely no longer relevant or newsworthy. If you follow up too soon, you risk annoying your contact and losing them. It is a best practice to follow up one time after your pitch is sent out, but no more than twice.

4. No media relationships

Public Relations is all about building relationships with target audiences. But these relationships take time and effort. Often you will need multiple sends to the same contact before your pitches are noticed. Some ideas for building better relationships with the media include:

- Personalize your pitches: use their name and explain why you feel they are the best fit for your story.
- Learn about your contact's interests or usual beat so you only contact them when a story is relevant.
- Email simply to introduce yourself without any direct ask, especially if you are a new contact.
- Engage with journalists via social media—give a like or comment on their work.

5. A lack of honesty

Credibility and authenticity build trust between you and your audience. Always be honest, and do not try to hide negative information. Instead, be proactive about it. As they say, the truth will always come out. Your proactivity and honesty will uphold the reputation of your organization.

About the Author

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Public Relations Specialist

Talented and efficient, Karen wears multiple hats for Infinity Concepts. She supports the Account Services team and handles a variety of tasks on behalf of our clients. Additionally, Karen serves as part of our Public Relations team, striving to gain positive exposure for our clients and their ministries or organizations.

RACE TO SUCCESS

Donor Communication Strategies

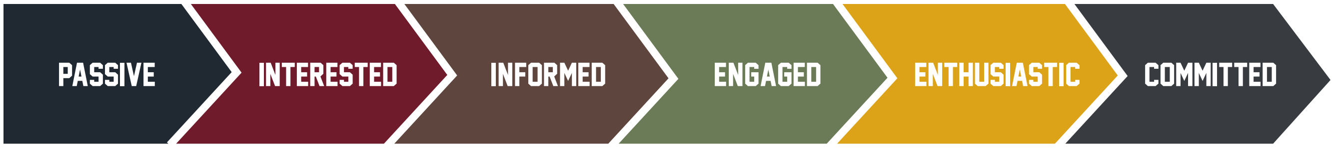
By Mark Dreistadt

Every nonprofit organization needs an effective strategy for ongoing donor acquisition. Without the continual influx of new contributors, a donor base will stagnate, and funding will ultimately deteriorate. Engaging new donors and developing a meaningful relationship with them must be a continuous and intentional process. In this article, I want to share some practical insights and action steps to help you achieve success in your donor communications.

Good strategy is always based on good research. Let's start there.

Take a moment to consider how your organization is perceived. Some people understand what you do and are deeply committed to help you achieve success, while others have no idea you even exist. People have a variety of perceptions between these two extremes. You can classify these variations into several groups.

Moving people from ignorance about your organization to being deeply committed is what we call the **PATHWAY PROCESS**. To grow your donor base and build a strong donor communications program, you must ascertain where they are at and walk them down a pathway of increased understanding and engagement. This requires building a trusted relationship with each new donor. This process takes time but is both measurable and manageable.



Let's take a quick look at how this process works.

Passive

While you may feel deeply passionate about your organization, the truth is that most people are initially passive about it. They know little to nothing about your mission and vision. Your organization is just one of thousands doing good work. In other words, in the beginning, you simply are not on their radar.

Interested

Motivating people to take the first step along this pathway requires significant effort. You must first capture their attention and provide them with something of value. This could be information, insights, or something more tangible. Many organizations use free downloadable documents or small donor gifts to pique people's interest. Combining this with heartfelt testimonies of changed lives sets your organization apart from others.

Informed

Once an individual is interested, help them understand the important mission of your organization and how their financial investment will make a difference. During the first 90 days of a new donor relationship, you want to provide the donor with information about your organization's programs and objectives. It is critical that you give them multiple opportunities to engage and make additional contributions.

Engaged

Once new donors have made the second donation, consider them engaged with your organization. They have demonstrated interest in your work—rather than just responding to a single appeal or product offer. Now you begin the process of friend-building, where you maintain ongoing communication, share insights, and provide regular opportunities for giving.

Enthusiastic

By effectively managing the donor communication process, you can build friends and long-term advocates for your organization. Look for ways to connect personally with your new friends: appreciate them, involve them, invite them, share with them. We call this bonding. Bonding will not only create enthusiastic advocates but also stimulate repeat donations and referrals.

Committed

When bonding has taken place, the donor will want to take a more committed and active role in your organization. Commitment opportunities should include a monthly partnership or sustainer donor program. Also, provide ways for these donors to get involved at a deeper level through volunteer work, field trips, ministry briefings, or other events. A growing number of committed donors is the true indicator of the success of your donor program.

So now that you understand that the PATHWAY PROCESS progressively leads people into deeper levels of relationship and partnership with your organization, let me help you get started. Here is a simple plan ...

The acronym **RACE** conveys a crucial process to help you plan your donor development and communication efforts. RACE stands for ***Reach***, ***Action***, ***Convert***, and ***Engage***.

These four principles outline how to effectively acquire and build an active donor base.

They provide the foundation upon which you can create a strong and fully sustained organization or ministry.

REACH

The REACH process involves building a strategic lead generation or donor acquisition program to help you find new people, tell them about your mission, and grow your organization's donor base.

Many organizations rely on organic growth that takes place over time. In today's media-saturated world, however, you must take intentional steps to cut through that noise and allow people to become more aware of the work you do.

You can employ many strategies to reach new potential donors. Historically, ministries and nonprofit organizations depended upon direct mail or broadcast media. Yet these methods are expensive, with somewhat unreliable results.

The three foundational steps outlined below will help you start the REACH process, so you can establish new donor relationships in a cost-effective and efficient way.

1. Start with a compelling organizational brand. This requires real commitment, because a strong and memorable brand must be constant across all platforms. Your brand is defined by the collection of experiences people have with your organization over time, so consistency is critical. Additionally, many organizations compete for the same donors, so your brand must be personally compelling to potential new donors.

2. Next, establish an affordable and manageable acquisition strategy. You may want to explore digital donor acquisition. We have found the digital channels of social media, partner emails, and banner ads to be affordable and manageable, at the same time providing a consistent flow of new donors.

3. Finally: commit. Donor acquisition takes time and patience. But it is worth the wait for your organization to commit to the process and stick with it.

ENGAGING NEW DONORS AND DEVELOPING A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM MUST BE A CONTINUOUS AND INTENTIONAL PROCESS.

ACTIVATE

Once you find new potential donors, you need to acquaint them with your organization, tell them about your mission, and motivate them to financially participate in fulfilling your vision. The most compelling factor you can express is the difference your organization makes in people's lives. This process of raising awareness and increasing understanding is fundamental to nurturing an individual along the donor pathway from interest to engagement.

CONVERT

Once you have laid a foundation of understanding and appreciation for your organization, you want to inspire the prospect to donate. People respond to different motivators: compassion, faith, fear, anger, and more. Find the right motivator for your organization and weave that into stories of changed lives. Storytelling is the most powerful way to touch people's hearts and motivate them to support your mission.

ENGAGE

A donation from a new individual is not the end of the donor acquisition process. Rather, it's the beginning of a new relationship. Once an individual is engaged, you have established a relationship that can be meaningful to you and your organization. Now is the time to build trust and confidence with your new donor ... and you need to get started right away. **Our research shows that if new donors do not make a second gift within 90 days of their first gift, the probability is less than 10% that they will EVER give to your organization again.**

Although it may seem counterintuitive, it is important to ask a new donor to give a second gift right away. During the first 90 days of this new relationship, careful and strategic communication is critical. Consider creating a new donor communication series: a set of emails with information about the ministry combined with strong and compelling appeals.

The **PATHWAY PROCESS** takes time, but you can make the most of your donor development efforts if you will **RACE: R**EACH – **A**CTIVATE – **C**ONVERT – **E**NGAGE. These four principles are timeless and true. While the principles are simple, executing them can be a challenge. It helps to understand that in the long-term, the best donor communications programs focus on friend-raising more than the fundraising. Walk with your new friends down this partnership pathway to experience real donor success.

About the Author

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As the founder and president, Mark has a long and distinguished history of transforming organizations through his strategic counsel and blended approach to branding, advertising, fundraising, and media management.

NUMBERS OR Narrative

WHAT MOVES YOU?

by Elle Speicher

Numbers matter. Numbers that can be added to charts and annual reports, that indicate success or failure, that can help us benchmark and set goals: 10,000 children fed each year, 80-percent program funding, 100 education scholarships. You get the idea.

While these statistics are important, however, they do not tell the whole story. Seth Godin, marketing guru, said it best: “Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell.”

To illustrate Godin’s point, take a look at the education crisis in Malawi.

The Numbers

- 119 to 1 – the average classroom size in Malawi
- 99 to 1 – the student-to-teacher ratio
- 38 to 1 – the ratio of students to the number of available desks in a classroom
- 30% – the percentage of primary school students accepted into high school

The Narrative

Sadai, the oldest child in a family of seven from a poor village in Malawi, displayed an aptitude for math. Noticing his potential, Sadai's teacher helped him earn a scholarship to attend high school, something that would have been cost-prohibitive otherwise. Sadai worked hard, defied the odds, and became a first-generation high school and college graduate. Because of that opportunity, Sadai chooses to give back by tutoring youth from his village so they, too, can escape the grip of Malawi's terrible poverty.

- Show the impact on real people using visual language and strong action verbs. Make sure to have the statistics available to support the stories, but do not lead with them.
- Evoke emotion and create a vision of "what can be." The strongest narratives are more than just examples; they tell a story and feature a hero, conflict, choice, and resolution.
- Invite readers to act. A good story will inspire action, so do not forget to ask!

STORIES HAVE THE ABILITY TO MOVE US TO ACTION IN WAYS THAT STATISTICS CANNOT. NUMBERS HELP TO VALIDATE THE NARRATIVE.

Now, close your eyes and think about what you just read. Can you picture Sadai as he overcomes the odds? Stories have the ability to move us to action in ways that statistics cannot. Numbers help to validate the narrative.

To further give credence to this idea, consider the groundbreaking research of Dr. Paul Slovic on the concept of "compassion fade." Slovic found that when it comes to eliciting compassion, a single individual with a face and a name typically evokes a stronger response than a group.

Numerous studies have also demonstrated *the identifiable victim effect:* people are

much more willing to aid one identified individual than to help numerous unidentified or statistical victims.

How should we tell stories?

Do some research. Find the story in your organization. There is more than one inspiring narrative, I promise. With some digging, you will find it.

- Make your call to action clear and visible (and always confirm that your links work).

Whether you are a business, a ministry, or a nonprofit organization, tell real stories about real people to build affinity between you and your audience. When you provide concrete statistics to support your stories, you will help build confidence and trust.

About the Author

Elle Speicher
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Elle Speicher has extensive experience in marketing, client service, and nonprofit management, as well as website and graphic design. With certifications in Google Ads and Google Analytics, Elle is passionate about helping clients craft compelling messages to knock their marketing, sales, and fundraising goals out of the park.

THINK LIKE A DONOR …

… AND REACH THEM WHERE THEY ARE!

by George Konetes

Before the dawning of the digital age, donor engagement included more layers and touchpoints. Typically, donors watched us, listened to us, or laid their hands on paper we had sent them. We worked to build a relationship and make connections. Given 30 minutes to hear my story, chances were good that a donor would empathize with my cause, even if my delivery was not perfect or I stumbled over some of my words.

Today, however, digital media abbreviates and condenses interactions into small “byte”-sized pieces. With only a 10-second video to convey the power of my cause, there is no margin for error.

With this shift, our thinking might become abbreviated and condensed as well. Instead, we need strategic thinking more than ever.

In the past we did not concern ourselves as much about how donors were thinking, because

we had time to talk to them and turn them around to think like us. But now we must be mindful of what is on their minds.

For example, when a donor wakes up in the morning and groggily checks email, how will our message strike them vs. after lunch? When a user is on Facebook, unwinding from the day, are they thinking differently than when checking their email? When are they more likely to tune into our appeal?

To reach donors today, we must think like them more and more.

My favorite example is the early Monday morning email appeal. Fundraisers want to start the week off strong, but they are thinking like fundraisers, not donors. Many

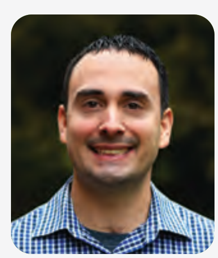
> IF WE CAN TUNE OUR MESSAGE TO REACH DONORS WHERE THEY ARE, THEN WE GREATLY IMPROVE OUR ABILITY TO SUCCEED.

people have a Monday morning email routine that I refer to as “Search and Destroy.” They want to clear out their in-box as quickly as possible and dig into what is needed to start the week. Every email they can delete without opening helps them claw out from the clutter that filled their inbox over the last few days.

The obvious leaning is to not send an early Monday morning email unless it is bleeding-edge urgent and can punch through that weary mental state.

But the bigger takeaway is to think like a donor before we write, before we schedule, and before we push the send button. If we can tune our message to reach donors where they are, then we greatly improve our ability to succeed. i

About the Author



George Konetes, PhD
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With a Ph.D. in Communications Media and Instructional Technology, George utilizes a keen sense of balance between practicality and innovation. George oversees the Account Services Department to ensure strategic implementation and successful results for all clients.

DEFINING YOUR BRAND

By Jason Dreistadt

Many think of a brand as a name, a logo, or maybe even a reference to the services an organization provides. However, at its core, the term brand is much more. It is a promise, including all the various touchpoints of an organization ... the sum of your constituency's experiences with you.

When your brand fails to deliver a promise, you create a disconnect with your consumer base.

So, yes, your name and logo play a contributing role in your brand. But your brand also encompasses every message your group conveys, every promise it delivers, and the essence of the members of the organization itself.

Imagine that someone hands you a large, heavy box wrapped in shiny, gold wrapping paper, topped with a red bow. Upon opening the box, you discover a water-damaged television and a bunch of rusty spoons.

In this instance, the intrigue and promise of the brand has now been tarnished; and the brand itself, the experience, did the tarnishing. In fact, you would probably have felt less disheartened if the box had been tattered and flimsy—you would not have expected the same quality of product.

We use the same concept in branding.

Every brand creates expectations. So even an outwardly appealing brand falls flat if the organization does not live up to those expectations. When your brand fails to deliver a promise, you create a disconnect with your consumer base.

But consider that earlier example: If you had opened the golden box to find diamonds, then the outward appearance of the brand would have coincided with the brand itself.

To launch or maintain a meaningful, consistent brand, start by looking internally and do the hard work to establish your brand essence.

A brand essence includes your organization's services (what you do), personality (what attributes define how you do it), distinctives (what you do different from anyone else), and benefits (what your constituents receive because of what you do).

The inward-focused exercise of articulating these elements helps bring clarity and agreement to your staff. The entire organization then stands ready to truly communicate the essentials of your brand outwardly, making that brand promise: the One Big Thing you want everyone to know and remember about you.

About the Author

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Jason is best known for his passionate commitment to strategic thinking and creative innovation. He brings a broad spectrum of experience in branding, creative design, event planning, marketing, direct mail, and nonprofit management to his work at Infinity Concepts.

1 Quick Website Hack

to Increase Donations Today

By Kim Rugh

What kind of calls to action do you use on your website and in your emails? And which ones really work? A call to action or CTA is a button or link that “calls” your customer or donor to respond in some way.

If you believe in your mission, ministry, or product, then boldly ask people to support your work financially or make a purchase.

Far too many nonprofits and ministries rely on passive CTAs such as “Learn more,” “Get Started,” or “Click Here.” Passive CTAs have a place, but not when you encourage someone to give or purchase. The wording feels polite, but it does not necessarily motivate people to do something. If you believe in your mission, ministry, or product, then boldly ask people to support your work financially or make a purchase.

For example, say you visit a website that reports, “Our ministry began in 1983 when our founder traveled to (name your country) and was moved by the problem of children who were not getting enough to eat. Since then ...”

That is followed by a CTA button that says, “Learn More.”

Then you go to another website that announces, “We are solving the problem of childhood hunger in (name your country). Every day we provide 1,500 hot meals to starving children under age 12 … "

That CTA button says, "Donate Today."

Which one moves you? Which one motivates you to give? Most people will be more likely to act on the direct call to action. The one that is clear and confident and tells them exactly what you want them to do.

So, what makes a great call to action?

First, use action words. There is a reason you call it a call to action. You want people to act, so use compelling and powerful verbs. Give. Donate. Change. Fight.

Second, be concise. Use as few words as possible and keep it simple.

Third, explain the need. Make sure your website visitor knows exactly what you do. For example, instead of "Learn More," try something like "Help end childhood hunger. Give today!"

Change the calls to action on your website and in your emails today—from passive to direct. You may feel a bit aggressive. But that is okay. By the time someone lands on your website or opens your email, they want to hear your pitch. Give it to them clearly.

About the Author

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Kim joined Infinity Concepts with over 20 years of experience in marketing and communications, most recently as the Director of Communications at a large church. She has an extensive background in both Business-to-Business and Business-to-Consumer marketing with a heavy emphasis in church communication ministry.

SMS MARKETING FOR MINISTRIES

5 Stats You Need to Know

By Andy Walker

Text messaging (or SMS) now ranks as the primary form of communication for many Americans, often more favorable than email and especially phone calls. (Do not even think about leaving a voicemail!) This rise in popularity provides another opportunity for ministries to connect with their audience. Many organizations, however, have yet to invest resources to grow an SMS list, let alone develop an effective strategy.

If this scenario feels all too familiar, take a few moments to consider the following five statistics that highlight why nonprofits should be investing in SMS marketing:

1. Eighty-five percent of adults in the United States own a smartphone.

(Pew Research)

Traditionally, most organizations connected with smartphone users via social media platforms. Yet many social media platforms are losing public trust. With such a large percentage of Americans relying on a smartphone, ministries and organizations

should explore new opportunities to connect with this audience in a meaningful way.

2. On average, 66 percent of Americans check their smartphones 160 times per day. *(Small Business Trends)*

Yes, you read that correctly. We previously established that the overwhelming majority

Over half of Americans check their smartphone once every nine minutes.

of Americans own a smartphone, but now it should be clear just how often they use their device. A lot.

3. SMS marketing messages have a 98 percent open rate. *(Gartner)*

Over half of Americans check their smartphone once every nine minutes, so it comes as no surprise that open rates are through the roof.

4. Almost 60 percent of smartphone users read their text messages within five minutes. *(SimpleTexting)*

Not only are messages opened, but they are also read quickly.

5. SMS click-through rates (CTR) are significantly higher than email.
(M+R Benchmarks)

SMS fundraising messages have a 6.3 percent CTR (email: 1.7 percent), and SMS advocacy messages have a 10 percent CTR (email: 3.3 percent).

Like all communication channels, SMS marketing has its own best practices and should be approached strategically. Begin to explore how your ministry or nonprofit can leverage SMS marketing—with its expansive user base and increased opportunities of engagement—to support your mission and calling. i

About the Author

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Director of Integrated Communications

Andy loves helping people remove the stress and hassle of marketing their organization. With over a decade of experience working at marketing agencies, nonprofits, and media companies, Andy oversees our Creative Department and Media Department.

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