

How to Combat Donor Fatigue

Network for Good

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Many organizations say: "We are a small nonprofit with a small, tired donor base. What can we do about donor fatigue?"

The Answer? If you have a small, tired donor base, you're not alone.

It bears repeating: the number-one reason people stop giving to a nonprofit **is how they were treated by the nonprofit**. Obviously, this is a big problem. It's really more of a customer service problem than anything else.

Often fundraisers ask, "Well, why? What do you mean, 'How they were treated by the nonprofit?' " Unfortunately, many donors are treated like an ATM machine. That is, nonprofits continued to come back to the donor with requests for more and more money. When donors hear about only what your organization needs—and not about what their gifts had achieved, about what future gifts could achieve, or about other useful and feel-good information—it can easily feel like an endless process of being hit up for money. And no one likes that, even if they love your charity!

Go on a "charm offensive"

We recommend you find out how you've been treating these folks and go on a major charm offensive. Whether you've inherited a group of supporters who feel like they were walking wallets or have a list of donors you are more familiar with, it pays to do an audit of your donor stewardship practices and improve your relationship skills when it comes to your donors.

There's nothing like talking directly to your donors to learn more about how they feel about your nonprofit, how often they'd like to hear from you and how you could do better. Review your list of donors and go back to them to ask them these important questions. Try to get a few donors on the phone. Of course, while you're at it, you should tell them how much of a difference they've made and thank them profusely. Find out from them what they would like to know about where their support has gone. They're a ready group of people you can talk to get good ideas.

Attract new donors, and keep them!

Keep this approach in mind while you also work to build your prospects list with new supporters. Don't forget to nurture and reward their loyalty with great communication and service. Remember: It's easier to keep a customer than find a new one, and the same is true for donors. If you don't have a donor stewardship plan in place, you should work to create one before your next fundraising campaign. (Need help with this? Get a step-by-step guide to creating a foolproof donor stewardship plan—complete with tutorials, templates, and expert advice—when you become a [Network for Good Premium Training subscriber](#).)

Fundraising to-dos:

- Review your donor communications and find out how many times per year (on average) you are asking the same list for donations.
- Call a few of your donors—NOT to ask for more money, but to sincerely thank them for their support, answer questions they might have and to understand how (and how often) they'd like to hear from you.
- Make a list of other ways you can engage your donors and supporters without asking for money. Use these ideas to update your outreach.
- Audit your acknowledgement protocol and your thank you letters. Are your thank you letters little more than donation receipts? If so, it's time for an overhaul.

This article was adapted from the webinar presentation "The Experts Are In! Your Online Fundraising and Nonprofit Marketing Questions Answered."

Editor's note: This article was originally published on July 10, 2012 and has been updated.

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