

A Whole New Meaning to Online Relationships

Cultivating an ePhilanthropy Strategy for Cultivating Major Donor Prospects - Understanding Major Gifts and Major Donors

Major gifts, or leadership gifts, are generally made to support new initiatives or address a significant need within an organization. They are often the most critical gifts a nonprofit receives, but they are also the most difficult, expensive, and time-consuming to obtain. To effectively cultivate a major donor, it is important to keep some basic characteristics in mind.

Major donors:

- Make a gift with a pre-defined amount (depending on the organization's definition of a major gift, this could be anywhere from \$100 to well over \$1 million)
- Are usually affiliated with an organization over a long period of time
- Allocate resources (time and money) selectively
- Want to make an impact on your mission
- View their involvement and support as a long-term partnership
- Expect to be treated as special, unique supporters

Most importantly, major donors have different needs and expectations than regular donors and Web visitors do. Meeting these needs is key to success.

ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL - BEGIN WITH A STRATEGY

The first step to strengthening major donor relationships using the Internet is to determine what your prospects and donors want and then coordinating this with what you want to accomplish. The basic principles of the traditional fundraising pyramid still apply online.

The following is an example of the major donor lifecycle as applied online by a museum:

- **Identification: Find the prospects who have the propensity and capacity to make a major gift.** A local artist was identified through prospect screening — she owns a highly successful gallery, is a longtime donor to the annual fund, and regularly attends openings at the museum.
- **Qualification: Gain a deeper knowledge of the needs and interests of prospects.** The prospect's web activity indicated that she spent the majority of her time viewing the educational programs pages.
- **Cultivation: Strengthen the prospect's sense of connection and involvement.** When the prospect visited the website, news and links from the educational services department were displayed on a personalized web page, and upcoming classes and workshops were emailed to her through customized email.

- **Solicitation: Develop a “shared” vision of the gift and make the ask.** The museum adjusted its solicitation strategy to focus on educational programs, rather than exhibitions, and is currently discussing the establishment of an endowment.
- **Stewardship: Say “thank you” and demonstrate return on investment.** Once the gift is secured, the museum can extend special benefits and customize the patron’s home page to show how the funds and assets are being used.

By communicating on a personal level on the web, organizations can build long-term, meaningful relationships that, over time, may lead to major gifts. A personalized website enriches visitors’ experiences and can increase the frequency and the duration of their visits.

Thinking about making some changes to your website to better serve your major donors and prospects? Here are some examples to help you get started:

- **Online Registration/Member Sign-in:** Getting your web visitors to log in does much more than just welcome them by name — it allows your organization to collect invaluable information on prospect interests and online activity that can then be used to provide personalized content and targeted features.
- **Online Programs and Benefits:** Provide increasingly higher value online content and features to donors as they move up the donor pyramid. Provide services that help to expand the reach of your organization, as well as add more value to your most valuable donors.
- **Online Communities:** Connect visitors to each other. Allow them to contribute to blogs, make posts on a forum, or chat directly with others who have similar interests.
- **Online Stewardship:** Major donors want to know how their gifts are being used to make an impact. By providing a link to real-time information like news, testimonials, webcasts, and interactive reports, you can show donors how their donations are being used. Qualitative reporting on results, such as a live video feed of a construction project in progress, or a blog written by beneficiaries of the gift, can be just as meaningful as financial information to a major donor.

With an exponential increase in Internet use and online donations, it is important for nonprofits to realize the true power of adding technology and ePhilanthropy to their development tools. It is critical to ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is in place, such as technical and support elements, quantifiable goals to measure progress, and the right technology partner. Having a single customer relationship management solution for online and offline contacts can help personalize content, provide a holistic view of constituents, and meet needs and preferences for messages and communication vehicles.

Nonprofits are facing more and more competition for support every day. Many successful organizations are turning to the Internet to better differentiate their organizations, increase fundraising, and operate more efficiently. By leveraging the Internet, organizations have the opportunity to build stronger relationships with their constituent community — including major donors — to support their mission today and well into the future.



About Blackbaud

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For more information about Blackbaud solutions, contact a Blackbaud account representative. In the United States and Canada, call toll-free 800.443.9441. In Europe, call +44 (0) 141 575 0000. Visit us on the web at www.blackbaud.com.

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