

RECOGNIZING SUCCESS

Communication about successful Donor Recognition strategies

Critical Considerations for New Donor Recognition Media

by Robin E. Williams and Anne Manner-McLarty

New technology is making the scene in donor recognition. The following are just a few of the critical issues fundraisers must consider as they implement new media. Throughout the process, work diligently to strike just the right balance for your organization between practicality and creativity.

Audience receptiveness: Every message should consider its target audience. Know your donors. Are they likely to use the media by which you plan to deliver information (you may be surprised – older Americans are the fastest growing sector of internet users, and younger donors actually prefer to receive information electronically).

Donor perception: If permanency and a sense of legacy building is important to your donors, traditional permanent displays may be the better option. Many people consider electronic media “temporary” no matter how well-integrated the housing. They know from personal experience that a click of a button can change the screen.

Prominence: Too many electronic displays lack the “front and center” presentation that donors expect. Taking the scrolling list as the extreme example, how long might a donor have to wait to see his or her name? What is lost by seeing only a limited number of the names at a time? Take these considerations to task as you plan even the most comprehensive electronic donor recognition display.

Accessibility: How will your audience find online donor recognition? Recent research shows that online marketing requires numerous paths and constant vigilance to ensure that users can find the information you hope to deliver. You must have a strategic plan for search engine optimization or find an alternative method for driving the audience directly to your site. Blogs, e-newsletters and social networks are increasing the opportunities for providing viewers a “direct link” to pertinent content.

Know the neighborhood: Be aware of the surprises your audience may find when trying to locate your site by generic searches on Google or Yahoo. “Donors” give lots more things than money, and you don’t necessarily want to be associated with that crowd! Consider a unique URL that helps donors get to exactly the right spot (see www.virtualtoydrive.com as an example).

Privacy and the Web: In general if you are careful about the format you use to list your donors and the data about them, you can protect the information as well as you can within the static public displays you now use. Use of Adobe Acrobat’s PDF formatted documents, for instance, limits access to the content for most search engines. You need not avoid listings on the web, just be aware of how the information can be accessed in order to make the web respond to and act in accordance with the protocols typical of your organization.

Be ready when things go awry: Promises of a “wow-factor” will fall flat if the technology fails, and the promise of lower expenses later may not include the cost of ongoing content development and programming over time through “quick and easy” updates. Have a plan in place for both repair and maintenance. Who do you call, how much will it cost and how quickly can they respond?

Keep investing: Recognition display updates and improvements may seem like an expendable luxury, but consider the hidden costs of boring the viewers you had intended to dazzle. Don’t let the cost – in time and money – of keeping your donor displays attractive and engaging stop you from making changes into the future. Take heed of the comments overheard about an interactive donor recognition media station recently. It had been installed with engaging videos, testimonials, lists and histories of donors. “It was great at first, but if I hear those same stories one more time, I’ll scream. Two years is enough!”

Donor recognition displays are, in the end, communication tools. The same degree of planning that goes into a major marketing campaign will be required for the development of a major electronic donor recognition program. Do your homework, and employ the expertise of a donor recognition consultant familiar with the “new electronic terrain!”

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