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13 July 2020

The shockingly high cost of "resting" donors after they give

One of the most costly and destructive fundraising myths is the belief that when donors give, you must let them "rest" from their exertions by not asking them again for some period of time.

That is demonstrably bad strategy. You can prove it for yourself, by doing what this post at the Better Fundraising Blog does: [Please Don't 'Rest' Your Donors](#).

I urge you to look at the post, because it one easy-to-read spreadsheet to demonstrate one of the most important and dependable truths about donors: **The more recently a donor has given, the more likely they are to give to you now.**

Think about that for a moment, because it's not at all what many fundraisers assume to be true. It's widely believed that when a donor makes a gift, their generosity is "used up" for a period of time, and any fundraising message you send is not only pointless, but likely to annoy them or even drive them away, because they're in a "no giving" state. That's the assumption behind the "rest the donors" myth.

The reality is far from that. It's exactly the opposite.

Here's the situation: An organization was working on its January appeal. Like many organizations, this one gets a large influx of giving in November and December, so they had a lot of donors who had given quite recently.

Their instinct was to give these recent donors a rest from giving.

It's a good thing they didn't. Overall results where:

- Mailed 15,863 donors
- Got 4% response
- Raised \$53,182.32

Not bad, especially for a January.

It gets interesting when you look at the results by recency of last gift.

Donors who gave within the last month (that is their previous donation was anytime from one day to one month ago) responded at 9.2%. More than double what they overall group gave.

Donors who gave a month ago responded at 7.5%.

And it goes along like that. The longer since that previous gift, the lower the response. Donors whose last gift was a year ago responded at 1.6%. Those whose lasts gifts were 18 months ago were well below 1%.

By looking at these response rates (and the revenue from each group), we can see how giving those recent donors a rest would have impacted revenue:

If they'd rested donors for three months, they would have raised \$27,388 less. That's 52% less revenue.

If they'd rested donors for six months, they would have raised \$38,388 less, a 72% drop in revenue.

If you have an ongoing policy of resting recent donors, you are experiencing losses like this all the time. (The loss is especially large in January because there's such a large group of recent year-end donors.)

All that lost revenue could be worth it if accompanied by hugely improved donor retention -- meaning you get more in the long term than you lose in the short term. The spreadsheet doesn't tell us whether this happens or not.

But I'll give you a hint: It doesn't. Resting donors does not improve donor retention. It lowers it.

Here's the thing: *Your donors want to give to you. They like what you do, and it feels good to give.*

When they've given recently, donors tend to feel more engaged and connected, not less. That's why they are more responsive.

Don't decide for donors that they are all tapped out and don't want to hear from you. Maybe some of them feel that way, but if you make the choice for them, you will lose a lot of revenue -- short term *and* long term.

Posted by [Jeff Brooks](#) on 13 July 2020 at 08:11 in [Fundraising](#) | [Permalink](#)

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