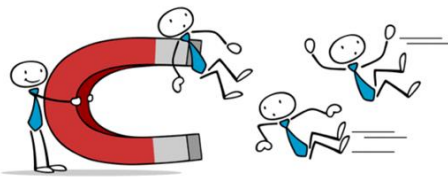


How Can Design Improve Donor Retention?

By now we've all read somewhere or have been told by a hired consultant that it costs more for a nonprofit organization to acquire new donors than it does to retain existing donors. I can attest to this. During my stint with a nationally recognized non-profit, I witnessed them pivoting from spending more and more on donor acquisition to regularly increasing the donor retention budget. The results were outstanding! Month after month they saw their monthly donor number increase and month after month marketing pieces aimed at donor retention performed well beyond expectation.

Donor retention is about engaging your existing donors effectively so that they turn into loyal donors that give repeatedly. Pivoting to aggressive donor retention involves several elements...a key one being design. Whether it's using your website to tell compelling stories, creating a new brochure to highlight your mission or focusing your fundraising efforts on donor retention, design and social change go hand in hand.



Are you ready to make the shift to donor retention? Excellent decision! Before you begin, let's take a look at seven ways a designer can create work that impacts donor retention:

1. Your web designer should ensure that your nonprofit **website shows clearly how to become a monthly donor on the landing page**. Don't make people search for a way to complete the main task you want them to complete. Whatever you want donors to do, in this case, move from one-time to monthly, make sure that your site's navigation is designed in a way that makes the process simple and easy.
2. In the effort to improve your donor retention, one of the tools you **MUST** pay close attention to is the design of your donation page. Your donation page should be designed with just as much care as the rest of your site. Do you know if your audience donates higher amounts or more frequently if you use a one-step donation form or a two-step form? You can find this out by designing two forms and testing them against each other to see which has the better response and achieves the goal of retaining donors.

A screenshot of a donation page for 'Share Our Strength'. The page features a clear message: 'Your tax-deductible gift will provide vulnerable kids with nutritious food and teach their families how to cook healthy, affordable meals.' It includes a logo for '\$50 = 500 MEALS'. The form offers two main options: 'One Time' (orange button) and 'Monthly' (grey button). Below this, there's a text prompt: 'A monthly gift does even more to help hungry kids' with an upward arrow. Donation amounts are listed as \$35, \$50 (highlighted in orange), \$100, \$250, and an 'Other' field. A 'CONTINUE' button is at the bottom. To the right of the form is a photo of a young girl with blonde hair, smiling, wearing a blue shirt.

Notice how this donation page has been designed for donor retention by encouraging people to become monthly donors. The photo use is also an intentional design element.

3. Whether it's a website, brochure or direct mail piece, the most successful design will make your donor feel as though they are actively participating in a solution. Through your design, show supporters ways in which their support has already been helpful but at the same time, acknowledge the continued need. This can be achieved with the right photo or graphic selection.
4. Does your designer know how specific audiences interact with their design? Do they understand their motivations, desires and needs? People that are about to take the step to engage more and support you long-term, will receive and use your creative products differently from someone who is just interested in making a one-time donation. Your designer should understand that difference and design your marketing piece to satisfy the needs of that donor who is on the cusps of long-term engagement.
5. Design that incorporates clear, concise language, selective color choices, visual guides, illustrations of people working together in their communities, goes a long way in making a supporter feel wanted and needed, and in turn, encouraged to stay connected and committed to the mission.



6. Create a story that emotionally and visually connects with the audience but that is also succinct and consistent. Use design elements that provide a good donor-facing experience. Think ease of use: a visually appealing self-addressed stamped envelope for the donor to return a check, a nicely designed tear-away in a direct mail piece specifically for people wanting to become monthly donors or a strategically placed "Become a monthly Donor" call-out box on your website. Use images that will have a large and lasting impact. Include emotionally charged photos and other informational graphics.
7. It may seem simple but something as quick and easy as calling out certain phrases by using a different font color or a call-out box can be used to draw attention to the fact that a specific marketing piece is designed to retain current donors and not to acquire new ones.

Dear Karen,

I have to tell you, it's not always easy working here at Mission.org. Every day you hear another heartbreaking story — kids skipping meals so that a younger sibling can eat or trying to make a meal out of a bag of chips. Kids just shouldn't be in this position.

But Karen, the reason I love my job — and I do — is knowing that every day we're making progress to make these stories a thing of the past. That's a good feeling.

And today, I want to invite you to share in that good feeling.

[You are cordially invited to join the Mission Core, our cadre of extraordinary supporters who make a donation every month to feed hungry kids.](#)

Ultimately, you should count on your designer to do thorough design research. It's not just about using the most recent version of the organization's logo or making sure that the website loads quickly. Designers through their work, have the power to move people to action. They should know their audience and build their design around the experience that they want this audience to have and the action they want them to take.

About the Author

Karen Byer

Karen is a Communications Professional, Copywriter, and Editor with 15 years of experience in the non-profit sector. She successfully crafts content to help businesses and organizations engage donors, increase fundraising, boost conversions, and more.