

Waiting to give: How to engage with young donors?

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I am often asked: *how can our ministry or church be successful in raising money from young donors in their 20s and 30s?* My short response is: first you have to understand the generational differences and be prepared to use new methods of fundraising. Secondly, you need to listen to young people, to understand their expectations and be prepared to shape up your communications accordingly.

Let me explain this more by using some examples and statistics from one of our recent surveys of UK evangelical donors¹.

Fact: Young donors are missing from many a charity's donor file!

One of the most pressing problems we identified through our giving survey is what some Christian fundraisers have suspected all along – that the majority of their donors are 60 years or older! Of course, there is nothing wrong with having lots of older supporters. But, if this trend continues in the next 10-15 years many Christian charities might have few donors left!

In my opinion, if a charity is to build for the future cultivating relationships with younger donors should become a strategic priority.

As a fundraising consultant to ministries I meet many Christian fundraisers who are concerned about the lack of younger donors but who are doing very little to engage with them. These fundraisers or communications officers continue to do *'business as usual'* by sending bumper mailings stuffed with long-copy newsletters, prayer diaries and fundraising appeals. The fact of the matter is that no young person in their 20s or 30s has the time or inclination to read such communications.

Another reason why younger donors are missing from charity databases is that most fundraisers have not intentionally focused on acquiring such donors. To

¹ *Why Christians Give, Understanding the hearts and minds of 21st century evangelical donors.* A special report by Redina Kolaneci, McConkey Johnston international UK, June 2010 (www.mcconkey-johnston.co.uk)

make things worst many fundraisers or communications officers do not understand what makes them tick.

The sooner you accept that young people today love the technology more than you and I probably ever will, and that they want to relate to charities in different ways from their parents or grandparents, the sooner you might do something to engage effectively with them.

Question: what do young donors want from charities like yours?

Here are a few top findings from our *Why Christians Give* survey which can help you to develop effective strategies for relating to young donors.

- 1. Young donors want giving made easy.** Gone *should be* the days of complex response forms with multiple selections designed by the charity's finance office. Our research revealed that there is a reverse correlation between the age of evangelical donors and the likelihood of being motivated by '*convenient ways to give*'.

85% of donors from the 18 - 24 age group and 40% of donors from the 25 - 34 age groups are likely to view convenient ways of giving as a motivating factor to donate. This figure drops to 37% or 34% for donors from other age groups².

- 2. Young donors want to be in the driving seat of the relationship with the charity they support.** In other words, you can't just send four newsletters, five email updates and three fundraising appeals to younger donors the same way you do to older supporters. Young donors want to determine when and how they hear from you. And, if you care to ask them and respect their wishes they might stay around and support your work for a while.

We noted that over 70% of 18 - 44 year olds want to have a say in the relationship with a charity compared to less than 50% of older donors³.

- 3. Young donors are likely to join in fundraising activities rather than make a donation.** A growing trend in the UK is the participation of young donors in sponsored events like running, swimming, walking, cycling, or even sitting in a bathtub filled with baked beans - for charity. While most young donors might not have a lot of money to give away they have wide social networks, energy and enthusiasm that they can muster for supporting a charitable cause.

So, if your charity or church is looking for donors willing to participate in fundraising activities the best place to look is amongst donors who are 18 - 24 years old or 45 - 54 years old.

² *Why Christians Give, Understanding the hearts and minds of 21st century evangelical donors* by Redina Kolaneci, McConkey Johnston international UK, June 2010, pg 59.

³ *Why Christians Give, Understanding the hearts and minds of 21st century evangelical donors* by Redina Kolaneci, McConkey Johnston international UK, June 2010, pg 69.

- 4. Internet and social media are useful tool for connecting with younger donors.** Our research revealed that the majority of donors from the 18 – 44 age groups are likely to consider visiting a charity’s website and getting online updates as attractive ways of strengthening their relationship with a charity. This figure drops sharply to less than a third of evangelical donors from the 45 – 54 age group and to 7% for donors from the 75+ age group⁴.

In conclusion

Even though young people today are under-represented in the supporter ranks of most Christian charities, I believe this trend can be reversed. And, I hope that this short article has given you some ideas as to where and how you can begin to reverse this trend in your ministry.

- *Get talking to people in their 20s and 30s* who are in the wider circle of your church or community. Listen to them, understand what makes them tick.
- *Get young people to join the board of your ministry.* Establish some connections with a group of young people who represent your target audience. Give them your mission and vision statements and samples of your communications. Invite them to ask questions – let them change the content of some of your communications to speak the language of young people today.
- *Make giving easy for young people both online and offline.* Review your options and give young people a chance to respond.
- *Create fundraising challenges that energise young people.* Offer them a chance to participate in something fun and worthwhile. Encourage young people to raise support from their friends and families.
- *Give young people options about how often and in what ways they hear from you.* Let them decide what they want to receive. Banish those bumper mailing packs.
- *Use the internet and social media tools to gather young people for your cause.* Find your social media champions and give them the task of spreading your message online.

Above all, kindle young people’s passion for Christian mission and help them to grow as stewards of God-given resources and talents.

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⁴ *Why Christians Give, Understanding the hearts and minds of 21st century evangelical donors* by Redina Kolaneci, McConkey Johnston international UK, June 2010, pg 70.