



Unlock the Hidden Power of Digital Engagement

How to Use Digital Engagement to Boost Donor Retention and Re-Activation



You Got This

Nonprofits, did you know there's a surprisingly simple yet effective way to reignite supporter love?

The secret to retaining and recapturing supporter love is a resource that's already in your marketing mix... dormant emails!

Yes, those emails, from the supporters who haven't opened or acted upon your well-crafted messages in months, maybe even years. The supporters you suppress from your list to protect your sender reputation. The supporters that are piling up like digital plastic pollution in your database.

Far from junk, these dormant emails hold profound marketing and fundraising power for your nonprofit. The connections they represent are among your warmest prospects for future support.

With this truth in mind, many nonprofit organizations already deploy engagement tactics that try to reconnect with audiences on their email lists. But not all these methods are equally valuable.

In this e-book, we'll show you proven approaches to unlocking the hidden power in your dormant emails so you can supercharge your donor retention and reactivation efforts.

Before we get into the how, however, let's start with the why, a reality check on the state of supporter loyalty.

Retention Needs Attention

Here are two hard truths every fundraiser knows. Retaining donors is hard, and retaining donors is necessary.

Let's tackle the hard part.

According to the Fundraising Effectiveness Project (FEP), the overall nonprofit donor retention rate – the number of donors who gave last year AND this year – is around 42 percent, and dropping. Isolating online-to-online retention, the overall retention rate is 36 percent (2022 M+R Benchmarks Report).

Every year, despite a mountain of multichannel outreaches, nonprofits lose more donors than they keep. Ouch.

Now let's address the necessary part.

Knowing you have a leaky fundraising bucket, you might be thinking, "Okay, I'll recruit new donors, and some of my existing donors might come back." It's true that every nonprofit needs new donors, and most nonprofits acquire


some new donors every year, at a cost. To recoup that cost, the donor likely needs to stay on your file and give for several years. If the donor only gives once, as most donors do, you lose part of your acquisition investment.

Simply put, new donors can't make up for lost donors.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Unfortunately, the current recapture/reactivation rates for lapsed donors are even more dismal. Back to the Fundraising Effectiveness Project, only 4 percent of donors come back and make another gift once they have lapsed from your organization.

Ugh. This treadmill of donor attrition can cost your organization thousands of dollars. Effective retention and reactivation strategies have never been more important.



Donor retention is the most cost-effective way to keep your fundraising bucket filled, and its power accelerates over time. Its success rests entirely on communicating with donors through the channels they use with the messages that resonate best with them.

– Blackbaud's Retention Toolkit: Your Ultimate Guide for Building Lasting Support

When it comes to donor retention and reactivation, digital dominates

Industry-wide challenges

Stepping off the attrition treadmill, improving retention, and growing your fundraising totals takes strategic effort.

There's the standard donor retention playbook: Welcome donors. Thank them quickly. Show them the impact of their generosity. Give them opportunities to engage. Offer monthly giving options. All organizations should use these tactics in their fundraising efforts.

In the new and improved donor retention playbook, digital marketing takes a starring role.

Let's look at the value of digital in general:

Digital Offers More Touch Points

The famous marketing "Rule of 7" suggests that customers need to have multiple exposures with a brand before taking action to purchase. Digital offers a plethora of touchpoints, from email to social to advertising, that are more customizable, immediate, interactive and actionable than any other channel.

Digital-First Donors Offer Long-Term Value

Digitally acquired donors are **more than twice** as likely to migrate to multichannel giving when compared to donors acquired via direct mail. In addition, multichannel donors contribute **more than twice** as much annual revenue, and are always retained at a much higher rate (BlackBaud's The Great Reset: Moving into the New Normal with Intention.)

Digitally Re-Acquired Donors Are Primed To Give

A supporter that's digitally re-acquired is **two times** more likely to take action than one that was recently added to your list. (Clarify Email ReEngagement Case Study)

Drilling deeper into digital, there is one particular tactic that shines when it comes to rekindling the love supporters have for your mission. And you might already be using it, albeit for a different purpose.

In order to maintain strong email deliverability, nonprofits must over-suppress their email lists.

Best practice is to suppress emails that:

- Have been on the file at least 6 months but
- Haven't opened or clicked on an email or donated in the past 12 months (some do 6 or 8 months)

However, this leads to:

- Increasing list attrition
- Declining donor retention

Woo me twice: Re-engage & re-subscribe

Lapsed donors can be a mystery. It's frustrating when you don't know exactly why a supporter stopped opening your emails, clicking on your content or making donations.

You can make an educated guess. Some of the most common reasons why a donor stops giving are:

- They were never thanked
- They don't know how their money was used
- They get too many solicitations
- They don't remember giving to your cause
- They can no longer afford to donate
- They stopped using that email address

You can, and should, survey existing donors to suss out why they are leaving your organization.

At the same time, you don't have to simply accept lost donors or declining response rates.

You can implement best retention and reactivation practices, like creating a multi-part email reactivation series, sending supporters only your highest-performing messages each month, retargeting past donors with unique social and display ads, and keeping up with annual email change of address (ECO) protocols.

These tactics all work – some better than others – and some combination of them belong in your retention/reactivation toolkit.

Here's a [kind of] new one to try: Woo them again, like new supporters, and keep wooing them, with interactive digital content where they are now.

That's right, the same simple digital interactions that you might use to acquire a brand new donor or supporter – quizzes, surveys, polls, and petitions – can be surprisingly effective in rekindling the love lapsed donors and supporters once had for you.

It's a riff on retargeting that's produced exciting results for organizations such as African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and others.

Let's dive in.

Reality Check

Email marketers should expect 10–30 percent of their email file to go inactive or bounce every year.

How African Wildlife Foundation reactivated 114,000 lost emails

Founded in 1961, African Wildlife Foundation is Africa's leading global conservation organization focused solely on the unique challenges facing the continent's wildlife and wildlands. It has a staff of 250+ working globally, an email file with over 600k active emails, and a Facebook page with more than 1.6 million likes.

AWF had already been deploying the standard retention playbook (implementing data hygiene, email segmentation, re-activation programming and social advertising tactics) when it came with agency partner Sanky Communications to Care2.com for additional solutions to improve email deliverability and supporter retention.

AWF used Care2's Cultivate service to re-engage its supporters while they are on Care2.com and are primed to take actions for social good.

Here's how it worked. When someone on AWF's list visited the Care2 community, Care2 repeatedly engaged them with interactive AWF engagement opportunities – a quiz, survey, poll, even an appeal. All digital engagements were educational, mission-focused and easy-to-answer.

We wooed them again!

When an inactive email supporter engaged with AWF on Care2, Care2 notified AWF, and AWF started emailing them again. No special or additional communications were needed; AWF simply dropped them back into the communications stream.

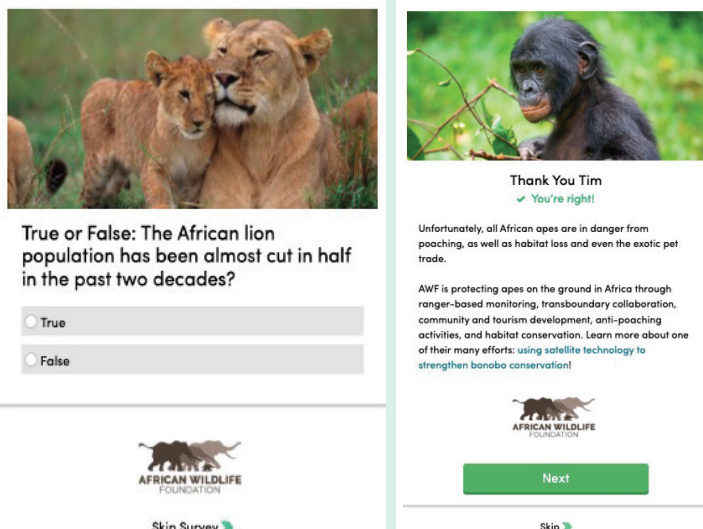
Because so many Care2 members are active in the community at any given moment, Care2 was able to generate over 1.6 million engagements – across active and inactive members – for AWF in the first 12 months.

The interactive content was incredibly popular. AWF members engaged with the quiz or poll a whopping **67 percent of the time** that Care2 showed AWF members the content!

Those 1.6 million engagements on Care2 significantly moved the needle for AWF, in more ways than one. In one year:

- 14,000 people (emails) were reactivated
- AWF generated \$176,000 in donations from these engagements
- It also received a windfall of \$327,000 in donations after these engagements
- There was 105 percent increase in donations from active supporters
- And a 127 percent increase in donations from inactive list members
- AWF aligned the most successful re-engagement content with its fundraising campaigns

The most effective engagements? Polls and surveys. It turns out supporters appreciate giving feedback and being asked their opinion.



True or False: The African lion population has been almost cut in half in the past two decades?

True

False

Thank You Tim
✔ You're right!

Unfortunately, all African apes are in danger from poaching, as well as habitat loss and even the exotic pet trade.

AWF is protecting apes on the ground in Africa through ranger-based monitoring, transboundary collaboration, community and tourism development, anti-poaching activities, and habitat conservation. Learn more about one of their many efforts: [using satellite technology to strengthen bonobo conservation!](#)

Next

Above are some example of the digital re-engagements.

More cultivation = more conversions

This type of cultivation – engaging members with quick, simple, acquisition-style interactive content – is highly successful in reactivating member emails and rekindling donor love, prompting donations across channels, including website, email, Facebook, and even SMS.

Consider this data from Care2 and others:

- When a prospect engaged with interactive content 3 times on Care2 Cultivate, they were nearly 3 times as likely to stay active and donate
- Cultivation **more than doubled** the donation rate among active email subscribers, from 2.5 percent to 5.3 percent
- One agency found that reacquiring existing email subscribers resulted in 2.5 times more repeat actions, at a much lower cost vs. brand new subscribers
- Interactive content generates 2x more conversions than passive content

Interacting with mission-focused content reminds supporters why they love an organization's work. This is especially important if those supporters have not been opening emails and have stopped responding to communications on other channels.

In our digital dominant economy, the marketing Rule of 7 must include interaction, not just exposure.

You make me want to try

Make dormant donors love you again! Re-engage them with an acquisition-focused engagement ad. After they complete the action, i.e. responding to a survey, invite them to create a bigger impact with a donation.

Key takeaways

- Engaging your active email subscribers and donors can reduce attrition
- Reactivating lapsed emails and donors can be more valuable than getting new ones (although acquisition is always necessary)
- There is significant value hiding in the inactive emails within your current supporter base.
- There are tactics to carefully but effectively reactivate inactive emails – some more scalable than others; some more expensive than others.
- It's important to set aside a testing budget for your organization.
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Quick donor retention checklist

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Current supporters and activists (active or inactive) are your warmest prospects! Here are a few strategies to re-engage supporters who are inactive on email:

1. Regular email validation process (a third party process that flags your file for spam traps, typos/misspellings and inactive/invalid mailboxes)
2. Multi-part email reactivation series
3. Test targeting full email file with social ads
4. Test target display ads to past donors
5. Annual email change of address processes
6. Cultivate your list on an ongoing basis with interactive engagements on Care2

Supporter reactivation checklist

11 essential steps to better email deliverability

Follow these tips to improve email deliverability. From care2's the new rules for email deliverability

1. Add only good email addresses to your list
2. Only send email to people who have specifically opted in to your brand
3. Validate email addresses at the point of submission
4. Consider using a 3rd-party validation systems such as FreshAddress to determine whether the specified mailbox actually exists
5. Remove obviously bad addresses (any address containing "remove," "removethis," "spam" or "nospam")
6. Remove "role account" addresses such as sales@, webmaster@, support@, info@, abuse@, etc.
7. Process hard bounces immediately
8. Ask subscribers to add your FROM address to their address book
9. Analyze your message content with a spam score tester
10. Preview your message templates in all major webmail systems, including mobile devices
11. Make unsubscribe instructions prominent in every message

Glossary

Active Email Subscriber

An email subscriber who has opened your organization's email over a period of time that you define (typically 6 months or 12 months).

Attrition Rate

In fundraising, the attrition rate is the percentage of donors who do not renew their gifts each year. In email marketing, the attrition rate is the number of email subscribers who bounce or unsubscribe from an organization's email list. Also known as churn rate.

Custom Audience

An online advertising targeting option that lets you serve ads to people who have already interacted with your organization, i.e. they are on your email list and/or have visited your website. Custom audiences are used in Retargeting Campaigns.

Donor Retention

A measure of how many donors continue to donate to your organization.

Dormant Email Subscriber

An email subscriber who is no longer engaging with your organization's email communications over a period of time that you define. Also known as an "unengaged" or "inactive" subscriber.

Email Deliverability

The ability of an email to arrive in your subscriber's inbox.

Email Reactivation

When a dormant email subscriber re-engages with your organization's emails.

Email Sender Reputation

A trustworthiness score that an Internet Service Provider (ISP) assigns to an organization that sends email. It is determined by a variety of metrics including complaint rate, unknown user rate, volume, spam trap hits, engagement and blocklistings.

Email Validation

The process of verifying an email address to confirm its validity and existence.

Lapsed Donor

A donor who has donated sometime in the past but not within the current fundraising period, usually 12, 18 or 24 months.

Recaptured Donor

A Lapsed Donor who gives within the current fundraising period.

Retargeting Ad Campaign

An online advertising campaign targeting an organization's email subscribers or website visitors. Also known as a remarketing campaign.

Additional Resources

Care2

- [Digital Engagement Blog](#)
- [Toolkits & Guides](#)
- [Case Studies](#)
- [Webinars](#)

[The Fundraising Effectiveness Project](#)

[Bloomerang's A Guide to Donor Retention](#)

[Blackbaud Institute's Retention Toolkit: Your Ultimate Guide for Building Lasting Support](#)

[Blackbaud Institute's The Great Reset: Moving into the New Normal with Intention](#)

[Clarify Email ReEngagement Case Study](#)

[2022 M+R Benchmarks Study](#)