

Tap into the Passion of New Constituents with an Online Welcome Series

Put Internet tools to work in cementing new bonds.



Successful fundraising depends on strong relationships with your donors and potential donors. Short of meeting your mission, those relationships are your #1 priority.

Your major supporters have been with you for years, no doubt. And you were working to build them before you ever sent your first appeal. But don't underestimate the new guys.

Remember, relationships start as soon as constituents join your e-mail file, when they may have just become intrigued with the promise of your work. For your newer supporters, those first feelings of passion for a cause can be a very powerful thing, setting the stage for a lifetime of support.

Needed: An Effective Welcome Series

One way to engage new constituents immediately after they register is to create an online welcome series. A welcome series is a sequence of automated e-mail messages that people receive over the course of their first few weeks or months on your e-mail list. These e-mails should be in addition to any registration or donation auto-responders that you send out.

A solid, professional welcome series consists of two or three simple messages.

Message #1: The first message is a personal greeting from the voice of your organization — your executive director, founder, volunteer coordinator, celebrity spokesperson, or any other person you want your constituents to relate to on an ongoing basis. This message describes your organization with a focus on educating constituents, especially about new and interesting approaches and results.

Messages #2 and 3. The second and third messages engage new constituents by highlighting ways they can get involved to support your mission (both online and offline through volunteering, social media, and advocacy actions) and show potential donors the value of being a supporter. This is an important step, because many constituents take a second action immediately after subscribing to an organization's lists.

What You'll Gain

The benefits of creating a welcome series are many:

They set the tone for the relationship, create an identifiable voice for your organization, and educate new constituents about your mission and the scope of your impact before you start sending them appeals.

Open rates for these e-mails can be as much as twice the open rate for other types of e-mails.

“Don't underestimate the new guys.”


These communications work to ensure that your constituents are highly engaged immediately after signing up to get e-mail updates from your organization.

Welcome-series messages keep your e-mail list clean by verifying that the new constituent wants to receive online communications. So don't be surprised to see unsubscribe rates higher than other communications that come later in the relationship with the constituent.

Together, these messages open the door for regular online communications, including e-newsletters and e-mail campaigns.

A well executed welcome series will foster deeper engagement with your organization over the long-term.

Test the Timing

Test the frequency of your welcome messages, and analyze the results to determine the best times to send each one. Some organizations find that one message every two weeks for two months is effective. Others prefer weekly messages. 

This article was prepared by Convio (convio.com), a Blackbaud Company. Convio is a leading provider of on-demand constituent engagement solutions that enable nonprofit organizations to maximize the value of every relationship.

HOT TIP:

Opt-in e-mail subscriptions are an essential best practice. But double-opt-in subscriptions—in which subscribers must sign up to receive the e-mail and respond to a confirmation e-mail by replying or following a link—are overkill. These confirmation e-mails are often lost or mistakenly routed to junk mail folders, leaving an expectant constituent—and prospective donor—disappointed and un-engaged.