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## Top 10 Trends: How Major Donors are Changing & What To Do About It

These strategies will put you ahead of the pack.

By Gail Perry

**M**ajor donors have changed a lot in what they want and expect from nonprofits. Ten years ago, you could raise good money with a generic “spray and pray” appeal. Now you have to work harder and smarter.

The good news is that there’s plenty of research about major donors. After culling through this research, we’ve come up with these top trends, along with a strategy to ride each trend productively.

### TREND 1. DONORS ARE WARY OF TRUSTING US.

Trust is a huge issue these days. What can you do to help your donors trust you?

Timothy Ogden, author of Guidestar’s “More Money for More Good” ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)), claims that donors do *not* pick nonprofits based on their impact. Instead, donors choose charities based on personal relationships. Getting to know major donors personally is a must.

How can they trust you if they don’t know you? Why would they invest in you?

**Your Strategy:** Build trust by fostering personal relationships with your major donors.

### TREND 2. THE BOOMERS ARE BECOMING THE #1 DONOR POPULATION.

Boomers own most of the nation’s wealth, they’re more generous than the Silent Generation, and they volunteer in droves.

What do boomers want? They want personal self-expression. They want to express their passions and their individuality. They want to be involved.

**Your Strategy:** Let Boomers’ personal passions and interests guide their cultivation plan. Help them connect to what is most meaningful to them.

### TREND 3. OLDER LADIES ARE THE MAJOR DONOR DEMOGRAPHIC.

A recent study (“Women Give,” Women’s Philanthropy Institute, Indiana University, [www.philanthropy.iupui.edu](http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu)) found that women are more than *twice* as generous as men. For every \$100 that men of the boomer or older generations gave, women in the very same economic circumstances gave \$258.

**Your Strategy:** Review your prospect lists. Reevaluate the giving capacity of the ladies. Get to work and go see them.

“What can you do to help your donors trust you?”

“Show them the numbers.”

### TREND 4. DONORS WANT DONOR-CENTERED COMMUNICATIONS.

Donors don’t want to hear you talking, talking, talking about how wonderful you are. How do they hear your presentation? As blah, blah, blah.

Try talking (and listening) to your donors about what they think, what they believe, what they want to see in the world. Then they’ll be happy.

**Your Strategy:** Slant everything toward the donors’ perspective. Stop talking so much about you and your wonderful organization.

### TREND 5. MAJOR DONORS WHO VOLUNTEER GIVE MORE. MUCH MORE.

The recent Bank of America Study of High Net Worth Philanthropy contains some interesting information: Many high-net-worth donors are volunteering and taking it very seriously. And those who volunteered over 100 hours last year gave their organizations an average of \$78K (compared to an average gift of \$39K for those who volunteered less.)

**Your Strategy:** Get your donors and prospects on site and in action.

### TREND 6. MAJOR DONORS ARE ALL OVER SOCIAL MEDIA.

Should you “friend” a major donor on Facebook? Well, if major donors “friend” you, it wouldn’t make sense to ignore them.

The fact is — some major donors *want* to connect with you on social media. That’s their preferred communications channel.

Remember — getting to know you personally is vitally important. So don’t be afraid of Facebook. It’s a great way to make connections.

**Your Strategy:** Use Facebook freely if your donors are there.

### TREND 7. MAJOR DONORS LOOK AT THEIR GIFTS AS INVESTMENTS.

Donors want to see impact and return on investment. They’ll often give more if you let them designate their gifts. Of course, major gifts are almost always focused or designated for one area or another. Even if donors are making an unrestricted major gift to “operations,” they understand why and what that will achieve. But it’s up to you to talk to donors in this language. It’s more specific. And it’s about results.

**Your Strategy:** Let major donors fund something specific.

“Boomers own most of the nation’s wealth.”

#### TREND 8. MAJOR DONORS ARE ASSURED WHEN THEY SEE THE FINANCIALS AND THE NUMBERS.

Discussing your financials with donors is a great opportunity for them to understand where the money goes and how much things really cost. The more clearly you talk about where you plan to spend their money, the more likely they are to donate. That conversation creates trust and credibility.

**Your Strategy:** Be transparent. Show them the numbers. Measure and show your results.

#### TREND 9. LIKE MOST OF US, DONORS ARE FEELING OVERWHELMED, JADED, AND EVEN BORED.

Everybody is inundated with media messages. We’re all hopelessly busy. Donors aren’t immune.

How do you reach an overwhelmed donor? Be offbeat, playful, and fun. This can give you a huge edge over everybody else. People will read your stuff first.

**Your Strategy:** Add surprise and delight to everything you do.

#### TREND 10. MAJOR DONORS LOVE A “BIG IDEA.”

How did Stanford University manage to be the first to raise a billion in one year? They had plenty of big ideas — ideas that addressed the profound challenges of our time, such as environmental sustainability and innovative technology — and weren’t afraid to pursue bold, imaginative solutions. Donors knew that their contributions would effect real change in the world.

**Your Strategy:** What are your “Big Ideas”? Talk about them with your donors! 

*Gail Perry, MBA, CFRE, is the best-selling author of Fired-Up Fundraising: Turn Board Passion into Action. This article is adapted from her blog at gailperry.com.*

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**How to Impress the Wired Wealthy** (Vol. 30, No. 3)

**Using Multi-Generational Marketing to Target Donors** (Vol. 23, No. 5)

**Reducing Donor Fatigue Syndrome** (Vol. 24, No. 2)

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