PRODUCTIVITY TIPS FOR CULTIVATING MAJOR DONORS

A SMART Practices Guide from Bristol Strategy for NeonCRM Workflows

Major donor cultivation is our favorite fundraising strategy. It produces significant income while providing leaders and fundraising professionals the opportunity to build deep, lasting relationships with individuals who want to support their missions. Income AND friendship – what more could we want?

But major donor relationships require lots of time. If you have a dozen, or fifty, or a hundred and fifty major donors to manage, your time is at a premium, so simple, repetitive tasks like thank-you's and follow-ups can fall through the cracks. These tasks are the "glue" keeping your donors close to you.[1]

This SMART Practices Guide was written for users NeonCRM, to help you get the most out of Workflows.

Cultivating Major Donors with Workflows

Who's a Major Donor?

Major donors are different from "individual" donors. While a major gift is pretty much like an individual gift, just bigger, a major donor, on the other hand, is someone who meets your standards for giving motivations, giving history, and wealth capacity, factors which comprise your ideal donor profile.

So first design an ideal donor profile covering these criteria. Only those donors who this profile justify the amount of time and effort you'll invest in them.[2] You'll invest much more time, effort and money building longer-term, more intimate relationships with them. If you don't make the investment, you and your agency will fail to obtain the income, talents and influence of these individuals. And the individuals themselves will fail to experience the joy of furthering your mission.

The Major Donor Process – Simplified

Every major donor relationship you build follows the same simple, five-step model:

1. Establish initial rapport
2. Decide if the prospect meets your criteria for "major-donor-ship"
3. Obtain first financial commitments and contributions
4. Maintain the relationship and facilitate additional financial and non-financial contributions
5. Be prepared to take "no" for an answer without losing your cool or alienating the donor forever

If you flunk any step, wait to long for next steps, or do the steps out of order, your cultivation efforts won't be very effective.

It's imperative to know how to establish rapport and build the relationship, which call on your very best social skills.[3] Relationship building demands personal interactions with the donor, whether you do them in person, over the phone, or on a Skype call.

Why Productivity Matters

Productivity is fairly simple: it's a way to measure the combination of efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency without effectiveness produces more incorrect things faster. Effectiveness without efficiency costs too much.

Efficient cultivation means handling low-value, repetitive tasks like reminders, responses, and acknowledgements flawlessly, never missing a beat, always meeting the appropriate deadlines so on. It's easy to talk about, not so easy to do, considering available resources. *Effective cultivation* means building strong, reliable relationships with donors new and current, persuading them to demonstrate their commitment by consistent giving, volunteering, and maybe even advocating on your behalf.

When both of these concepts are adopted simultaneously, it means more major-gift income with less effort, on a consistently upward curve. This requires effort, thought, and constant attention to the ways in which you and your development team manage their time and effort.

Efficiency with Automation

A big proportion of the work of cultivation is person to person. Laser-like focus on working with well-qualified donors is enormously important, even though it requires a judicious investment of planning and preparation. But when your plate is already full, there are only three ways to improve efficiency:

- Delegating the work to someone else. Good luck, especially since they're all overworked already.
- Outsourcing the work to a contractor. Have you checked the budget lately?
- Automating. Make a machine do it!

And the winner is – automation! Investing in the right automated tools is the smartest way to improve efficiency, which is why Neon's Workflows are so valuable. The modest investment you'll make in Workflows bring you:

- Significant returns on your investment
- Staff size your nonprofit can afford
- Reduced anxiety, since you know that superior follow-up, acknowledgement, and related tasks are always handled correctly

Automate with Workflows

Workflows never get tired, and they never forget what you've instructed them to do. They can't. A sample of what you can automate with Workflows:

- Thank-yous and acknowledgements on an as-they-arrive basis
- Reminders for staff to take certain actions on a timely basis
- Mechanisms for following up on email campaigns, special events, and the like

How often have you left tasks like these to the minute *after* the last minute, or forgotten to follow up altogether? Well, I know I have and I can't imagine I'm all that different from you.

Workflows – Cultivation Practices You Can Automate

No matter how good you are at engaging and maintaining relationships, you're also a mere human being, which means you won't remember to do every single thing you're supposed to. You might not return a phone call, or acknowledge your favorite donor's decision to attend the gala. You might not even follow up with Donor Jones after you gave her a gift proposal. That's why Workflows are such a great addition to the cultivation toolkit.

We like to use Workflows in one of three ways. Sometimes these ways braid themselves together, as you'll see.

Way #1: Outreach (and follow-ups). Even the best-run development shops are always working to build their lists and find new major-donor prospects. Workflows are invaluable aids to these tasks. Use them to:

- Follow up on responses to invitations, events, or email marketing
- Send the correct message, depending on the link or selection made by each respondent
- Secure opportunities for initial meetings or conversations

Way #2: Follow-ups. You met current donors and prospects at community events, your own fundraising events, or whatever. Use workflows to:

- Acknowledge the interaction
- Propose additional follow-up
- Provide ways to take action (links, subscriptions, downloads, surveys)

Way #3: Internal tasks and reminders. Your calendar is filled with donor meetings, while you have a pipeline full of potential gifts, requests for information, needs for prospect research, and other requirements. You can't conceivably remember everything, or keep them in the right order of priority. Use Workflows to:

- Remind yourself when it's time to reconnect with the donor
- Remind someone else to handle such tasks on your behalf

Invest in Workflows. They'll add as much horsepower to your major donor project as hiring a full-time administrative assistant or development associate. That's real productivity for you.

Contact us to learn more about how we can help you set up your own NeonCRM Workflows.

Click HERE for More Info

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[1] Learn what your fundraising time is really worth, by downloading our Opportunity Risk Calculator.

[2] View this short video about the SMART Way Prospect Scorecard, for an example of selecting the criteria your major donor should meet, before you invest too much development time.

[3] If you're unsure where to start, download Three Simple Questions that Get Donors to Give, a primer on great questioning techniques