

Week 4: Thanking monthly givers
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Introduction

Now that you've got your monthly donors, how can you keep them giving through thank yous?

It's tricky, because every donor is different, and everyone wants to be thanked in a different way.

Compound this with the lack of time to keep track of every donor's preferences, plus a few other things on your plate, and the next thing you know, the donors aren't getting thanked at all.

This is the last thing we want to happen. So how can we automate the thank yous, how can we still make our thank yous meaningful, and how can we offer something unique to our monthly donors to keep them loyal?

Read on!

How often should you thank monthly donors?

Thanking monthly donors can be tricky. How do you thank someone who gives every month without being annoying? You don't want to annoy your most loyal donors.

So how do you get around this?

If you've done your homework from the previous week, you should have put together a survey for your monthly donors, asking them what their communication preferences are.

If they know you care about how often they want to hear from you, that will count a lot, even if you mess up sometimes.

If I were you, I would give your monthly donors four options in a survey.

1. Get a thank you and a tax receipt at the end of the year
2. Get a thank you once per quarter with an update on what their money is helping to accomplish
3. Get a thank you every month when the money is taken out of their bank account
4. No thank you, just a tax receipt.

And remember, you can always thank your monthly donors every week in your e-newsletter, just a simple, "Thank you again to all of our monthly donors, your little gifts every month mean so much! Here's what your giving is helping accomplish this month"

And then share a story.

Asking outside of the monthly gift program

Should you ask your monthly donors for gifts outside the monthly giving program?

Studies say yes. Even those who give on a monthly basis will expect to be asked for a year-end donation. At the very least, you should send them a year-end solicitation through the mail and through email, unless you've established in your survey that they are not interested in that.

Many monthly donation amounts are so small that the donor is not going to feel them. And if you are consistent in your communications showing gratitude to your donor, they may feel a cognitive dissonance if they don't give at least once more during the year.

Indeed, monthly donors can be some of the most loyal donors you have, possibly because it makes sense to them, as the most loyal donors, to give more often. '

What loyalty programs can teach us about monthly giving

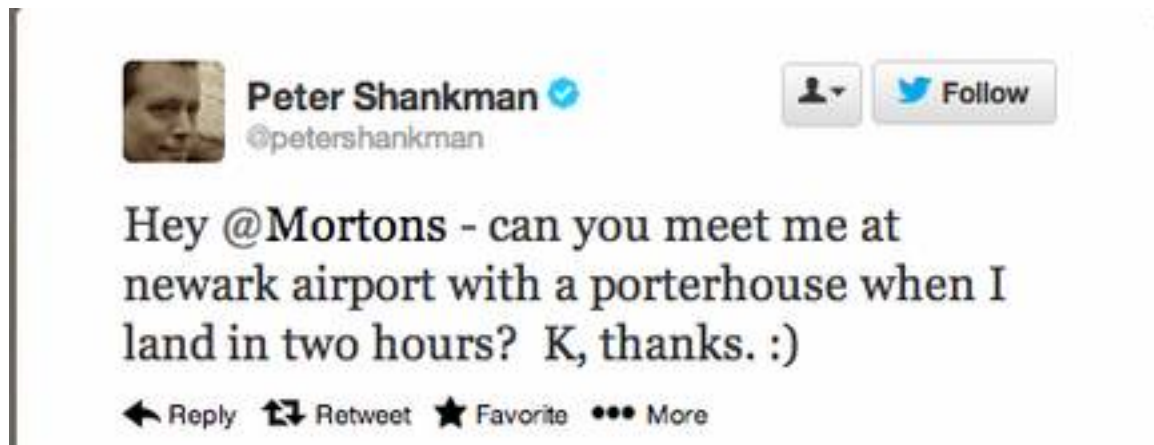
When a corporation has a loyalty program, they go above and beyond for their most loyal customers.

Places like Starbucks give you more than a free drink, they have your drink ready and waiting for you with your name on the cup when you come in.

Places like Zappos try to get your shoes to you overnight, even faster than you thought possible.

Loyalty programs can teach us about the value of surprising and delighting our donors.

This story below demonstrates the power of surprise and delight.



You saw it coming, right? Peter Shankman got off the plane and a waiter from Morton's Steakhouse was waiting with a porterhouse steak when he landed.

You don't have to give your monthly donors fast shoes, a porterhouse steak or even a coffee, but you DO need to make them feel special. Surprise and delight is a tactic that works.

You could remember a donor's birthday, anniversary, or the anniversary

of their first gift to your organization. You could send them a card on these occasions, or just call to wish them happy birthday.

What if you made a small video, just 30 seconds long, holding up a sign that said “Thank you so much *Donor X!*” (insert the donor’s name) and then you and your colleagues all said thank you at the same time? Then what if you sent them the link?

Wouldn’t that make them feel special?

What if you organized a thank-a-thon, just calling to say thank you to all of your monthly donors?

You see? You don’t have to spend a lot of money, just maybe a little bit of time, to surprise and delight your monthly donors.

Write some of your ideas below for ways that you could surprise and delight your monthly donors

What if your monthly donor lapses for a month? Don’t knock them off the register. Continue to be kind to them, and remind them to renew, and they will be more likely to renew than if you turn away from them.

Unique ways to appreciate your monthly givers

When I was first working in the nonprofit field, I was in charge of helping children in a hospital make tiles for a tile wall, that was going to showcase donor names as well.

As we were finishing the tiles, one of the nurse practitioners poked her head in, rolled her eyes and said, “Oh GREAT, ANOTHER TILE WALL.” I didn’t understand what she meant at the time, but now everywhere you look there are donor recognition walls. And it’s hard to go beyond that, because so often, we as fundraising staff are tasked with coming up with meaningful ways to thank donors WITHOUT SPENDING MONEY. It’s hard not to look at the dozens of donor recognition walls of various shapes and sizes and think, “Well, let’s make a donor recognition wall.”

I am here to say that you don’t have to do that. You can be better than that. How can you do something more meaningful for your donor?

When you are acknowledging your monthly donors, think about how you can create an experience for the donor, an inspirational experience that they will never forget. Here’s my story.



Believe it or not, at one point I was in charge of creating a “steamboat ride experience” for our monthly donors at the small domestic violence shelter where I worked.

I sent out the invitations to our Circle of Hope donors, I made chocolate covered strawberries, I

ordered extra *hors d'oeuvres*, I ordered the award for one of our

leadership volunteers and gift-wrapped it, I made sure the champagne was cold, and even when we broke down in the middle of the river, I managed to keep everyone's spirits up until the boat got underway again.

No matter how many other nonprofits your monthly donors give to, you can bet that most of them have never gone on a steamboat ride!

If this isn't feasible where you live, consider how to create that inspirational experience for your donors in other ways. Could you get a restaurant to donate space or food to your cause, so that for one evening, you could show your monthly donors what their donations are accomplishing, and how much they matter to your nonprofit?

Low-Cost Ideas for monthly donor recognition:

Have a friendraiser for your monthly givers where someone who has benefited from your programs is there, and allow them to tell their story.

- At this friendraiser, you could invite donors to tell their own story with your cause, and offer to highlight them in your newsletter.
- An innovative way to do this is to create a whiteboard or chalkboard word bubble and allow the donor to write their reason for giving or their dream for the future on this word bubble. Taking a picture of this donor with their bubble will be a wonderful way to show others who supports your mission, and why, and make them consider donating as well.

People LOVE seeing their names in print!

Invite your monthly donors to upload a picture of themselves and why they give to a tumblr or a special corner of your website and highlight their pictures and best comments in your next newsletter.

Invite your monthly donors to get on a quarterly conference call where program staff share what's happening on the ground, and express their gratitude to the monthly donors for making the work possible. Recognize the donors who were on the call in your next newsletter, and mention some good questions that they asked, and talk about common misconceptions about your cause. Chances are, if monthly donors had these questions, other donors have these questions too.

Personalization: If you have the budget, see if you can work with a printshop to create some magnets with your donor's name on them, plus your mission, like

"Kelly believes in equality!" or "Sarah speaks up for animals!"

This could also work as a sticker, a bumper sticker, or address labels. According to Paul Bobnak of Who's Mailing What, this is relatively easy for a printshop to do, and what costs pennies on the front end might lead to a lot of more loyal donors on the back end.

(As an aside, according to new trends, this personalized magnet method might also be good to use as a way to get donors to start giving monthly. Bottom line: This new trend of giving the premium before the donor actually gives might help you get more monthly donors on the front end.)

Use the Mail:

At a nonprofit I used to work for, we went out right before Christmas and went to monthly donor's houses and left a little package of clementine oranges, hershey's kisses, and a starbucks giftcard with a thank you note for the monthly donor. If you have under 100 monthly donors, this might work for you. If you have more than that, you might just want to do this with the ones who give over a certain amount.

Did we get pushback from this method? Sure we did. Some donors said, "Please don't use my money to give us presents." But this is something you can also work out through early surveys. Have you created your donor survey yet?

Share with the monthly donors a picture of what they helped create, (could be a child's drawing, could be a photograph) and then write on a handwritten note: "We couldn't have done it without YOU!"

Do you like receiving beautiful letters? If so, could you come up with a little letter that would both speak to your mission and be beautiful? What if you're a Japanese garden? Origami love notes would be totally appropriate.

What if you're an animal nonprofit? Could you get some bulk cards in the shape of the animals you help to send to your monthly donors?

If some idea makes you squeal and say, "Oh, that's CUTE!" then think about it.



Penelope Burk's Checklist of 20 ideas that make a great thank-you note

1. The letter is a real letter, not a pre-printed card.
2. It is personally addressed.
3. It has a personal salutation (no “dear donor” or “dear friend”).
4. It is personally signed.
5. It is personally signed by someone from the highest ranks of the organization
6. It makes specific reference to the intended use of funds.
7. It indicates approximately when the donor will receive an update on the program being funded.
8. It includes the name and phone number of a staff person whom the donor can contact at any time or an invitation to contact the writer directly.
9. It does not ask for another gift.
10. It does not ask the donor to do anything (like complete an enclosed survey, for example.)
11. It acknowledges the donor’s past giving, where applicable.
12. It contains no spelling or grammatical errors.
13. It has an overall “can do”, positive tone as opposed to a hand wringing one.
14. It communicates the excitement, gratitude and inner warmth of the writer.
15. It grabs the reader’s attention in the opening sentence.
16. It speaks directly to the donor.
17. It does not continue to “sell”.
18. It is concise – no more than two short paragraphs long.
19. It is received by the donor promptly.
20. Plus, in some circumstances, the letter is handwritten.

Do you know about Penelope Burk? No? She's the head of Cygnet research, and her book, *Donor Centered Leadership*, is a seriously good investment for your fundraising shop and your nonprofit.

Does this give you any ideas?

What are some unique ways you can think of to thank your monthly donors?

What processes could you put in place to make sure that monthly donors get a unique or surprising thank you?

Resources

[A PDF download from Simone Joyaux](#) about how to keep your donors

Are you doing the best job you can at keeping your donors? [A 9 step communications audit](#) from Tom Ahern

[The Better Thank You letter checklist](#) from Lisa Sargent

[12 ideas on ways to say Thank You](#) from Andy Robinson

[9 Clever Ways to say Thank You](#) from Kivi Leroux Miller

[Your first stewardship plan](#) from Amy Eisenstein

[4 tips to keep monthly donors](#) from Joanne Fritz at Nonprofit.About.com

Conclusion

We're coming into the home stretch!

Are you having fun yet? Have you created a name for your monthly giving program?

Are you looking at what you can give for premiums for your monthly giving program?

What barriers are you running into?

Feel free to send me an email at info@wildwomanfundraising.com
I'd love to hear from you!

Thank you so much for being here.

I am so proud of you for taking action and trying something new!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mazarine Frey". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mazarine" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Frey".

Mazarine