

JUNE TOOL

By Todd McMichen, Consultant

"Moving the kingdom forward in refreshing ways."

toddmcmichen.com

205.223.7803

toddmcmichen.com



Digital Giving Experiences That Inspire Generosity

Summer is the perfect time to focus your attention on behind the scenes work that rarely gets accomplished. There are three big systems that are always running in the background when it comes to donations. Most often they go neglected because we simply never carve out the time to evaluate and improve.

Here are the three important background systems that can garner your attention during the summer:

1. Budget Alignment - This includes a well articulated vision that directs future expenses and calendar planning. The sequence of activities should be to craft your vision, then commit your calendar, followed by channeling your resources. Time and money can only be invested once so lead wisely. The fastest way to increase financial resources is to focus on increasing financial margin by aligning expenses with high production ministries. This type of work takes scheduled time with strategic thinkers documenting the plan for others to execute.

2. Donor Communication - Every donor deserves to be thanked and every life transformation story is the result of invested donors. Ministry simply does not happen on either a small or large scale without generous disciples. Learning to say thank you in a meaningful way to the donor, creating reports articulating both accountability and fruit, then inspiring with generosity next steps should be staple administrative tasks. The list of items needed range from your website, social media, letters, digital giving auto-replies, quarterly reports, and an annual report that communicates to a donor in rewarding ways.

3. Digital Giving Experiences - In today's world this can be quite complex. Most churches do not have digitally trained staff who can build a website, church app, and text giving experiences that release powerful generosity. It is going to take professional partnerships. However, it is critically important that church leaders understand a few basics about the digital giving experience.

Of the three ongoing systems mentioned above, **#3-Digital Giving Experiences**, can either be assumed to be excellent due to the out-of-box solutions provided today or be the most challenging because of the lack of digital expertise on church staff. For these reasons, I want to provide some guided help from the vantage point of a generosity expert as you embark on your summer of planning.

Here are some solid starting points to help improve your digital giving experience.

1. The church is not setting the standard, but it must rise to the standard. Cash and checks are nearly absent elements in modern commerce. The vast majority of transactions are being made digitally. The standard is being set for your people by their everyday online purchases and self-checkout lines at their local places of commerce. Like it or not, your digital giving experiences must rise to the expectation of the donor.

2. Good news. Digital giving platforms for churches have come a long way over the past twenty years. I am a seminary trained pastor who previously directed a digital giving product that included online, app, and text giving. We also transacted gifts made by credit cards, debit cards, ACH payments, items of value, and securities. Here is what I learned, that every church leader needs to know.

- (1) Select a digital giving partner that leads with the donor in mind.** It is easy to let your drive be back office conveniences for your staff. However, this can be achieved while not meeting the standard a donor has based on their everyday experience with digital transactions.
- (2) All-in-one solutions are not for every church.** The larger the church the more sophisticated the solution. Make sure you know the difference between an all-in-one solution embedded in Church Management Software and distinct specialized digital giving solutions that connect to a variety of Church Management Software Applications.
- (3) Understand the fees associated with digital gifts, but do not let them drive the conversation with donors.** Credit cards have transaction fees that are typically higher than debit cards while ACH transactions can be much less. Price needs to factor in your decision of selecting a digital giving provider, however it should not be the driver. **Donor experience is chief followed by a trusted partner with a passion for the local church and excellent customer service.**

Personally, I am not a fan of churches educating their donors on the fee structure related to credit, debit, or ACH gifts. **Giving should feel like giving.** If digital giving is done well it will increase donations and create a time margin for your office staff because of the automation features.

(4) Find the easiest digital giving path to optimize before moving on to others.

There are an ever increasing variety of ways to give digitally from kiosks to apps. Every church does not need to prioritize the same channel. Learn your team, your platform proficiencies, and your people. Most churches are striving for 70-80% of their gifts to be received digitally. Take the time to measure how you are doing, then strategically test and practice new ways of improvement.

Let's start with your website since it can provide the most comprehensive giving experience. Here are some ideas to help you have a fresh take on engaging donors in an inspiring way.

- **Review several websites from nonprofits that you admire.**

It is important to view a few that are well resourced from global nonprofits you respect as well as local nonprofits your people might frequent.

Important items to note include:

1. Lead Messaging on the Home Page
2. Images and Stories of Transformation
3. Active Donor Opportunities

- **Compare to your church's website.**

Is your message driven more by internal programming information or life impact results? How about the quality of images versus the quantity of words? Finally, can the donor easily follow where you are leading?

- **Know your audience.**

My advice would be to establish your website to engage a guest and a donor. I would not create a website to be the all inclusive line of communication for your church. This takes a large staff continually updating the content. If you are speaking to a guest the range of conversation is smaller and the journey can be strategically crafted with minimal updates. The same can be said for donors. This ability to focus your message will increase the quality of excellence you can provide.

- **Every donor has a journey and every donor needs an inspiring experience.**

Lead with transformation not transaction. When someone clicks the "Give" button and it immediately bounces to a credit card transaction page with a dated look, this is not a great first step. Think about creating a Giving page that includes some of the items below.

(1) Stories of how donations have been used to improve the lives of others.

These can be from people attending a ministry on your campus, a participant of a

local ministry partner, or addressing a felt need you serve around the world. It might include stories from all three arenas to show what your church does on a daily, monthly, or yearly basis from right here at home to a distant part of the globe.

- (2) **One powerful Bible verse.** Choose one that reflects the generosity of God to all of us and the opportunity to join in by living a generous life for others. You might consider including a Bible giving hero like the Good Samaritan or the boy who gave the fishes and loaves. Helping the donor attach to another donor is affirming.
- (3) **Answer a few basic questions.** Donors can be comforted by knowing that your church conducts yearly audits, is governed by a board, leverages a highly secure digital giving platform, and is supported by a large number of local families. Being a part of something successful alongside others increases trust. They also want to know that their information is safe, will not be sold, and they will not be spammed.
- (4) **Set up your automated digital gift acknowledgements.** Make sure every donation receives both a confirmation and a word of appreciation. Some platforms allow for these to be customized which is ideal. Each month you could craft a couple of sentences highlighting an active ministry investment that affirms a donor's involvement.
- (5) **Think like a nonprofit thinks.** Reflect back to the nonprofit sites you previously visited. Remember you are also an active nonprofit in your community. Strive to be the most generous and trusted organization in the city. Lead with a positive community facing message.

I hope you have an amazing summer and can carve out the time to work on your systems. Lead well. Think like a nonprofit. Feel like a donor.