

Institutional Advisors

How to Grow Donor Engagement in a More Digital World

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Nonprofits compete with each other for donor attention and donor dollars. As digital channels become increasingly central to donor discovery, nonprofits must adapt by optimizing their online presence for visibility and credibility. This means clearly articulating their mission and impact across their website, social media profiles, and other digital touchpoints, ensuring that AI and search algorithms can easily identify and present their organization in response to donor queries. Consistent messaging, up-to-date information, and engagement on trusted platforms are now critical factors for being included in AI-generated recommendations and search results by potential donors, making digital strategy an essential part of cultivating donor relationships and driving sustainable growth for a nonprofit. This article outlines several essential priorities for nonprofits aiming for growth and relevance in an evolving digital world.

Speed is the new conversion strategy

For many nonprofits, the donate page on the website is the most important revenue asset they own. The speed of this page may decide whether a donation happens. A donate page should load in four seconds or less. If it does not, abandonment rises sharply, by 20 – 25%. This loss is due to friction, not a lack of intent. In a mobile-first world, donors want fast, simple, and smooth transactions.

Speed, clarity, and mobile-first design are revenue drivers. Fast-loading pages with a clear value proposition, minimal fields, and simple payment options consistently outperform complex alternatives. Organizations that consider their website donor page performance as part of the donor experience convert more visitors.

► Website page performance is no longer just a technical concern; it is a primary driver of donor conversion.

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AI has become a primary discovery channel

How donors find nonprofits is changing fast. More people now ask AI tools questions like, “Which nonprofit addresses this issue?” or “Where can I donate to make the greatest impact?”

These tools summarize information quickly for donors. They do not endorse, but they do influence what is seen — and what is overlooked. By drawing from publicly available sources, they provide donors with information such as clarity of mission and impact.

When a nonprofit does not appear in these responses, it is effectively invisible in a growing segment of the discovery world. To evaluate whether AI tools support your visibility, begin by observing how your organization appears in response to donor queries. Many organizations are surprised by the results of testing their presence when donors ask common questions related to their cause or geography. These exercises often reveal gaps, such as unclear explanations, vague outcomes, or insufficient context, that leave donors uncertain.

If your organization is underrepresented or unclear, address these gaps by providing clear, concise educational content. Create straightforward FAQs, concrete descriptions of your impact, and storytelling that explicitly details what the organization does, how it works, and why it is credible. These steps help AI tools pull accurate, relevant information that effectively represents your nonprofit.

These efforts do not require advanced technology investments. They require disciplined communication designed for how people — and AI systems — now seek answers.

- ▶ To remain visible and credible in the digital age, nonprofits must ensure their mission and impact are clearly communicated online so AI tools can accurately present them to potential donors.

Metrics should guide your digital strategy

Digital channels are complex, and there are many metrics surrounding these that can be used. The top nonprofits effectively use metrics surrounding their digital channels to help them make better choices, set priorities, and measure results appropriately. Metrics are not about just collecting lots of data. They are also about finding the most useful metrics to make good decisions. Boards should expect metrics that show how actions lead to outcomes, not just pretty numbers.

Efficient organizations usually track:

- Cost per acquisition and donor lifetime value
- Retention and repeat giving
- Engagement quality, such as shares, saves, and substantive responses.
- Operational indicators like page speed and form completion

Signals related to experience, expertise, authority, and trustworthiness — often referred to as EEAT — are not measured through a single score or rating. Instead, they are suggested through observable indicators. These include credible media mentions, transparency in methods and disclosures, and audience interaction with content over time. Together, these signals help show how trustworthy and credible an organization appears to donors and partners.

- ▶ Use outcome-driven metrics to guide your digital strategy decisions and improvements.

Digital change requires strategic adaptation

The pace of digital change continues to accelerate. Nonprofits should adapt to an environment shaped by AI-driven search, short videos, and increasing privacy constraints.

Organizations that respond strategically — rather than reactively — are better positioned to attract new stakeholders, retain existing donors, and remain relevant over time.

- ▶ The accelerating pace of digital changes requires nonprofits to be strategic with their donors rather than reactive.

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A 90-day roadmap for growing donor engagement in a more digital world

Nonprofits can strengthen digital performance and donor engagement within 90 days. Here is a potential roadmap for your organization with suggestions on how AI tools can make a nonprofit's journey more efficient:

Days 1 – 30

Diagnose and align

Establish a clear baseline across the organization's most critical digital touchpoints. Assess website and donation page performance, with particular attention to speed and mobile usability. Review messaging for clarity and specificity and evaluate how the organization appears across search and AI-driven environments. Use AI-assisted analysis to summarize performance data, identify content gaps, and surface patterns that may not be immediately visible. Define core metrics to measure engagement, conversion, and retention. Once you have assessed where your organization currently stands and identified any gaps, align the organization's digital strategy.

Days 31 – 61

Implement and iterate

Begin rolling out targeted improvements based on initial assessments and strategic alignment. Update website content, streamline donation processes, and enhance mobile accessibility. Leverage AI to automate repetitive tasks, personalize outreach, and test new messaging approaches. Monitor key metrics continuously and make agile adjustments to campaigns and digital touchpoints, ensuring the organization remains responsive to donor feedback and emerging trends.

Days 61 – 90

Optimize and evaluate

Refine conversion pathways and expand initiatives that demonstrate traction. Apply AI-assisted reporting to synthesize results across channels, identify engagement drivers, and highlight opportunities for improvement. Review outcomes against established benchmarks, focusing on engagement quality, conversion performance, and donor retention. Use insights gained to determine next-phase priorities.

Your Bottom Line

Ultimately, nonprofits must adapt their strategy so that their digital channels optimize their impact with donors and drive sustainable growth. By implementing these principles, they can strengthen donor relationships, unlock new revenue opportunities, and significantly expand their long-term impact in an evolving digital landscape.

For more information, [please contact your advisor.](#)

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About the Author

Cindy serves as the National Director, Philanthropic Advice, where she is responsible for introducing a comprehensive suite of sophisticated planning solutions tailored for Nonprofit and Institutional clients. Her role encompasses developing and implementing growth strategies, providing strategic planning advice, conducting governance and policy reviews, offering thought leadership, and delivering education on a range of critical topics. These topics include planned giving, fund accounting, charitable trusts, donor-advised funds, and other services that support Nonprofits with a particular focus on endowments, foundations, and pooled special needs trusts.

Understanding the importance of supporting clients in the impactful work they do, Cindy obtained her Chartered Special Needs Consultant (ChSNC®) designation. This designation enables her to assist people with special needs through planning ideas. She has gained in-depth knowledge of the best strategies and a dynamic understanding of areas such as disability regulations, special needs trusts, ABLE Act, government benefits, Medicaid complexities, special education, estate and retirement planning, and tax implications.



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