

# The Connected Donor



25 Ways to Navigate  
Digital Discipleship  
and Generosity

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The human experience deeply craves meaningful connections, a sense of belonging, and the quest for a purpose that resonates with our souls. Organizations, particularly those rooted in faith or dedicated to philanthropic endeavors, stand at a pivotal crossroads.

In this era, defined by digital advancements, the dynamics of engagement, discipleship, and generosity have undergone a profound transformation. As leaders and stewards of these ideals, it is incumbent upon us to harness the full potential of technology, revolutionizing how we nurture bonds, ignite a spirit of generosity, and amplify our influence to maximize impact.

## Acknowledging the Digital Shift

In today's age, the concept of a "global village" goes beyond a mere cliché. It symbolizes the intricate web of the digital world, where distances vanish with a click, and a cause's pulse can travel across continents in mere moments. This interconnectedness has broadened the scope of our voices and enriched them with the ability to touch individuals on a profoundly personal level, nurturing a fresh era of connection and engagement.

## The Omni-Engagement Pathway

Gone are the days when donors distinguished between forms of outreach—be it social media, email campaigns, or digital video content. To the connected donor, every touchpoint is an opportunity to connect with their chosen organization, a brand with myriad avenues for engagement. For modern organizations, the task is to craft an omni-engagement framework that seamlessly unifies multiple channels to create a cohesive narrative and experience.

## The Journey-Based Approach

Imagine a devout supporter, spearheading your cause, not as a passive observer but as an active participant navigating an intricately designed series of digital touchpoints—each interaction enriching their perception and deepening their involvement in your mission. This is the essence of the Journey-Based Approach. Utilizing technology, we create paths that guide individuals from recognition to regular stewardship, from occasional involvement to unparalleled advocacy.



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## GETTING STARTED

# Five Practical Ways to Adopt a Multi-Channel, Journey-Based Engagement Strategy

1. **Audience Segmentation:** Segment your database based on demographics, interests, and engagement levels to deliver personalized content and interactions across multiple channels.
2. **Omni-Channel Integration:** Integrate various communication channels such as email, social media, website, and events to provide a seamless and consistent journey for your audience.
3. **Content Mapping:** Map out the content journey from awareness to conversion stages, ensuring that each piece of content aligns with the audience's needs and moves them along the engagement path.
4. **Automated Nurturing Campaigns:** Implement automated nurturing campaigns that deliver targeted messages at key touchpoints in your journey design, keeping donors engaged and informed.
5. **Data Analysis and Optimization:** Use data analytics to track engagement metrics, analyze performance, and optimize strategies based on insights gained, ensuring continuous improvement in the multi-channel engagement approach.

## The Foundation of Engagement

To implement our vision of a connected world marked by profound digital engagement, we must adopt tools that enhance the human experience and augment our capacity to connect and inspire.

### Data-Driven Intimacy

Data has often been vilified for detaching us from the human element. However, when deployed with empathy, it becomes a ray of light illuminating the path to deeper relationships. Donor Relationship Management (DRMs) systems, analytics, and personalization engines provide the insights necessary to tailor experiences that resonate on an intensely personal level.



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## The Art of Personalization

Personalization, the fine art of making the personal seem universal, is a key pillar of the modern engagement strategy. By leveraging technology to address the individual, we turn mere moments into memories, generic content into compelling narratives, and stakeholders into staunch advocates.



### GETTING STARTED

## Five Practical Tools to Help You Boost Digital Connections

1. **Social Media Management Platforms:** Tools like Hootsuite, Buffer, or Sprout Social help schedule posts, analyze performance, and efficiently engage with followers across various social media channels.
2. **Email Marketing Software:** Platforms like Mailchimp, Constant Contact, or Sendinblue enable personalized email campaigns, automated workflows, and detailed analytics to enhance audience engagement.
3. **Donor Management Systems (DMS) or Church Management Systems (ChMS):** These database platforms provide an easy-to-use interface for creating and managing engaging content on websites, optimizing user experience, and increasing digital engagement to boost engagement and nurture affinity and connection.
4. **Recurring Giving Platforms:** Implement specialized recurring giving platforms designed to effectively facilitate and manage digital recurring donations. These tools streamline the donation process and offer reporting capabilities to support ongoing engagement and sustain financial support over time.
5. **Analytics and Insights Tools:** Utilize tools like Google Analytics, Hotjar, or SEMrush to gather data on user behavior, website performance, and campaign effectiveness. This will allow for data-driven decisions to optimize digital engagement strategies.



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## Sustaining the Engagement Ecosystem

Creating an initial buzz, a spark of connection is the easy part. The true challenge is to sustain this enthusiasm and continually fan the flames of engagement.

### Storytelling in the Digital Sphere

When it comes to generosity, the power of storytelling reigns supreme. Here, stories of transformations are not whispered over the pulpit but alive in vibrant images, resonating in videos, and echoing in words of gratitude across social feeds. Mastering the art of digital storytelling, one can weave a narrative thread that binds every donor as a character in the story of change.

### Community Building and the Network Effect

The ascendancy of social media and digital forums has handed us the blueprint for community building. Through these platforms, we not only forge connections with individuals but also set the stage for a network effect, where the impact of one's actions is magnified, and the collective discourse echoes the values of our shared mission.



#### GETTING STARTED

### Five Ways to Sustain Digital Connection and Engagement

- 1. Implement Ongoing Communication Strategies:** Establish regular communication channels such as newsletters, social media updates, and email campaigns to keep donors engaged and informed about the organization's impact and initiatives.
- 2. Host Virtual Events and Webinars:** Organize virtual events, webinars, and interactive sessions to provide donors with opportunities to actively participate, learn, and connect with the cause and other supporters in a digital setting.



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- 3. Customize Donor Interactions:** Utilize data insights and CRM systems to customize donor interactions. Acknowledge their contributions, share personalized impact stories, and express gratitude to foster a sense of connection and belonging.
- 4. Create Engaging Content Across Platforms:** Develop compelling storytelling content in various formats, such as videos, images, and blogs, to showcase the organization's impact, celebrate donor contributions, and inspire continued support within the digital sphere.
- 5. Encourage User-Generated Content:** Foster a sense of community participation by encouraging donors to share their experiences, testimonials, and stories of impact on social media platforms, creating a ripple effect of engagement and advocacy for the cause.

## Measuring the Immeasurable

One cannot improve what one does not measure. In the realm of digital discipleship and giving, performance metrics serve as lighthouses, guiding us toward understanding the efficacy of our strategies.

### Engagement Metrics and the Journey Map

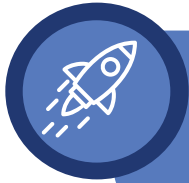
Gauging engagement is no longer a task of merely counting likes and shares. It involves tracking complex journeys using diverse metrics, illuminating the path that most effectively transforms curiosity into conviction, and followers into fervent supporters.

### The Currency of Gratitude

Amidst the numbers and graphs, we must not overlook the most vital currency of all—gratitude. Every interaction and every gift must be a cause for thanksgiving. Technology gives us the tools to express our thanks on a previously unseen scale, reaping dividends in loyalty and advocacy.



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## GETTING STARTED

# Five Ways to Consistently Measure, Learn, and Improve

1. **Define Key Engagement Metrics:** Identify and define relevant engagement metrics beyond likes and shares to comprehensively measure the effectiveness of digital discipleship and giving strategies.
2. **Implement Journey Mapping:** Create a journey map that tracks the path from curiosity to conviction for followers, using diverse metrics to understand how engagement unfolds and transforms over time.
3. **Integrate Gratitude Metrics:** Integrate gratitude metrics into performance tracking, ensuring that every interaction and contribution is acknowledged and celebrated, fostering loyalty and advocacy among supporters.
4. **Utilize Technology for Expressing Thanks:** Leverage technology tools to express gratitude at scale, whether through personalized messages, automated thank-you emails, or interactive platforms that allow for meaningful interactions with donors and followers.
5. **Analyze Data and Adjust Strategies:** Analyze engagement metrics, gratitude indicators, and journey maps regularly to gain insights into what resonates with the audience, refine strategies accordingly, and continue to improve the impact and effectiveness of digital discipleship and giving initiatives.

## Overcoming the Challenges

Despite the strides we've made, challenges loom. The digital space is a double-edged sword, capable of amplifying our praises and pitfalls.

### The Risk of Overwhelming Donors

In our enthusiasm to engage, we risk overwhelming the very flock we seek to lead. In an era of information bombardment, discernment and restraint are the virtues we must espouse. The challenge



here is not to communicate less but to ensure that every communication contributes to the depth and not the breadth of our relationships.

## The Battles of Authenticity and Trust

Within the vast sea of digital content, a tempting allure emerges to commercialize trust. Our true mission lies in preserving the sacred bond of trust, ensuring that each digital engagement resonates with the genuine essence of our purpose. Let technology serve as the enhancer of our principles, not as a mere reflection.



### GETTING STARTED

## Avoid These Five Common Pitfalls

1. **Risk of Communication Overload:** Excessive communication can overwhelm donors and lead to disengagement and fatigue. It's crucial to balance staying connected and respecting their attention by ensuring each interaction adds value to the relationship.
2. **Struggles with Authenticity:** In the digital realm, there is a temptation to prioritize commercial gains over authenticity, jeopardizing followers' trust. Maintaining authenticity in all digital engagements is essential to uphold the integrity of the organization's mission and values.
3. **Lack of Personalization:** Failing to personalize interactions can result in a generic and impersonal experience for donors, diminishing the emotional connection and reducing engagement levels. Tailoring communications to resonate with individual donors is key to fostering meaningful relationships.
4. **Ignoring Data Insights:** Neglecting to analyze data insights and metrics can lead to missed opportunities for improvement and growth. Utilizing data-driven decision-making processes is vital for understanding donor behavior and preferences and optimizing engagement strategies.
5. **Mismatched Technology Integration:** Implementing technology without aligning it with organizational values and goals can create a disconnect between digital efforts and the core mission. Ensuring that technology enhances and reflects your vision is essential for building trust and meaningful engagements.





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## The Path Forward

The convergence of cutting-edge technology and the philanthropic spirit presents an extraordinary and unparalleled opportunity to reimagine the essence of giving, the profound sense of purpose, and the core of community belonging. Our directive is crystal clear—leverage these innovative tools to establish a rich and interconnected community that creates meaningful connections with donors and revitalizes the spirit of our human need for connection.

It's important to remember that the true measure of success in this venture lies not in the sheer volume of transactions we undertake but in the vibrancy of the relationships we nurture, the unwavering commitment to discipleship, and the profound impact we collectively achieve.

## A New Beginning

In the ever-evolving landscape of today's tech-driven world, where interactions occur at the speed of a click, we stand not merely at a crossroads but teeter on the edge of a promising new dawn. This new era heralds a fresh beginning, where the intangible threads of digital connectivity seamlessly intertwine with timeless virtues such as empathy, continuous learning, and a sense of community.

Within this harmonious convergence, as mentors and guardians of this digital realm, we are presented with a unique opportunity – and a weighty responsibility – to uplift, empower, and honor the very essence of our collective human pursuits.



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## About the Authors



**Joe Park** leads the Horizons Stewardship team of 40 Ministry Strategists, ICF-trained coaches, and support staff in their mission to help churches and faith-based nonprofits grow disciples and fund ministry. The Horizons team has guided the raising of over 10 billion dollars in annual, capital and planned giving. Joe is a former bank CEO who frequently speaks on subjects impacting generosity. His weekly blog is followed by over 45,000 church leaders.



**Ben Stroup** serves as the Chief Growth Architect and President at Velocity Strategy Solutions, a next-generation strategy and management consulting firm dedicated to empowering visionary leaders by aligning teams, simplifying technology, eliminating complexity, and driving revenue. With a rich background spanning over two decades in various sectors, Ben is recognized as a forward-thinking innovator excelling in change management, digital transformation, and data-driven decision-making. Beyond his professional achievements, Ben is an author, speaker, and podcast guest, having written and edited numerous books and articles. Together with his wife and two sons, Ben calls Nashville, Tennessee, home.

## About Horizons Stewardship

Horizons Stewardship helps church and faith-based nonprofit leaders grow disciples and fund ministry through a collaborative framework that is tailored to the unique culture of the church, aligned with leadership's vision, and implemented through coaching, planning, technology, and analytics to ensure the church lives into its full ministry potential and impact.

After more than three decades of working with thousands of churches to raise billions of dollars for ministry projects, Horizons has refined a deeply integrated, spiritually-focused approach that consistently results in more ministry funding and more effective disciple-making strategies.

Horizons' ministry team of International Coaching Federation (ICF) trained coaches are ready to help you discover a proven, effective process that will empower you to move forward with clarity and confidence. On average, churches that partner with Horizons experience a double-digit increase in giving within the first twelve months.

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