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Love Thy Reader | About Donor Communications | *from Tom Ahern*



If you had more money ... you *could* do more good.
If you do better communications ... you *will* have more money.

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From Future Fundraising Now...

Jeff Brooks says, charities don't know jack about their donors

Those are my words, not his. But if you're any kind of professional, you readily agree, of course. Jeff was in this particular [instance](#) talking about [Seth Godin's](#) profound comments: "If people aren't donating to your cause, it's because you're not telling a story. They aren't buying a story about you, they're buying a story about themselves. So if your fundraising is all about how awesome your organization is, you're not helping them tell their story." Thank U, Seth. Thank U, Jeff. This is it. This is the physics of fundraising. This is all there is.

Best practices dept...

Michigan State holiday greeting

Did *your* org. make a good (*great!*) impression this holiday season with an inspiring online greeting directed at your "natural constituency" (in this case, alumni)? The MSU College of Arts & Letters did, in my opinion, with this [YouTube](#)

What I learned in 2013

For one thing, I learned that the email subject line, "You are not alone," gets opened way more than most. As you just demonstrated.

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On the issue of pumping more revenue out of your current donor base, I learned from Uncle Roger and Uncle Tom at [The Agitator](#): "On average, we have found that if you have 5,000 donors, a 10 point increase in retention could mean \$175,000 in additional net income ... 10,000 donors and you put an additional \$350,000 to your bottom line ... 20,000 donors, \$700,000 ... and so forth."

Better retention? It could be for fundraising what fracking was for US oil industry, releasing entirely new reserves.

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On the question of just how you *do* retain more donors, I learned (again from The Agitator): "A three-minute thank you call will boost 1st year retention by 30%."

**video.** Sim one graduated from MSU. We have an endowed fund there. And we deeply admire MSUs ever-striving donor communications; if you're looking for best practices....

Blogs I follow...

### Tony Elischer

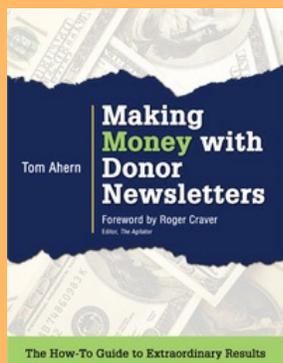
Tony's Sisyphean task of the moment is a "[new lexicon](#)" for fundraising. I love it. Solid NEW thought about brand, retention, 'major' donors (despicable phrase), "investors," need, stories...etc. AND great quotes (Simone and I are "quote addicted"). Judge for yourself.

If you're headed for San Antonio, AFP Int'l 2014...

### DRAT, I won't see you there. But...!

Hey, what's new? We couldn't come to terms. I wanted to hog 3 speaking slots. But poor AFP could only afford to allot me the one, for an hour and 15 minutes. I est. it would cost me about \$4-5K to do that single 75-minute presentation, what with expenses and lost revenue. So my Scrooge-like inner accountant said, "Are you nuts?" On the other hand, if you go to San Antonio (and I urge you to do that at least once): do NOT miss [Tony Elischer's](#) San Antonio production number for [AFP Int'l](#). It will be one of a kind and breathtaking (yes, he and Jon [Duschinsky](#) are that good; just ask the attendees at their inaugural production in Toronto 2012).

### It's here!



Which reminded me of something I'd learned in 2012 from The Agitator as well: how Uncle Angel Aloma, the ED at [Food for the Poor](#) and a brilliant donor communicator, raked in an extra \$450,000 in generosity from 25,000 select donors. His secret? **He was extra grateful.** At the beginning of the year, he sent an extra thank you note to these donors, without any ask.

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When I, the donor (a.k.a., the customer), "buy" you (my charming new charity), I'm in an emotional state: a state of enjoyment.

I *like* helping. I enjoy doing good. Being generous. Truly. Physically. When I act that way, my brain feeds me dopamine rewards. That particular stimulus/response is built into human wiring. If I could afford to write checks to charity all day, I'd stay high as a kite.

But there is also a phenomenon let's call "**donor's remorse.**"

It's just like buyer's remorse: an oppressive feeling of disappointment and doubt that you've made a bad purchase decision. It's a feeling of potential loss that happens immediately and automatically as soon as the first gift is completed.

I'm feeling it right now. I just gave \$500 of my hard-earned income to a political candidate whom I trust and admire. And yet I wonder....

Donor's remorse is immediate because, as Uncle [Alan Clayton](#) loudly and often points out, all emotions *are* instantaneous.

Should we despair? No: fundraisers can to a large degree *control* donor's remorse.

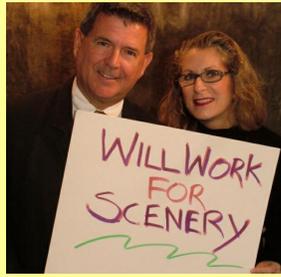
They can, for instance, reverse it, through effective "new donor communications" (think "welcome kit"). You can quickly convert donor's remorse into a strong platform for long association and cultivation, by substituting a positive emotion for a negative ... but DO put the emphasis on the quickly.

Angel Aloma's secret to success was brilliantly obvious: **Deliver more gratitude than expected.**

You know, it's amazing how many charities do gratitude badly.

Step #1 in any recovery is simple: "Admit the problem."

Heavily revised and illustrated 2nd edition.  
From [Emerson & Church](#).



They grow up so fast...

**This was shot** in 2005. Eight years later, I feel like saying, "We'll work for scenery that has escalators and a wine cellar."

## Joinme?

¶ [Linked In](#): a big bunch  
¶ [Twitter](#): 1,172 followers  
Twitter name: thattomahern  
¶ [E-news](#): 7,856 subscribers  
¶ [Facebook](#): 210 friends

## Working on....

The biggest health care case in the world ... a new exam book on donor communications ... North America's oldest Boys & Girls Club ... an audit of an environmental group that is stitching together a New Wilderness ... Canadian deadbeats ... and SO much more ....

What's new on [SOFII](#)?

## Need a good idea RIGHT NOW?

Then review this freshly updated [list](#) of SOFII's **latest** exhibits. SOFII stands for the *Showcase of Fundraising Innovation and Inspiration*. This big-hearted, mostly volunteer, London-based nonprofit collects and annotates examples of **SUCCESSFUL** donor communications from around the world ... and then gives you **FREE** access. I'm there often.

Could they take the heat? Well, they came into my kitchen...

**Enter a GALLERY of FRANK critiques ... solely for your error-avoiding, idea-stealing**

(Angel Aloma did. In 2005 he realized that Food for the Poor was doing low-yield "corporate" rather than high-yield "donor-centered" communications ... and the rest is Christ-centered, feeding-the-desperately-hungry, largest-US-international-relief-and-development-agency history.)

Are the right people on the bus, Uncle [Jim Collins](#) might ask?

You have charity staff themselves vandalizing successful fundraising, calling it "poverty porn," which [apparently?] donors watch for some very wrong and ugly reasons. The burning question for our industry, for our times: *Do* donors get off on the suffering of others?

Oh: then you have the idiots who think we need to re-engineer our donors and their innate charitable impulses. By the way, have you seen Eric Friedman's new book, [Reinventing Philanthropy](#)? Read how the smartest guy in the room sees the charity industry.

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[Impact Communications](#) taught me: "When asked, what's the single biggest reason donors say they stop giving to an organization? Over-solicitation. But ask them what that means and they explain, 'They asked me for another gift before they told me what they did with the last one.' So over-solicitation is really under-communication and failed donor stewardship."

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I asked a veteran observer, "Why do *you* think the fundraising industry can't get its act together? I don't think I've seen a positive metric since 2008."

"Well, there's online," she said without much enthusiasm.

## Et tu, online?

Maybe.

Barack Obama's 2012 presidential campaign used email appeals to raise \$690 million from 4.5 million people. That's an average gift of \$153; *not* small change.

Online giving *is* increasing: steadily, reassuringly, predictably. Yet at this time its total remains an un-transformative fraction of the giving pie (omitting Mr. Obama's success).

Shall we be a teensy bit analytical?

### pleasure

Brave people send me samples of their donor comms, for a **free, nitty-gritty** - and **public** - critique. Find out exactly what they did wrong or right, and learn from their mistakes or victories.

Available as

[downloadable PDFs](#)

with pop-up comments.

I won't be critiquing for awhile in 2013, due to other commitments.

### Joyaux Associates

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### Where will Tom speak next?

Check upcoming events on Tom's international [speaking CALENDAR!](#)



[Ourhouseinfrance.com](http://Ourhouseinfrance.com)

### My blog

### My website

For one obvious thing, some of the steady, annual increase in online giving **simply** doesn't count as big news. It's **simply** a shift in fulfillment habits amongst the philanthropically inclined; you know, *those* people.

They're moving away from the relative inconvenience of check-writing to the relative convenience of clicking on things.

If the Internet has done any one thing to massively change human behavior, it's the introduction of clicking. It turns us all into geniuses: we click and something happens. It makes passivity (staring at a screen) into action. *How great is that?*

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## Bloomerang client sees improves retention 10% in just 6 months



Here's their Tweet.

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## Welcome at last: young donors

The only truly "new" (introduced decades ago) bright spot in donor acquisition and retention for established charities seems to be 'street' fundraising.

It's an acquisition method for monthly contributions that's called 'face-to-face' fundraising outside the United States. It's also derided where it's long established as "chugging" (charity mugging). It can be pretty intrusive in a rich city like London.

It happens on the sidewalks, between **well-trained** and **personable** younger people ... and their **peers**. As a 60-something I have walked utterly unmolested (giggling) down a busy sidewalk lined with "chuggers." I was invisible to their radar because of my advanced age.

Done right, street fundraising's ability to Hoover up huge numbers of never-seen-before younger donors is truly amazing. There is a PR stumbling block: the first 11 months of a new donor's gifts are transferred to the for-profit company that trained the chuggers, last time I checked.

Do charities STILL net huge increases in giving, to fund growth of the mission? Yes, they absolutely do.

Which, Charity Navigator and other one-size-fits-all evaluators, is ALL you really need to know: the mission is growing. More are being helped.

**Take this factoid with your morning coffee:**

About a fifth of the annual charitable income in Australia now arrives via monthly gifts that were mostly obtained from 20-to-40-somethings with credit cards ... and a willingness to try to save the world.

Younger donors? They are signing up in droves.

Just NOT by the traditional methods. (Though you'd think after 25 years street fundraising would be deemed "conventional." That's an entire generation, after all.)

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Back issues of this newsletter? [Here...](#)

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## **NEW "DonorComms" collection**



### **Wear your heart on/near your sleeve**

*Writer-wear*©. *Advice-wear*®. *Reminder-wear*™. **We do message. You customize! PICK your colors, sizes and styles ... huge range! Statement T-shirts (and the occasional iPhone sleeve) for the wordy wise.**

[Click here to see for yourself!](#)

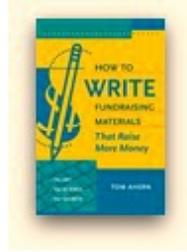
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How to write a case for support.  
Read the Kool-Aid.

See what Amazon reviewers say...

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How to write fundraising  
materials your donors will love.

See what Amazon reviewers say...

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**'Til next time...**  
donor communications  
true believers!

