

How to thank your amazing givers

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Showing appreciation for a gift is always a sign of good manners, and everyone knows the value of a thank-you note. But, how many times do you thank the givers in your church?

Here are five creative ways to let donors know how much you appreciate them.

1. Creative contribution receipts

Donor receipts are a requirement of the IRS; but with a little thought, they also can be a wonderful way to thank your donors and increase donor engagement.

“Think about it,” says Kindful blogger Carrie Horton, “donor receipts are the only piece of mail donors expect (and even want) to receive from your organization.”

Instead of the typical, boring emails or printed receipts, spend a little time putting together communication pieces that pop! Make your receipts look professional, appear consistent with the rest of your church communications and — actually *thank* donors for their gift (not just state what they gave).

Perhaps most importantly, your receipts should inspire people to donate more, without directly asking for another gift.

Donor-centered thank-yous should:

- Be personally addressed and signed (not necessarily handwritten, but that's always a nice touch);
- Catch the reader's attention by giving examples of how the donated funds are being used; and
- Be concise but genuine.

2. Welcome packages

When looking for creative ways to thank donors, welcome packages are always a hit. In addition to expressing your sincere appreciation for the donation, a welcome package should include quotes, statistics, inspirational stories or photographs that show the difference your church is making.

Small gifts like customized bookmarks with an inspirational message or a nice ink pen are always a good fit, or you could spend a little more money to give your donors a specially printed coffee mug, T-shirt or cloth bag. Additions of special treats such as candy or homemade goodies also are cost-effective ways to show your appreciation.

3. Photo books

Did someone donate a large sum of money to help fund a special mission trip? Did special donors make vacation Bible school possible this year? Did a group of givers sponsor scholarships for youth to attend camp?

A photo book of the experiences is a great way to say thanks. Most places that offer regular photo developing offer photo books as well. In addition, sites like Mixbook, Shutterfly and Snapfish offer easy-to-use online services to create photo books.

With so many companies to choose from, you may want to check out photo book reviews to find which company is best for you. And don't be intimidated. While photo books are much more impressive than their old-school photo album counterpart, they aren't that difficult to create. There are tons of great tips for creating photo books.

The process is generally quite simple:

1. Choose the photos you want to use.
2. Upload them onto the site.
3. Position the photos into the templates offered.
4. Add titles, subtitles and special messages.

You can customize as much or as little as desired.

While photo books can be a bit pricey to distribute to a large audience, some sites like Picaboo give you a link to view the ebook version at no cost. You can share the link on Facebook or send it in thank you emails to as many people as you like.

Also, many sites offer discounts for multiple purchases, and sites such as Groupon often offer discounts of as much as 80 percent off. Just search Groupon using the term “photo book” and several deals will appear.

4. Thank-you videos

“The person opening the envelope wants to hear a story,” says church giving blogger Ben Stroup. Say thanks by creating your own video.

Use creative video production techniques to create a short (1- to 2-minute) clip about the story of your church, how it is impacting your community or the way in which donations are being used. Mail the DVDs with a personal thank-you note to your givers.

5. Calls and cards

Sometimes, it’s the smallest things that make the biggest difference. Express your appreciation by calling the givers in your church. It’s not necessary to mention the specific amount of the gift, but just let them know that you are thankful.

Phone call thank-yous also give you the opportunity to develop a stronger relationship with your donors. You may want to ask if there are ways you can pray for them, and maybe even pray with them over the phone.

If you are enlisting volunteers for this assignment, practice what needs to be said or offer suggested scripts. However, remember, in order for it to be meaningful, the appreciation must be sincere.

Another great way to show your gratitude is by remembering days that are special to your givers. Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and holidays offer great opportunities to send greeting cards with personal messages. If you prefer email to snail mail, you may want to check out sites like 123greetings, Blue Mountain, American Greetings and Hallmark, all of which offer various ecards; some are even free.

Saying thanks is the polite thing to do, and giving begets giving. Small expressions of appreciation will help your donors feel loved and involved with the ministries of the church. That can help increase their desire to continue giving.