

Donor Perception in the New Media Era

First, a little background: While focus groups are a rich source of qualitative material, that is ideas, actions and reactions, they do not represent the population statistically and no statistical inferences can or should be drawn from these findings – you can't straight-line this research data and say "this is a fact" or "80% of people do this."

The individuals who took part in this study were recent Mission donors who had mailed at least two gifts totaling \$25 within 12 months. They were a mix of men and women and most were 55 or older. One special focus group was conducted with those between the ages of 24-36, made up of a mix of donors, volunteers and event participants.

And yes, there were significant differences in the responses of these two groups.



Joe Grieco is the Founder and President of Grieco Research Group (GRG), the largest single marketing research group in the U.S. dedicated solely to qualitative research.

Joe's research experience has given him a unique perspective on the lifestyles, values, needs and continuing social development of Americans of every generation – including Baby Boomers, Gen-Xers and Echo Boomers/ Millennials.

Prior to launching GRG, Joe was a Senior Vice President at McCann-Erickson, an international advertising and marketing agency. His background is in social psychology, marketing and literature.

GRG has conducted several qualitative focus group studies for Brewer Direct, the most recent of which provide the basis for this report on Donor Perceptions in the New Media Era.

This summarized presentation from Brewer Direct's 2013 Institute is the result of eight focus group studies in seven cities with 83 Mission donors.

Older donors are in that stage of their life often where they're "comfortable." They are becoming empty nesters, or the family is growing, and getting out of the house. Or, they're settled into retirement and they're often comfortable with where they are at in life. Younger donors, on the other hand, are "uncomfortable." They're building a family, or paying off student loans, trying to get a house. These concerns are distractions from the consideration of the work Missions are doing.

Older donors are able to discuss their motivations – why they give. They've thought about it and they can talk about it and put it in context. Younger donors can't even begin to talk about why they give. They're very skeptical of everything, and before they talk about why they give, they often talk about why they don't give. So they start from a very different point of view. Older donors draw on their belief system, and spirituality is a big part of that. Younger donors draw on their rationality and their skepticism of the world around them.

So when both of these groups talk about their perceptions of Missions – the way they perceive Missions and Missions' service to humanity and God – they are coming from very different perspectives.

Donor Insight: Before the group discussion began, all donors were asked to complete a questionnaire that tracks motivations – why people do what they do. The eight primary motivators include:

Curiosity
Creativity
Courage
Humor
Spirituality
Kindness
Humility
Leadership

These are the things that make people “happy” ...exercising their spirituality or their kindness.

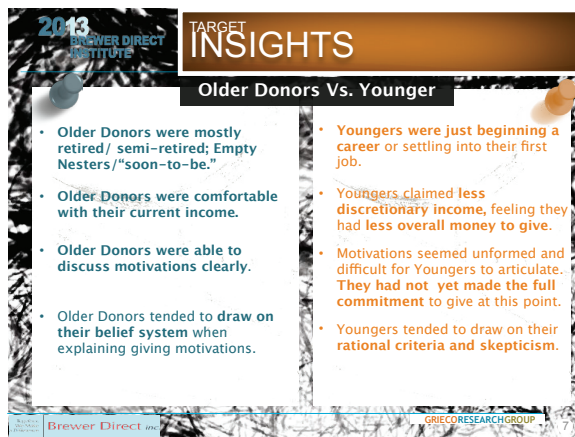
Across all sessions, with both age groups, two motives spiked consistently:

Spirituality **Kindness**

Just as you might suspect, as people age, what makes them happy changes. Older donors ranked spirituality over kindness, while younger donors reversed the priority.

What this tells us is that the younger individuals who took part are more at home with that outer world, where they can practice an act of kindness, than the inner world, where they realize that what they're doing is part of their spiritual life as well.

Interestingly, across all the motives, the one that was least impactful, least motivating, was humility. And what that tells us about our donors is that they are not necessarily “humble” people. They’re proud to give. And when they do give, they want to be acknowledged and rewarded. In other words, you’d better say thank you, or they won’t give again.



Attitudes & Behaviors Toward Giving

When older donors discuss their motivations to give to a charity or a cause, we found three themes, regardless of which city we were in or what group were talking to:

- 1 Recognition of a need, and being in a positive position to act
- 2 A spiritual and moral responsibility to do the right thing
- 3 A personal feeling of fulfillment

"I have been blessed and therefore I want to give back."

"It's the right thing to do... God commands that we give."

"Giving makes me feel good...I love to give."

Attitudes & Behaviors Toward Giving

If older donors have a feeling of spirituality and an almost Biblical anchor point, younger donors resort to more rational criteria when discussing their giving:

- 1 Selective, wary or careful about giving; do lots of research before a gift is made
- 2 Choose organizations that are personally meaningful and trusted
- 3 Choose local organizations that improve the community in a very real way.

This last point is especially interesting and a big one for younger donors. Their charities of choice tend toward animals, animal welfare and environmental causes. And yes, homelessness is on the list, but not at the top.

Younger donors also speculated about volunteering versus giving... donating their time instead of their money. “A lot of it has to do with your situation in life,” said one. “Right now, I have a lot of time to give, but I don’t have a lot of money to give.”

Whether they’re students or not, many of these younger donors have what we call “broke student syndrome.” Some of that has to do with the economic climate that they’re in, or the debt that they’ve incurred as a student, or the idea of a prolonged milestone in your life stage – delayed marriage, delayed child bearing, delayed home acquisition, etc.

“There are all these reports you can read and see where you’re money is going.”

“I bust my butt for my money, so I would like 100% to go toward what I think it’s going toward.”

“I give to the Humane Society. I’ve gotten both of my animals from there.”

Attitudes & Behaviors Toward Giving

Not only does volunteering provide a way for them to “do” rather than “give,” it’s a way to meet other young people. So it’s important to keep in mind that for younger age groups, fulfilling some of your commitments to society is also a way of socializing with peers, meeting other young people and having fun – without financial risk.

So while younger donors may not give “then and there,” later on down the road, when they’re able, they will. Sparking their interest now with special events and volunteer work may produce monetary benefits later on.

The recent recession has also had an impact on giving.

Across all age groups, three giving patterns were fairly evenly represented:

- 1 I have less/I give less frequently
- 2 No change in the total amount I give
- 3 I give more/give more frequently because the need is so great

Donor Insight: Regardless of their giving patterns, almost all donors said they had altered their behavior to reflect more focus on their giving. That is, they are giving to fewer charitable causes.

Attitudes & Behaviors Toward Giving

The Constant Sum Exercise

Each donor was asked to imagine he/she had \$100 which represented his/her charitable contributions for the entire year. The question is: Who's going to get what?

- Missions topped the list among older donors in every market, receiving an average of \$26 out of every \$100.
- Missions dropped to a low of \$16 among younger donors, subordinate to animal shelters and other social causes spread over a very wide spectrum.

The closest competitors for Missions' Share of Wallet in each market showed consistent patterns:

- The Salvation Army
- Local food banks
- Red Cross
- Teen/child welfare
- Veterans assistance
- Medical/disease research

Please note that respondents were asked to exclude their local churches. Adding these organizations to the equation changes everything.

What does this mean for Missions? Applying the basic tenets of marketing, it means Missions compete with the Salvation Army and food banks. So it's vitally important to set yourself apart from these organizations. Ask yourself how you are different and what is unique about your organization or the services you are offering.

caring
 compassionate
concerned

Perceptions of Missions

Another subset of perceptions has to do with “management”:

Goal-oriented	Inspiring and Empowering
Down-to-earth	Hard-working
Dedicated	Good Listeners
Non-judgmental	

These “Mission-personified” perceptions are wonderful, and these ideas are strongly imbedded in donors. But what do they really know, or not know, about you?

First, they don’t know everything. And even though they are your donors, they often don’t know your name!

They do know that you:

- Provide basic, immediate needs for food and shelter.
- Have a local, visible presence and long-standing service to the community.
- Are viewed positively as “proactive” and “competent” at handling issues of homelessness in the community.
- Are tolerant and patient – “no time limited to duration of care,” “does not force a Christian decision” (this from non-faith donors).

There is an especially high regard for Missions among volunteers who had taken part in toy drives, kitchen duty, donation drop-offs and events linked to local churches.

giving
 generous

SELFLESS

SUPPORTIVE

loving

KIND
warm

Perceptions of Missions

But what they don't know is even more interesting:

- Lower/inconsistent awareness of long-term services including drug rehabilitation, job preparation, transitional housing and spiritual counseling
- Vague knowledge of programs for women, children and families

Donor Insight: There's an especially high regard for the Missions among people who have visited your facilities, or come in contact with Mission personnel or Mission buildings. If people can touch you some way, they can see what you're doing, where you're doing it, what it looks like, how it feels, how it smells...if they can expose their senses to you, it deepens their desire to contribute to you.

What do donors think your priorities should be?

Donors felt that feeding, housing, and providing clothing, especially for impoverished men, is the most vital and most important Mission priority: Physical needs first, other needs later.

Second, the Mission should save, sustain and solve the problems of homelessness over the long haul.

What do they do?

"They provide food and shelter to homeless men."

"They take in drunks, alcoholics and dope users."

"I think their priority is saving souls."

"To be honest, I thought they only fed homeless people."

Methods of Solicitation and Giving

Donors live in an increasingly digital world.

- Almost all had a computer and an e-mail account.
- Most had visited a charity's website or researched a charity online, however, only a few of the older donors had made an actual online donation, indicating that their internet usage is primarily for information purposes.
- About half of older donors owned a smart phone, and just a few had ever used "text-to-donate," mainly for disaster relief.
- Almost half of older donors have a Facebook account while all but one of the younger donors was on Facebook. (Older donors are sometimes reluctant Facebook users who keep in touch with grandchildren and trade photos – they don't understand what it means to "like" an organization and fear it means they'll be tracked or their privacy will be invaded.)
- Twitter and Instagram were "up and coming" platforms among younger donors.

In our discussion of digitization and a cyber-world, we observed extreme mindsets on both sides. We had those who are staunchly resistant to a digitally advancing world, and those who were technologically savvy, digitally active, and embraced a "smart" world.

Those who are resistant to a digitally advanced world are NOT donating online, making purchases or shopping online. They're not using their credit card online. "An automatic withdrawal from my account? I would feel that I had lost control of my money."

Methods of Solicitation and Giving

We forget sometimes how important the act of writing a check is to some of our older donors... people who grew up writing checks. Writing out the check, signing it with your signature, putting it in an envelope, putting a stamp on the envelope, taking it to the post office, that archaic way of sacrificing is very important to some people. That ritual that they go through fulfills that idea of giving. Checks and mail are “safe” and “familiar.”



Those who were technologically savvy and digitally active embrace this smart world and several, mainly those under 50, had made the jump to automatic monthly giving, or bill-paying for charitable donations, and actually preferred the convenience of giving my credit card, debit card or, PayPal.



Internet savvy younger donors were using Facebook and up-and-coming social networks such as Twitter or Instagram regularly, not only as a means of connecting, but as a means of getting their news and communicating with others about important events. While QR codes may be a hot new technology, younger donors felt scanning might be “too much work.”



Facebook and other social networks are a good example of passive interaction: the organization does most of the work, sending out notifications, updates and information.

They view paperless transactions as “least wasteful” and “least costly,” and have little or no fear of online identity theft.

Methods of Solicitation and Giving

So while older donors recognize that social media is becoming an important part of a new world, as an important tool for the younger generations, they don't want organizations to "isolate" their generation by getting rid of the mail and letters.

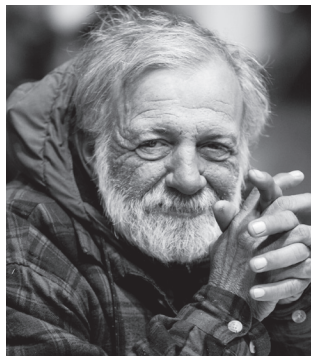
A change of heart?

After we took donors to each Mission's website and showed them how easy it was to donate online, some older donors said they would "maybe" feel compelled to give online, by credit card if:

- 1 It's for an immediate, urgent need
- 2 It's easy
- 3 It's secure (encrypted)
- 4 It's from a known and trusted organization
- 5 It's clear that there is no charge to the donor and efficient for the organization
- 6 It's clear the donor will not be bombarded with requests after donating

What motivates giving?

Testimonials and stories and emotional narratives are triggers for the older donors. They love to hear the story of the man who had a terrible problem in his life and maybe resulted in alcohol or drug addiction. He found the Mission or the Mission found him, and he was saved both physically and spiritually.



Methods of Solicitation and Giving

Fundamentally, the choices were similar between older donors and younger donors.

What they responded to best was aligning the Mission services with active human values.

This...

Provide meals
Shelter
Compassionate
Caring

Not this...

Supply meals
Lodging

Donor Insight: When you talk about the recipient, help the donor visualize the basic services given to a real human being, rather than using terms that neutralize people.

This...

Homeless men, women
and children
Homeless neighbors

Not this...

The needy
Needy person
The homeless

Portray the plight or danger that these real humans face as solvable problems.

This...

Hopeless
Hungry
Disadvantaged

Not this...

Lost
Addicted

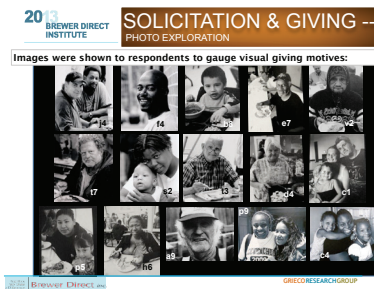
Methods of Solicitation and Giving

One picture, a thousand words.

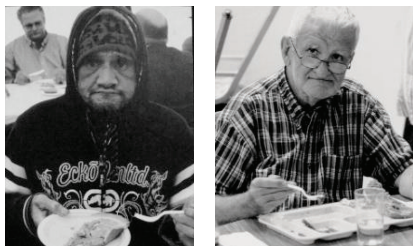
Images and perceptions. Who is homeless? Who needs help? Who will YOU help?

Participants were shown several images to gauge their motivation to give.

Images of perceived “homeless men” were central to the giving motive.



Elderly men who were perceived as “down and out” but looked “hopeful” effectively showed the impact of the Mission’s help and the “face” of the Mission.



Women and children are considered atypical recipients of help from Missions, but were emotionally captivating for all age groups. The perception is that these are possibly battered women, who “recently came upon hard times” but “they’re happy together because of the Mission.”



Methods of Solicitation and Giving

A young child pictured alone with food is perceived as helpless, in need of protection. “He needs more help; we need to protect the innocent.”



Attention to detail with a photo is also important. The “cues” in the picture tell the story

- Food (on plates) cued perceptions of hunger
- Long tables indicated capacity to serve
- Crowded tables indicated a need for more space
- Cots indicated shelter

Should your photos be black and white or color? When we showed the same photo in black and white, versus its color counterpart, we got some very interesting responses.



“In black and white, this man is the face of the Mission.” “In black and white, this young boy is the innocent child who needs protection.” Photos in color were thought to “take away from the idea of the person.” What respondents are saying is that if you want to evoke emotion, do it in black and white... but you must continue to test!

What we think we've learned.

- 1 Begin to cultivate younger donors where they live and drive visits and volunteers to the Mission.
- 2 Where applicable, strengthen awareness and community involvement through the Mission thrift store: Gen Yers are “into” vintage clothing, recycling and bargain hunting.
- 3 Raise online visibility through social networking: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or the next new digital magnet.
- 4 Don't trade analog dollars for digital dimes. Build and diversify revenue streams, but protect the older donors who give by mail.
- 5 Keep your focus on those activities which people believe you do best: The basic human necessities of food, shelter and clothing.
- 6 Make “compassion” the core emotional word in your lexicon.

For more information, please contact your Brewer Direct account team at (626) 359-1015.