

Why Should I Give TO YOU?

THE NONPROFIT VALUE PROPOSITION INDEX STUDY



Published by



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At NextAfter, we are obsessed with answering one single question: "What makes donors give?" In our quest for the answer, we have turned the web into a living laboratory. In our Fundraising Research Lab we perform both Forensic and Applied Research. Our Forensic Research is focused on uncovering the challenges nonprofits face as they seek to grow their donations, while the Applied Research seeks to discover ways to optimize giving by performing experiments and validating what works (and doesn't) in fundraising. We then open-source all of our work in our [Digital Research Library](#) and share it with the nonprofit industry so that a growing number of organizations can apply what we have learned to grow their lists, acquire more donors, and raise more dollars to create a better world.

This research study, *Why Should I Give to You?*, has stemmed from years of research that pointed to a endemic issue within the nonprofit industry: many organizations struggle to effectively communicate their value proposition. When we asked 127 top nonprofits the central value proposition question—“Why should I give a gift to your organization rather than some other organization, or not at all?”—most organizations struggled to formulate a compelling response.

If your organization is not equipped to answer this question consistently across all communication channels, **then this study will be of tremendous value to you**. After reviewing this research, you will be equipped to address three critical areas that can potentially transform your fundraising program:

- 1. What is our organization's value proposition?**
- 2. How do we evaluate our value proposition?**
- 3. How do we optimize our value proposition?**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

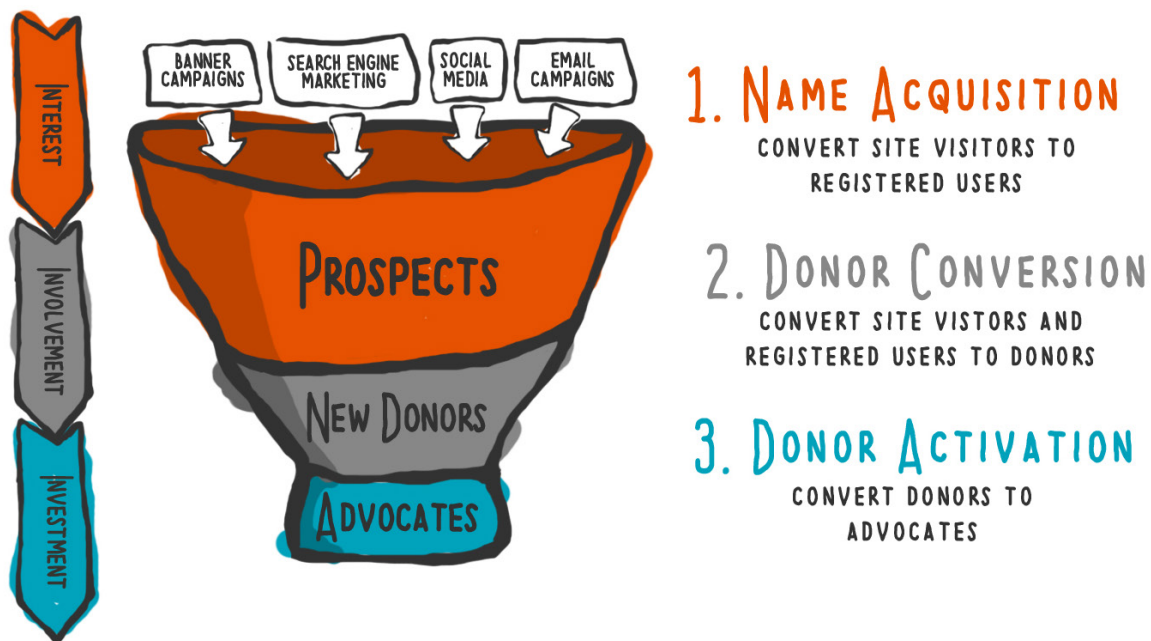
This research study has been generously sponsored by our friends at Douglas Shaw and Associates. It is our hope that you can take this research, apply it within your organization, and help us unleash the most generous generation in the history of the world!

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Why should I give to you?

This is the fundamental value proposition question. Every single potential donor asks themselves this question before they give you a gift. Many times, it's on an unconscious level. Neuroscientists estimate that our brains are processing 11 million pieces of information every second. Yet, we are only consciously aware of about 40 pieces at any given moment! As we explore this idea of the value proposition, we are going to take a step back first and consider the **Donor Funnel**.

The traditional online donor funnel looks very much like this:



At the top of the funnel, we see that we have different ways of sending traffic to our website. We can send people to our website from a banner campaign, search engines, social media, email campaigns, and many other sources. Within this funnel metaphor, we are trying to move people consistently from interest to involvement, and ultimately to investment. The goal is to turn some of the visitors to our website into prospective donors. Then, we turn some of those

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

prospective donors into new donors. And finally, we turn some of those new donors into passionate and generous givers that support our cause. Over time, we want them to become advocates—or even evangelists—for our organization and bring other people into our funnel.

This is how many of us view the online donor funnel. In fact, this is how I viewed it for much of my career until I was challenged by the folks at **MECLABS**.

If you're not familiar with them, MECLABS is the largest marketing optimization institution in the world. They work with some of the largest corporations on the planet. They perform tremendous amounts of research about what works (and what doesn't) in the realm of digital marketing. Through the course of their research, MECLABS has tested over a billion emails; they've tested over 10,000 different sales conversion pathways; they've recorded and analyzed over 5 million phone calls. All of this research is centered on trying to answer one single question: **why do people say yes?** Their thesis is that if they can unlock the reasons and the motivations as to why people say yes, then they can engineer more "yes-es" into their customers' sales funnels.

I found this to be very compelling, so I met with the folks at MECLABS to talk about it.

I said, "We've got this funnel in the nonprofit space and there are three different levels to it: interest, involvement and investment."

They said, "We love the funnel. It's a great and useful analogy. In fact, it's a primary analogy because all of marketing should be influencing somebody to make a decision. But there is a problem with your funnel."

I didn't understand, so I asked them what they meant.

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

They said, “What do your conversion rates look like? Are you getting significant conversion rates?”

I said, “The industry benchmark for nonprofits, is between 1 and 4 percent. In other words, for 100 people that come to the website, between 1 and 4 people will make a donation.”

And they said, “Exactly. That means that most of the people are not falling into your funnel, they’re actually falling out of your funnel. You need to take your funnel, flip it upside down, and realize that gravity (meaning the organic forces in the marketplace) is not leading people to convert—it’s actually leading people to abandon. Instead of traveling down the center of your funnel, people are climbing up the sides.”

This was a revelation to me. We really don’t have a donor funnel after all. What we do have is something that looks more like a **donor mountain**. At the top of the mountain is our “**macro-yes**.” This is the ultimate goal of our campaign, marketing, or fundraising.

If our ultimate goal is to get somebody to give a gift, then our “macro-yes” is a donation. But in order to get somebody to the “macro-yes” at the top of the mountain, there are a series of “**micro-yeses**” that must occur along that journey.

For example, if I send an email to you, and the ultimate purpose of the email is to get you to give a gift to my organization, then the very first decision you must make is, *should I open this email?*

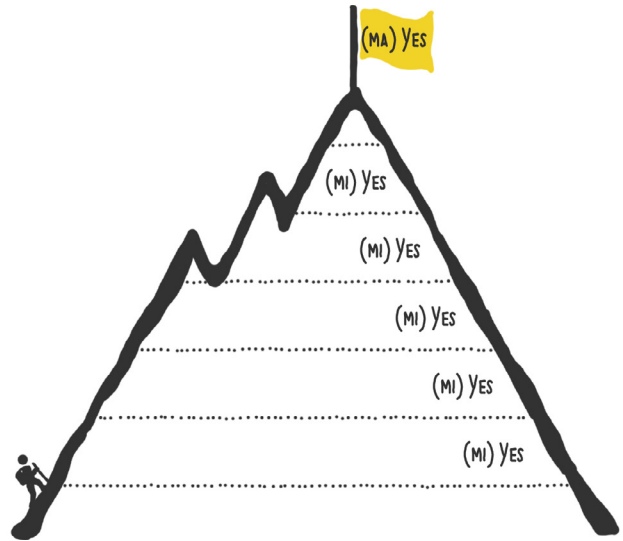


AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

After you open the email, you then have to make another decision: *shall I read?*

If you read, then *shall I click?*

If you click, then presumably you get to a landing page. On that landing page there is then a series of decisions that you make as you navigate the content, the copy, the images, the video. Whatever happens to be on that page must be moving you to a decision point. And if that decision point is to give a gift, then there may be a call-to-action that points you there. Even as you click through to the donation process, there is a series of decisions you make as you navigate the donation form:



How much do I want to give?

Is this a one-time gift or recurring gift?

Do I want to designate my gift in some way?

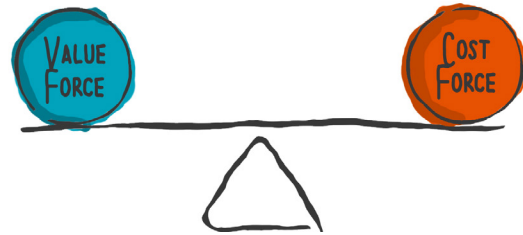
Should I make this a tribute gift?

These are all decisions that the donor is faced with on this journey towards the "macro-yes" of giving a donation. We must then consider what it is that we possess as fundraisers and marketers as we stand at the top of this mountain. What tool do we have in our fundraising toolkit that we can use to help our donor get to the top of the mountain?

That tool of course is our **message**. Messaging is the essence of marketing. And

our message acts as a rope that we lower from the summit of the mountain to help "pull our donor up" through the series of "micro-yeses" that ultimately leads to the "macro-yes."

Now, if our message is our tool, then we must ask a deeper question: *what is the heart of the message?* What is the strength of



our rope? What is the force behind the message that we use to help pull people through these series of "micro-yeses," on the journey to the "macro-yes?" That force is our **value proposition**.

A simple illustration of the value proposition is to think of it like a balancing scale. Your donor is in the center, and they are constantly trying to weigh **value** versus **cost**. On one side of the scale sits **value** and on the other side sits **cost**. Your donor is performing a mental balancing act, and many of their decisions are unconscious.

In order for our message to be effective—in order for it to move our donors up the mountain towards the "macro-yes"—it must consistently convey a stronger perceived value than the perceived cost at every single decision point. This is why the value proposition is so critical to fundraising success.

This is the whole purpose of optimization science. Our goal is simply to identify each of these different micro-decision junctions, map them, and then analyze them to determine if the value proposition is conveying a heavier cost or value. If the value proposition is cost heavy and value light, that will yield a "no" and lead people to abandon the process. If the value proposition is value heavy and cost light, then that produces a "yes." And if we keep our donor moving with a continuous, unbroken chain of "micro-yeses," then we will achieve a "macro-yes" and get a conversion.

The entire focus of this study is to explore this concept of the value proposition.

We aimed to understand how effectively nonprofits communicate their value proposition, and how that varies through different channels. But we also went a step further.

Through our testing and optimization lab, we were able to perform a number of different online experiments with the value proposition across different organizations. The results of these experiments are included in the second part of this study and make a compelling case for further value proposition research, testing and optimization.

This study is not the final word on value proposition—it is, in fact, a prologue. We believe that there is so much to learn about what motivates and inspires people to give, and this is just a very small piece. But we hope that you find it to be a useful piece. And we invite you to join us on our quest to unleash the most generous generation in the history of the world. But in order to do that, you must first answer a fundamental question:

Why should I give to you, rather than some other organization, or not at all?

Within the answer to that question you will discover your value proposition.

Onward!



Tim Kachuriak
Chief Innovation & Optimization Officer
Lead Researcher
Nonprofit Value Proposition Index Study



Part 1

FORENSIC RESEARCH

At NextAfter, we conduct two types of research: forensic and applied. Our forensic research focuses on discovering the current practices and trends within the nonprofit industry. Our applied research is focused on practical experimentation within digital marketing channels to discover what really works in fundraising.

In the first part of this study, we will explore the forensic research we have conducted in the area of value proposition. We deployed our “mystery donors” to contact 127 nonprofits and ask, *Why should I give a gift to your organization rather than some other organization, or not at all?*

How well do nonprofits communicate their value proposition?

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH



What We Have Already Learned

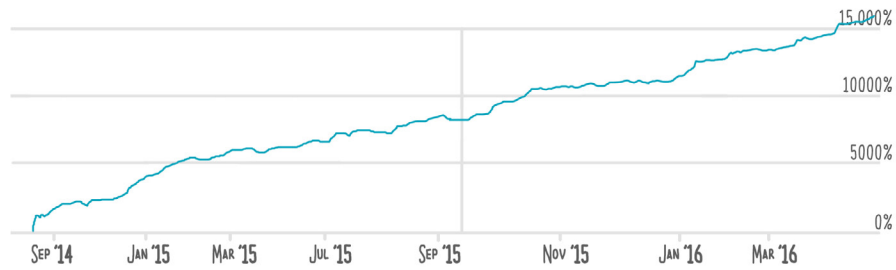
In 2014, we published the [Online Fundraising Scorecard](#), a forensic research study which assessed the online fundraising practices of 151 nonprofit organizations. In the study, our analysts examined four key areas that are critically important to online fundraising success:



1. Email Registration Process (how organizations grow their email lists)
2. Email Communication (how organizations communicate with their donors and prospects)
3. Online Donation Experience (how it feels for a donor to give a gift to the organization)
4. Gift Acknowledgement (what the donor experiences after they give a gift)

What we learned from the study was that many nonprofits were falling short of the grade with their online fundraising programs. One of the major themes that emerged from this study centered on the value proposition. Out of the 46 different attributes that were assessed, four were focused on some aspect of the value proposition. For example, the study concluded that only about 50% of organizations were communicating reasons why visitors should make a financial gift on their donation pages. Another finding was that 84% of organizations provided an email signup offer that anyone could find either somewhere else, or anywhere else on the Internet.

NEXTAFTER TESTING LAB



TOTAL SAMPLES
46,767,115

TOTAL CONVERSIONS
757,903

CUMULATIVE LIFT
16,126.3%

In addition to the findings from the Online Fundraising Scorecard, were the insights that we have gleaned from more than 500 [online fundraising experiments](#). Out of these 500 experiments, the value proposition was the primary factor that moved the needle in at least 200 tests.

All of this evidence pointed to the fact that we needed to do a deeper exploration on value proposition in the nonprofit space and how it affects giving.

Our Methodology

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH



OUR METHODOLOGY

A value proposition is very different from a mission statement. In fact, it is not a statement at all—it is an argument—an ultimate reason for taking a very specific action. The value proposition must answer the one fundamental question,

“If I am your ideal donor, why should I give to you rather than some other organization, or not at all?”

As we set out to analyze the value propositions of leading nonprofits, we needed a very different approach. We needed to essentially experience the value proposition from the perspective of the donor. We did this through our secret, undercover “Mystery Donors.”

Here is the approach that our “Mystery Donors” took:

1. First, we identified a sample of 127 large nonprofit organizations that represented different verticals including: Christian Ministries, Colleges & Universities, Disaster & International Relief, Disease & Health Services, Environment & Wildlife, Food Banks, Human & Social Services, Hospitals, Performing Arts, and Public Affairs.
2. Then we visited each organization’s web site and took a screenshot of their donation page.
3. We went to the contact us form and submitted this inquiry, “I am thinking about giving a gift to your organization. But before I do, I was hoping you can answer one question: why should I give a gift to your organization rather than some other organization, or not at all?”
4. We found the phone number posted on every organization’s web site. We placed a call and again asked the value proposition question, “Why should I give a gift to your organization rather than some other organization, or not at all?”

OUR METHODOLOGY

5. Finally, we went to every organization's Facebook page. We sent a direct message through Facebook (to organizations that had direct messaging enabled) and asked the value proposition question, "Why should I give a gift to your organization rather than some other organization, or not at all?"
6. Once we had compiled all of the data, we scored each value proposition across each channel: web site, email, phone, and social media based on a methodology for scoring value propositions developed by MECLABS.

A Note About the Value Proposition Scoring Methodology

Scoring value propositions is subjective. There is just no way to get around that. But we wanted to remove as much subjectivity as we possibly could and make the scoring rigorous and methodical. To accomplish this, we borrowed a value proposition scoring methodology developed by our good friends at MECLABS. Through the course of their research, they have identified four primary components of a value proposition:

- Appeal – Appeal means, "I like it. I want it."
- Exclusivity – Exclusivity means, "I can't get it anywhere else."
- Credibility – Credibility means, "I believe in it. I believe in you."
- Clarity – Clarity means, "I understand it. I understand you."

These four elements come together in the following Value Proposition Heuristic:

$$VF_{Ac} - CF_{Ac} = NF$$

VF = (AP ∴ Ex)
 Ac = (CL ∴ CR)
 CF = (MT ∴ MN)

© MECLABS

MAIN ELEMENTS:

NF = NET FORCE OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION
 VF = GROSS FORCE OF THE VALUE
 CF = GROSS FORCE OF THE COST
 AC = ACCEPTANCE

SUB ELEMENTS:

VF { AP = APPEAL
 Ex = EXCLUSIVITY
 AC { CL = CLARITY
 CR = CREDIBILITY
 CF { MT = MATERIAL
 MN = MENTAL

What this formula means is that the **net force** of the value proposition equals the **accepted gross value force** minus the **accepted gross cost force**.

The **value force** is made up of the relationship between two key elements and they form a very powerful dyad: appeal and exclusivity. Appeal means I like it, I want it. Exclusivity means I can't get it anywhere else; you're the only one that has it.

At the epicenter of appeal is this idea of **want**. You cannot inspire people to give to needs where the solution is not wanted.

The other element is **exclusivity**. The **exclusivity factor** is related to the number of competing options. The lower the number of competing options, the better. Another way to think about it is like a fraction: appeal is divided by the total number of competing options.

OUR METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, we scored each organization's value proposition across each channel on a score of 1 to 5. If an organization did not respond, they received a score of zero.

WEBSITE	EMAIL	PHONE	SOCIAL MEDIA
APPEAL	APPEAL	APPEAL	APPEAL
EXCLUSIVITY	EXCLUSIVITY	EXCLUSIVITY	EXCLUSIVITY
CREDIBILITY	CREDIBILITY	CREDIBILITY	CREDIBILITY
CLARITY	CLARITY	CLARITY	CLARITY
< 1 --- 5 >	< 1 --- 5 >	< 1 --- 5 >	< 1 --- 5 >

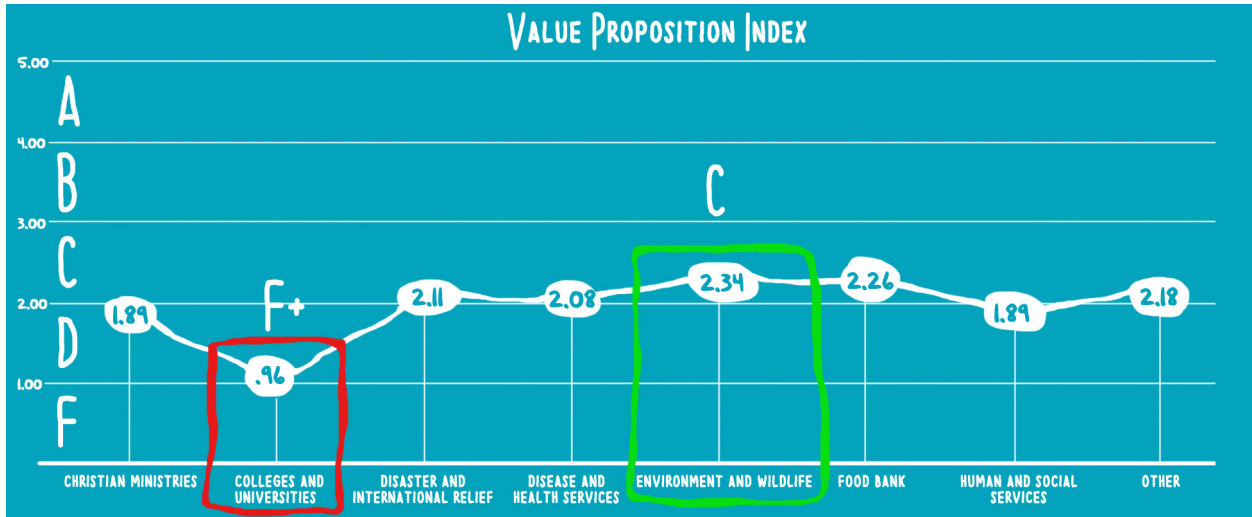
GRADED ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5

General Findings

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH

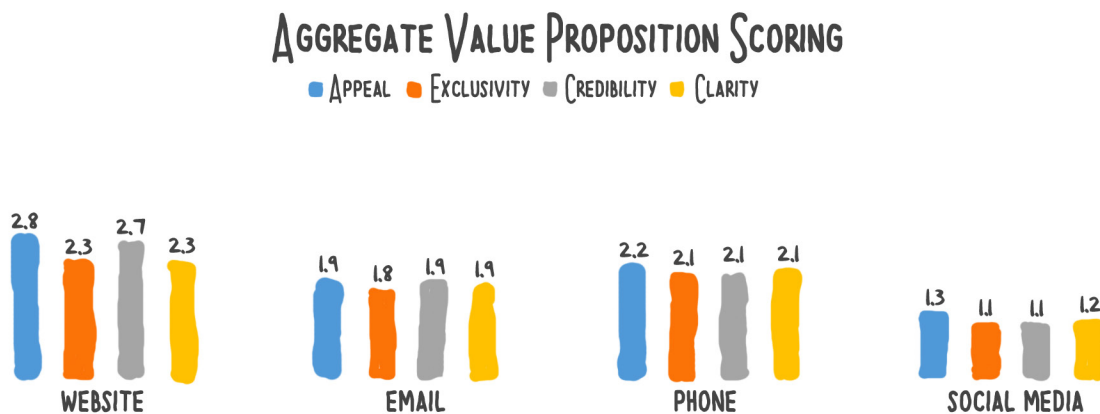


Not All Verticals Perform the Same



When we took the aggregate value proposition scores across all the channels, across all the different verticals, we found that all of the verticals are performing at the average C level with the exception of Christian Ministries (D+), Colleges and Universities (F), and Human & Social Services (D+). At the head of the class were Environment and Wildlife organizations, and at the bottom, we see the Colleges and Universities.

Not All Channels Perform the Same



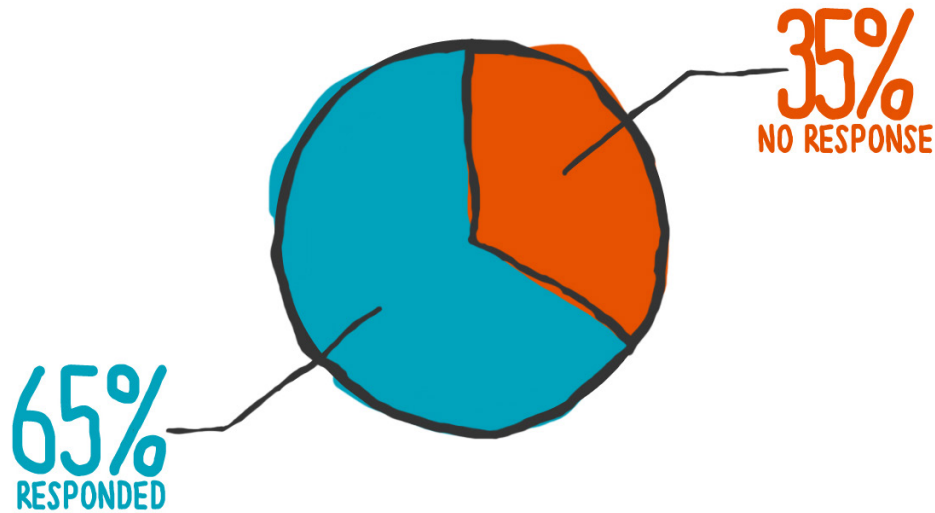
This chart breaks down appeal, exclusivity, credibility, and clarity by each of the different channels (website, email, phone, social media). The website and phone channels were the highest performing channels, because in aggregate they convey the strongest value proposition. It is important to note, however that

GENERAL FINDINGS

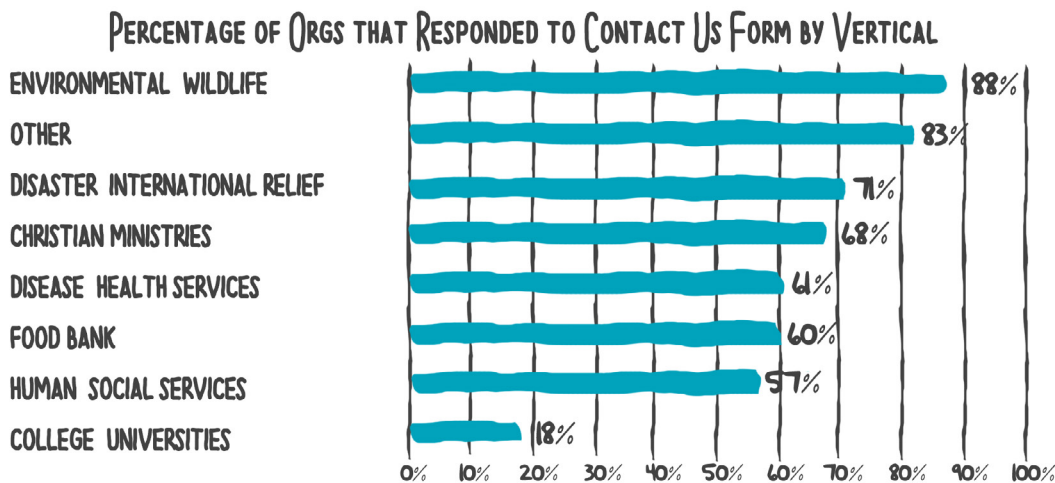
we had very low response rates in some channels which prompted us to take a closer look. This led to several pretty eye-opening insights.

Many Email Inquiries Go Into a Black Hole

The first thing that we discovered is that **more than a third of organizations did not respond to our submission, ever.** That's a problem!



As we dug in a little bit deeper, we saw that the response rates actually varied by vertical.



GENERAL FINDINGS

At the head of the class were the Environment and Wildlife organizations, with 88% responding to our request. At the bottom of the class were Colleges and Universities, where 82% never responded to our request.

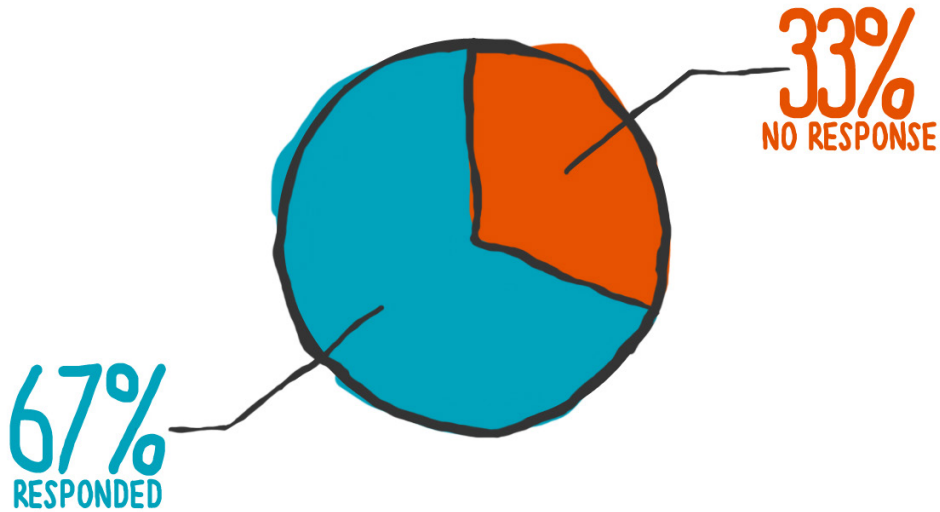
How Long Should We Make Our Donors Wait Before We Respond?

We submitted a contact form for each organization that provided one, but found that 3% of the organizations we studied didn't have a way for us to contact them online. This leads us to believe that they don't want to hear from their donors. That's a problem! Out of all the organizations we were able to contact via email, 26% responded within the first 48 hours. We waited a week, only to find that 43% of organizations still had not responded to our inquiry. After 30 days, 35% of organizations had completely ignored us.

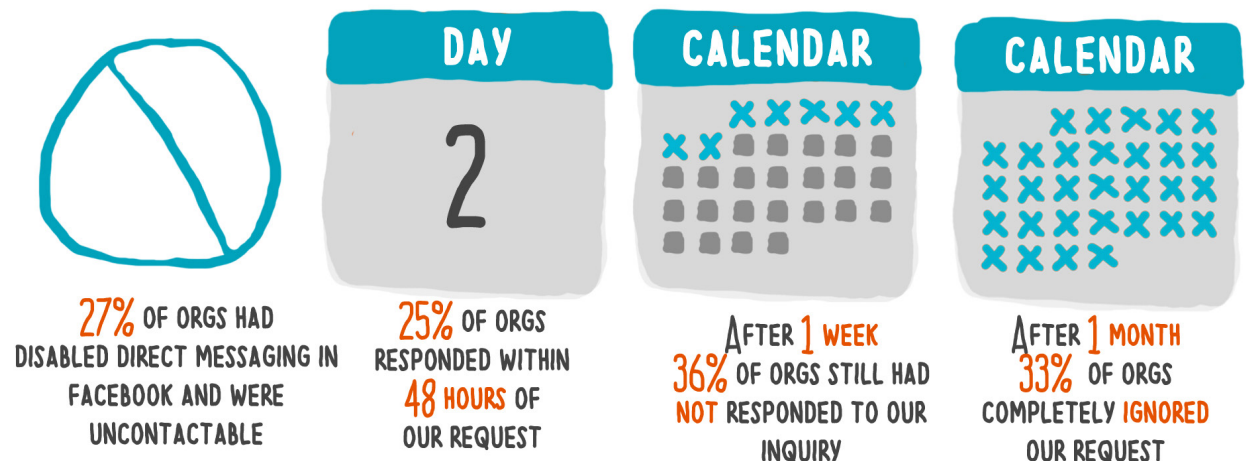


Social Media is an Even Bigger Black Hole

When looking at social media, unfortunately, the outlook is not much better. Only 67% of organizations that were contacted responded to our direct message.

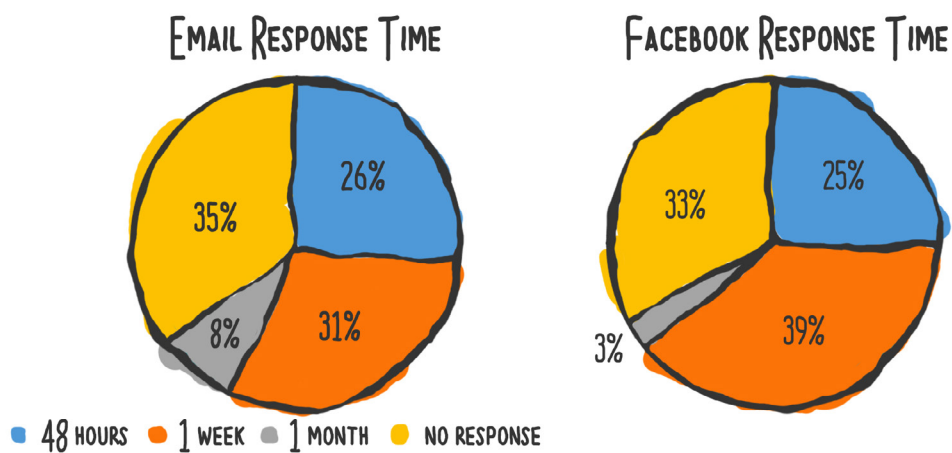


One thing that is important to note here is that Facebook provides an option for organizations to disable direct messaging, of which 27% of organizations did. What that communicated to us is that these organizations view social media as a one-way communication channel. This means that 27% of organizations couldn't be scored. Of those that did, 25% responded within the first 48 hours, and 36% still had not responded after a week. After a month, 33% had ignored our request completely.



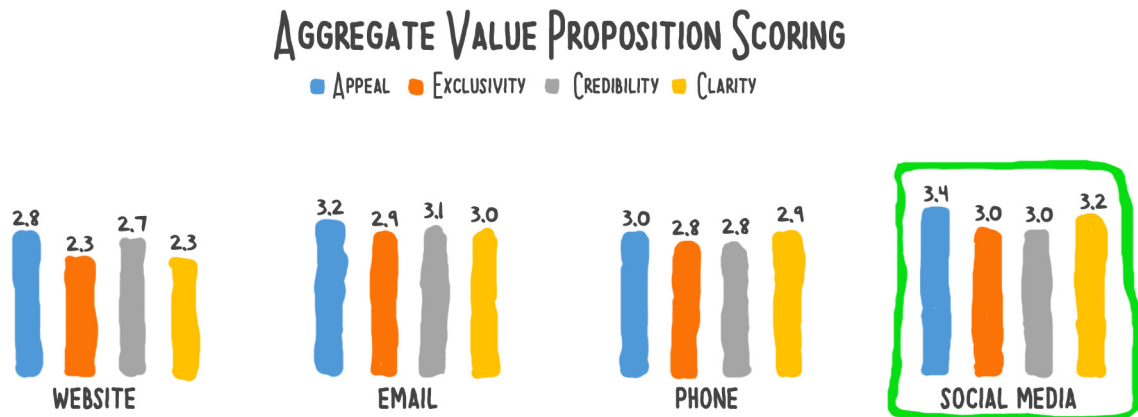
Online Response Time is a Systemic Issue

Looking at the two charts below side-by-side, you'll see that they look almost identical. This suggests that online response rate is a systemic issue. Perhaps the same people that are responsible for responding via social media are also responsible for responding via email? Whatever the case, the slow—or even worse—unresponsiveness from the online channel highlights a significant area for improvement across the board.



Removing Non-Responders Paints a Different Picture

After considering our data, we decided to set aside all of the non-responders and reanalyze the results by channel.



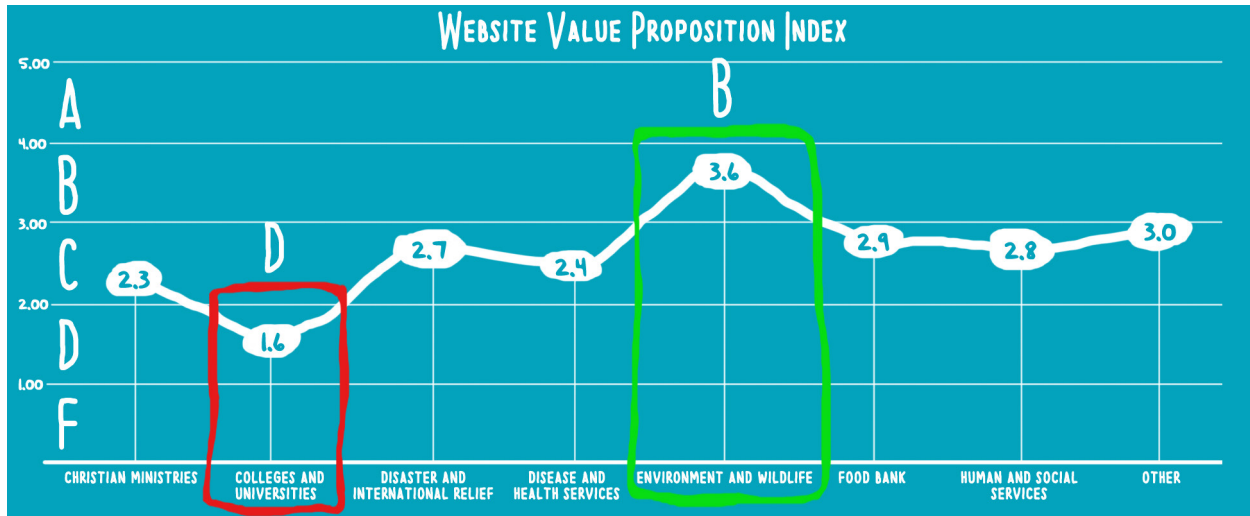
When we look at the aggregate scores again by channel, the results look a bit flipped. Social media was actually the highest scoring channel, followed by email. Website was actually the poorest performing channel.

Scoring the Value Proposition: Website

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH



SCORING THE VALUE PROPOSITION: WEBSITE



The chart above plots the aggregate value proposition scores by industry vertical for each organization's website donation page. Every vertical scores about average at the C to High C level, with the exception of Environment & Wildlife (B), and Colleges & Universities (D).

When scoring the value propositions for the website, our researchers were looking specifically at the donation page for each organization and looking for visual and text-based clues that convey to the web visitor that this organization is worthy of a donation.

It is important to note that this is a subjective analysis. However, we made every attempt to make this analysis as objective as possible. To accomplish this, we leaned heavily upon the Value Proposition Evaluation Framework developed by MECLABS (See "Note About Value Proposition Scoring Methodology" on page 18).

To help you see the difference between how different organizations communicate their value propositions on their donation pages, we have included a few examples. In each example, we have made every attempt to hide the identity of the organization. As you look at each example, consider how you would have scored the four elements of Appeal, Exclusivity, Credibility, and

Clarity. Ask yourself the following questions:

Is this something that the ideal donor wants/needs?

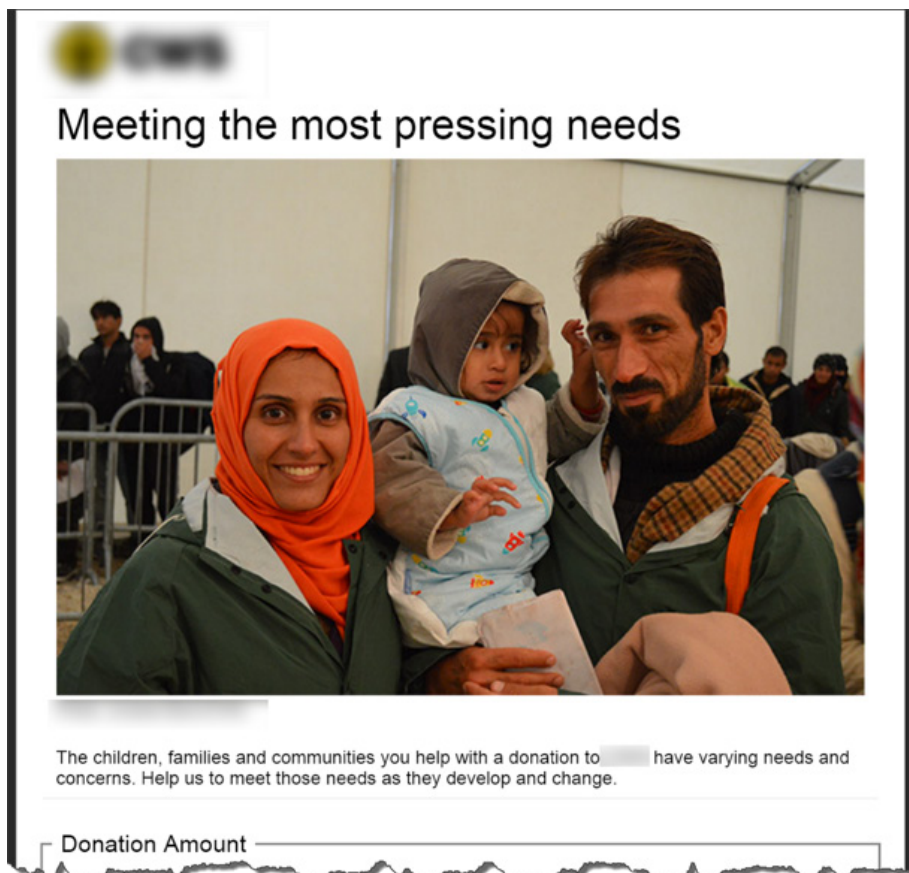
Is this something the ideal donor cannot find anywhere else?

Are the claims made on the donation page credible? Do I believe them?

Are the claims made on the donation page clearly stated?

Do I know what they mean?

Let's look at the first example:

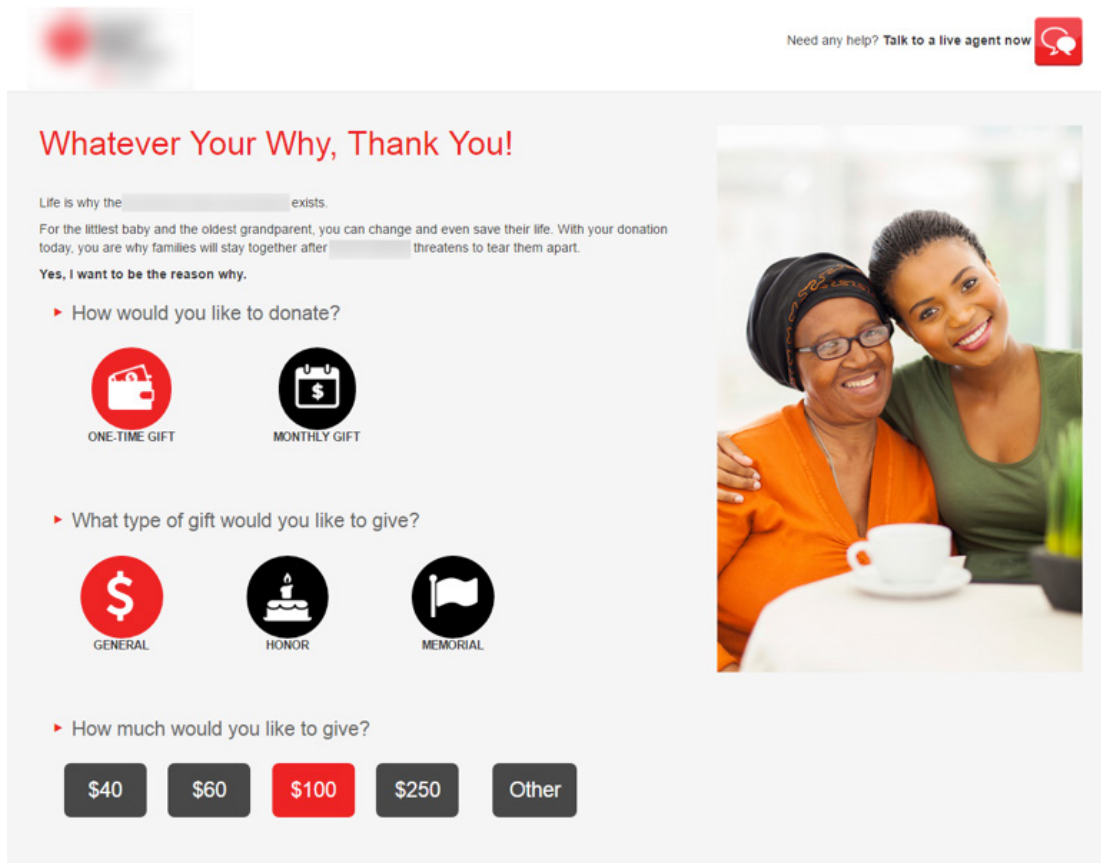


Website Donation Page Example #1:

This is an excerpt from the donation page for an organization. Just looking at what they convey on the donation page, there is a little bit of copy that says, "Meeting the most pressing needs. The children, families and communities that you help with your donation to [Organization] have varying needs and concerns. Help us to meet those needs as they develop and change."

If you were to score the appeal, exclusivity, credibility and clarity of this value proposition based on what they're communicating to you, how would you score that? Would it be high? Would it be low? Would it be somewhere in the middle?

Let's look at another example:



Website Donation Page Example #2:

The headline reads, "Whatever Your Why, Thank You! Life is why the [Organization] exists. For the littlest baby and the oldest grandparent, you can change and even save their life. With your donation today, you are why families will stay together after [redacted] threatens to tear them apart. Yes, I want to be the reason why." There are then some options to donate. Again, how would you score the value proposition communicated by this donation page? Is the

appeal high? Is the exclusivity high? How about clarity?
 Let's look at one more example:

Website Donation Page Example #3

This one says, “Give now, three easy steps to your secure donation,” and provides some options: “Providing God’s Word to seven waiting people, Help 15 people receive a Bible of their own, Give 30 people a Bible.” You also see some copy down the right-hand side, “For every five dollars you donate...” and then they list out the different things that your gift will accomplish. Consider what they’re communicating here to their ideal target audience. Is this high appeal or low appeal? Is this exclusivity high or low? How about the clarity? Do you know how your donation is going to be used? Do you know how it can

actually create impact?

Some of the Things We Saw Absolutely Blew Our Minds!

As we pored over the many donation pages that we captured for this study, we came across some things that really made us scratch our heads. Aside from the positive factor of the value proposition, we have discovered that there are also negative factors at work on our online donation pages, such as friction and anxiety. Usually, we try to mitigate these factors as much as possible, but some organizations seem to be doing things to enhance them.

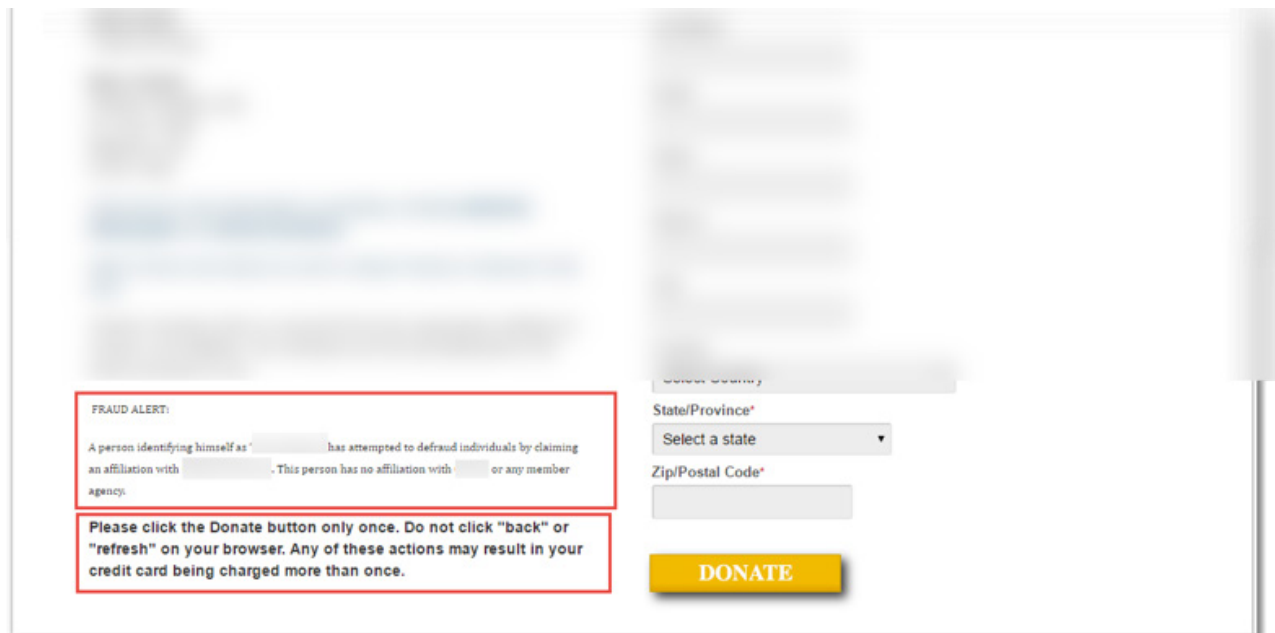
Using Proximity to Induce Donation Anxiety

One of the things that we have learned from testing many donation pages is that proximity can play a powerful role in reducing **donation anxiety**. As a donor is going through the process of completing an online donation, there are a number of psychological factors at work. On the positive side, the value proposition is painting a mental picture of what the donor is able to accomplish in terms of impact with their gift. However, there are often negative psychological factors at work.

On some level, the donor may be thinking, *“Where is my donation going to go? How is the money really going to be used? Is this a trustworthy organization?”*

These negative sentiments form what we often refer to as donation anxiety. That’s why we will often use anxiety reducing techniques such as security seals, endorsement badges or other third-party credibility indicators near the donation form on the donation page. These subtle devices reinforce credibility and trust, and thereby reduce anxiety.

But in the example below we actually observed a donation form that did the exact opposite.



Right next to the “Donate” button in the last step of the donation form there are two warning messages:

FRAUD ALERT:

A person identifying himself as [Redacted Name] is attempting to defraud individuals by claiming an affiliation with [Redacted Organization Name]. This person has no affiliation with [Redacted Organization Name] or any member agency.

And as if that wasn’t enough, directly below that warning is another one—this time in **boldface font**:

Please click the Donate button only once. Do not click “back” or “refresh” on your browser. Any of these actions may result in your credit card being charged more than once.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I read this, I don't even want to close my browser—or even touch my mouse. I'm so afraid that I just want to shut down my computer, quietly back away, and let it cool down for a little bit!

'Which One Do I Choose?'

As bad as donation anxiety is, there is actually something worse—**donation friction**. Donation friction is anything that causes psychological resistance to a given element in the donation process—or very simply, when you make it harder than it has to be for a donor to complete their transaction. There are many types of friction that can creep into your donation process, and if you really want to [dig in deeper you can view this video on the topic](#), or even take our [Donation Friction Self-Assessment](#).

One of the more visceral types of friction is called **decision friction**. Decision friction is when you disrupt your visitor from the donation process with unanticipated questions. This often takes the form of a gift designation or project code. Check out the number of different options in the form on the right. Do you think this might be a bit distracting for some (if not all) would be donors?

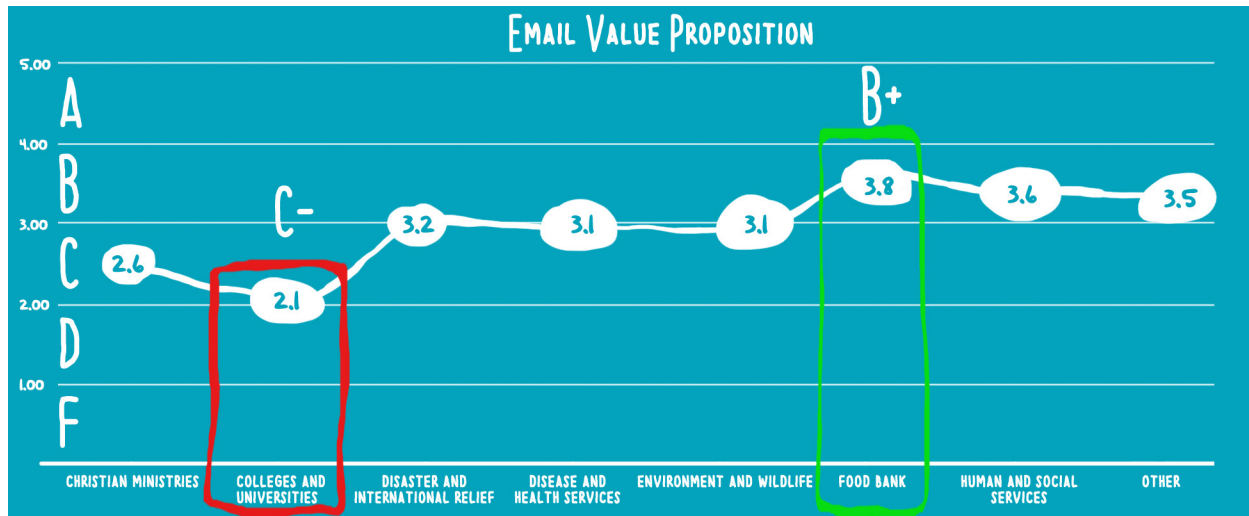


Scoring the Value Proposition: Email

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH



SCORING THE VALUE PROPOSITIONS: EMAIL



Looking at the aggregate value proposition scores for Email, we see a slightly different trend. Most verticals scored much higher than average with all but two achieving a B or higher. Food Banks were at the head of the class with a B+ average, while Colleges and Universities were low again, with a C- average.

To better understand this, let's examine some of the emails we received in response to our question, "Why should I give a gift to you rather than some other organization, or not at all?"

Example One:

Dear friend,

Thank you for contacting us here at [organization]. We don't ask for donations, so this decision is entirely up to you. If you would like to make a donation, you may do so online or by calling our customer service department. Our normal customer service hours are Monday through Friday, between 7:30 and 3:50pm. We'd be happy to assist you in any way we can. Thanks again for writing. If you have any further questions, let us know.

Have a blessed day.

How would you score the value proposition associated here? Is it attractive to you that they don't ask for donations? Is it a little bit annoying? Is it lazy? Our donors are people. Even though we must often communicate through technology that separates us from them, we have to look through the medium to the real people on the other side of the screen. Only then will we acquire the level of empathy needed to engage the donor in a genuine conversation.

Example Two:

Richard, Good afternoon.

Thank you for your email and for your interest in supporting [organization]. There are so many great charities out there right now supporting children and it can be very difficult work to sort through the masses and find the best fit for your personal contribution. What I can tell you about us is that, unlike other organizations within the same space, we combine three very important attributes that other organizations can't match. Those three attributes are: (1) Our more than 100 year history of support of America's youth.

We have more than 16 million living alumni throughout the world, many of which would tell you that their club helped save their life. (2) Our outreach of service with more than 4,000 clubs located in cities, towns, U.S. military installations worldwide and native American lands throughout the U.S. that serves 4 million children. (3) Our combination of scope and services that include not only a safe place to go after school, but also provide fundamental programs that emphasize academic success, healthy lifestyles and life skills and attributes that are needed to grow a person of character who believes in supporting the community.

The last (and to most people, the most important) piece of the puzzle is the return on investment. The [organization]'s national structure creates efficiency by consolidating our resources. Clubs receive support in key areas such as

SCORING THE VALUE PROPOSITIONS: EMAIL

administrative services, technology, government relations, financial services, human resources, professional development, training and marketing. This combination fosters shared best practices and cost efficiencies that ultimately result in increased impact across the movement and on the lives of America's youth and our future.

I hope this has given you a broad overview of what makes us different. Happy to share additional information if you have additional questions, please don't hesitate.

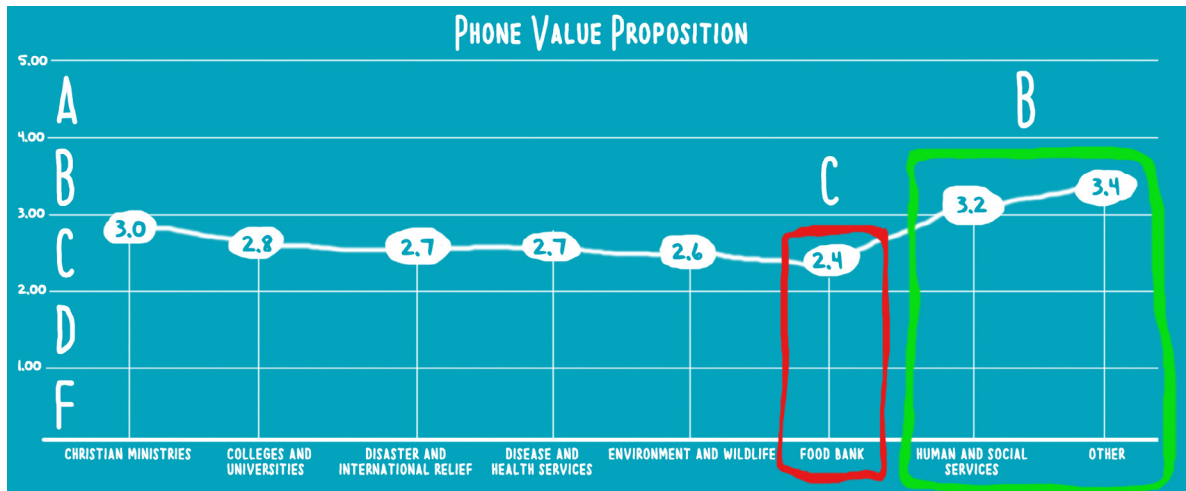
Now, I'll let you come to your own conclusion, but you have to admit, this email is a whole lot better than the first one. In this email, the writer lays out a very lucid, very compelling, very quantifiable argument as to why I should support them. Here is the irony. If you go to this organization's donation page, it doesn't say any of this stuff. In fact, it was one of the lowest scoring donation pages we looked at. How would you score it?

Scoring the Value Proposition: Phone

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH



SCORING THE VALUE PROPOSITION: PHONE



Turning to phone scoring, most organizations scored in the C range. From the Phone Value Proposition chart above, we can see that, in this case, Christian ministries, Human Social Services and a collective of groups not big enough to make a cohort (Other) scored in the B range, while Food Banks moved from the head of the class on email to the bottom of the class on phone with a C average. Most groups did okay in terms of the phone value proposition, but there is still lots of room for improvement. Let's look at the transcripts from a few phone calls so that you can get a sense of what to do, and what to avoid as it relates to communicating your value proposition.

Phone Example #1:

Mystery Donor:

Hi. I have been looking to donate this year and I've been looking at your organization, and I just had a quick question. Why should I give a gift to you rather than some other organization, or not at all?

Nonprofit Call Answerer:

I'm sorry, can you repeat that question?

Mystery Donor:

Absolutely. I'm just wondering why I should give your organization a gift rather than some other organization, or not at all?

Nonprofit Call Answerer:

Okay, well, we're working for a great cause. For example, this is a disease that really doesn't have a cure and a lot of people are calling us for help. We get a lot of calls all the time. It's just heartbreaking to hear sometimes what people have to go through. When you are able to fund something that people want to see curable one day, I think that just makes it better.

What do you think? For starters, I think everyone reading this probably believes that their organization is “working for a great cause” or they wouldn't be working there. But here's the problem with that: it doesn't communicate any exclusivity. And though I appreciate the caller's empathy for the people that call in, they gave no compelling reason as to why a gift is best invested there, rather than some other organization, or maybe not at all. Let's look at another as we continue to explore how different organizations answer this fundamental question.

Phone Example #2:

Mystery Donor:

Hi. My husband and I are looking to donate this year and we've been looking at your organization and I just had a quick question. Why should we give you all a gift rather than some other organization, or not at all?

Nonprofit Call Answerer:

Ah---that's a great question! Well, I will tell you that [Organization] is celebrating its 200th year anniversary this year. We're an organization that's been about the same mission for a very long time. Our mission statement is, “Make the Bible available in a language and a format that all can understand and afford so that people can experience its life changing message.” We have an outreach that is global. We partner with 147 Bible societies around the world, bringing the Bible to the world, and scripture and scripture resources...

SCORING THE VALUE PROPOSITION: PHONE

The call goes on for quite a while, but just from that snippet we can see that the organization was laying out a clear argument as to why the caller should give to that organization. The answer included quantifiable evidence that communicates exclusivity and, most of all, clearly articulated value.

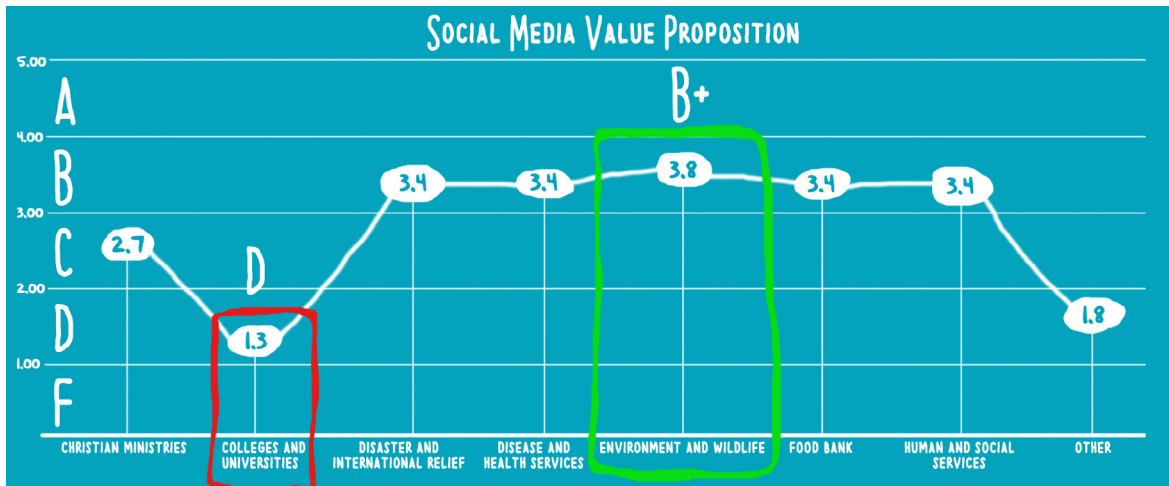
In this business of fundraising, we really are in the business of communication. Perhaps our greatest skill is not persuasion, but clarity. Clarity trumps persuasion. And I would argue that clarity is persuasion. When we communicate clearly, not only do people understand more, but they want to respond with financial gifts.

Scoring the Value Proposition: Social Media

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH



SCORING THE VALUE PROPOSITION: SOCIAL MEDIA



The last area we scored was the social media channel. This channel had the smallest subset of scorable organizations, with only 37% having responded. When we were able to score the responses we received, most organizations scored pretty high.

You can see above that Disaster and International Relief, Disease and Health Services, Environment and Wildlife, Food Bank, and Human and Social Services scored very high. On the other hand, Ministries, Colleges and Universities, and Other scored on the lower side. We're going to look at a couple social media responses we received, and dissect them as we've done with other channels. Remember, the question we posed through social media was the same one we offered through the phone and email, "Why should I give a gift to you rather than some other organization, or not at all?"

Social Media Response #1:

Hi, Mary. Thanks for your message. You can learn more about our mission at www.ourorganizationwebsite.org.

This has to be the laziest response someone could possibly give! This basically says, "Go away! Go bother somebody else with your stupid questions!" And keep in mind that the question we asked was "why should I give to you?" which

suggests giving intent. Let's look at another example.

Social Media Example #2:

Hi, Jeff. Thank you for considering [Organization]. Very generally, what distinguishes [Organization] is what we do and how we do it. [Organization] was founded in 1945 to deliver Packages to survivors of WWII. The term [redacted term] comes from us. We're one of the oldest, most experienced and most efficient emergency relief organizations in the world. But that's only part of why we're different. Over the years, experience taught us how to address poverty's root causes to deliver more lasting change. We focus on women and girls in the world's poorest communities because, equipped with the proper resources, women have the power to lift entire families and communities out of poverty. If that doesn't convince you, consider that Turner Field is visible from our office and you're wearing a Braves hat in your profile photo.

If I haven't convinced you, ask me more questions and I'll try harder! If I have convinced you, please donate here: [Redacted link]

Best wishes!

Can you see the difference? In this response we see evidence of this organization's appeal and exclusivity. For example, they reference their exclusivity as the "oldest, most experienced and most efficient emergency relief organization in the world." Also, the nonprofit responder enhances their personal appeal by commenting on what the Mystery Donor is wearing in their profile picture to establish a more personal connection. What a brilliant strategy! So, how would you score this response? Is this how your social media team would respond to a similar inquiry? If not, how can you help them to better understand and articulate your organization's unique value proposition?

Final Observations

PART 1: FORENSIC RESEARCH



FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Reviewing the value propositions, across four channels, for 127 organizations, was like drinking from a firehose! There is so much that we learned that we could likely write volumes about it. And we probably will. But for the nonprofit organization that wants take-home value today, you need to understand the big picture. The following observations capture the most important macro-trends from this study, and should be instructive for anyone that wants to improve how they communicate their value proposition in any channel.

- 1. We speak with a forked tongue.** Based on our research, many organizations are saying different things across different channels. Even when we observed a strong value proposition in one channel, it did not mean that it was as strong (or even the same value proposition) in other channels. In some cases, we received a strong email from an organization with an absolutely horrible donation page. If we want to strengthen the force of our value proposition, we need to think about how we can communicate a consistent message in every channel so that our organizations speak with a unified voice.
- 2. There is a relationship between clarity and appeal.** As we examined the composite scores across channels, we observed that organizations that scored high in clarity also scored high in appeal. What this tells us is that clarity is persuasion. When we communicate in a way that people can understand, our message becomes more appealing to our donors.
- 3. There are creative ways to communicate exclusivity.** We were intrigued by how some organizations creatively communicated implied exclusivity. A lot of organizations would say things like, “I can’t really speak for other organizations, but let me tell you one thing that I think makes our organization different...” This highlights a very important principle: when communicating exclusivity, we don’t necessarily have to draw a direct comparison to other organizations—we need to only highlight the ways in which our organization is different.

- 4. Get rid of the ‘Gobbledygook!’** A lot of organizations used a lot of words that really didn’t mean anything at all. Like this, “The strategic interface of our global operations in connection with our on the ground logistics, enables us to have a strategic advantageous and synergistic impact...” I have no idea what that means, and I’m confident that the organization doesn’t either. Again, this goes back to that idea of clarity. We don’t have to use big, impressive words to inspire our donors. We simply need to communicate with clarity and honesty.

- 5. Don’t be so flipping lazy!** “Got a question? Great—here’s our website. [Now leave me alone. I’m playing Candy Crush.]” Lazy responses communicate to your donors that you really don’t care about them. Don’t just leave people hanging or send them somewhere else when they’ve come directly to you for help. Take the time to listen carefully and realize that every conversation is a brand impression. I’m always baffled when organizations will spend thousands and thousands of dollars hiring brand consultants, and yet don’t do the simple blocking and tackling stuff like customer service that impacts the brand far more than any mood board will. If it has been awhile since you last called your 800 number, or if you have never submitted an inquiry through your web site—you might want to do that...like today!

The bottom line from our analysis of many different value propositions is that nobody really did that well. Every single organization we saw still has tremendous opportunities to improve. And that’s the entire point of this study. We believe that **every challenge is an opportunity for greatness**, and based on what we’ve observed, the opportunities are abounding! We hope that you will use this study as a conversation starter and use some of the things you’ve discovered here to provoke a wider conversation within your organization around your value proposition. And when you are ready to start testing...well, give us a call.

Part 2

APPLIED RESEARCH

How do you leverage the power of the value proposition to move perception, increase the force of your value proposition, and attract more donors to your organization?

The following case studies have been compiled from real world experiments with nonprofits that were conducted in our research lab. These case studies illustrate the power of the value proposition when it comes to optimizing your fundraising program to produce more names, donors and dollars.

One word of caution: There may be causes, issues, and ideologies represented within these case studies that you may not agree with. Try to look past that and focus instead on the key principles that are illustrated. When you do that, you will truly receive the maximum value from this applied research.

Featured Case Study 1

HOW INCREASING THE FORCE OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION AFFECTS CONVERSION RATE ON A DONATION PAGE

Research Partner: Senator John Cornyn

Experiment Summary — Timeframe: 4/20/2014–4/30/2014

John Cornyn has served as a U.S. Senator from Texas for more than 14 years and is the current Senate Minority Whip for the 113th Congress. As election season begins, a torrent of traffic comes to JohnCornyn.com. This traffic includes likely voters looking to confirm their affiliation, donors looking to support the Senator, and people seeking information about all of the candidates. Senator Cornyn’s team wanted to make sure that friction and anxiety were minimized on their main donation page and that credibility and clarity were increased so that the most motivated potential donors would make a gift to support the Cornyn campaign.

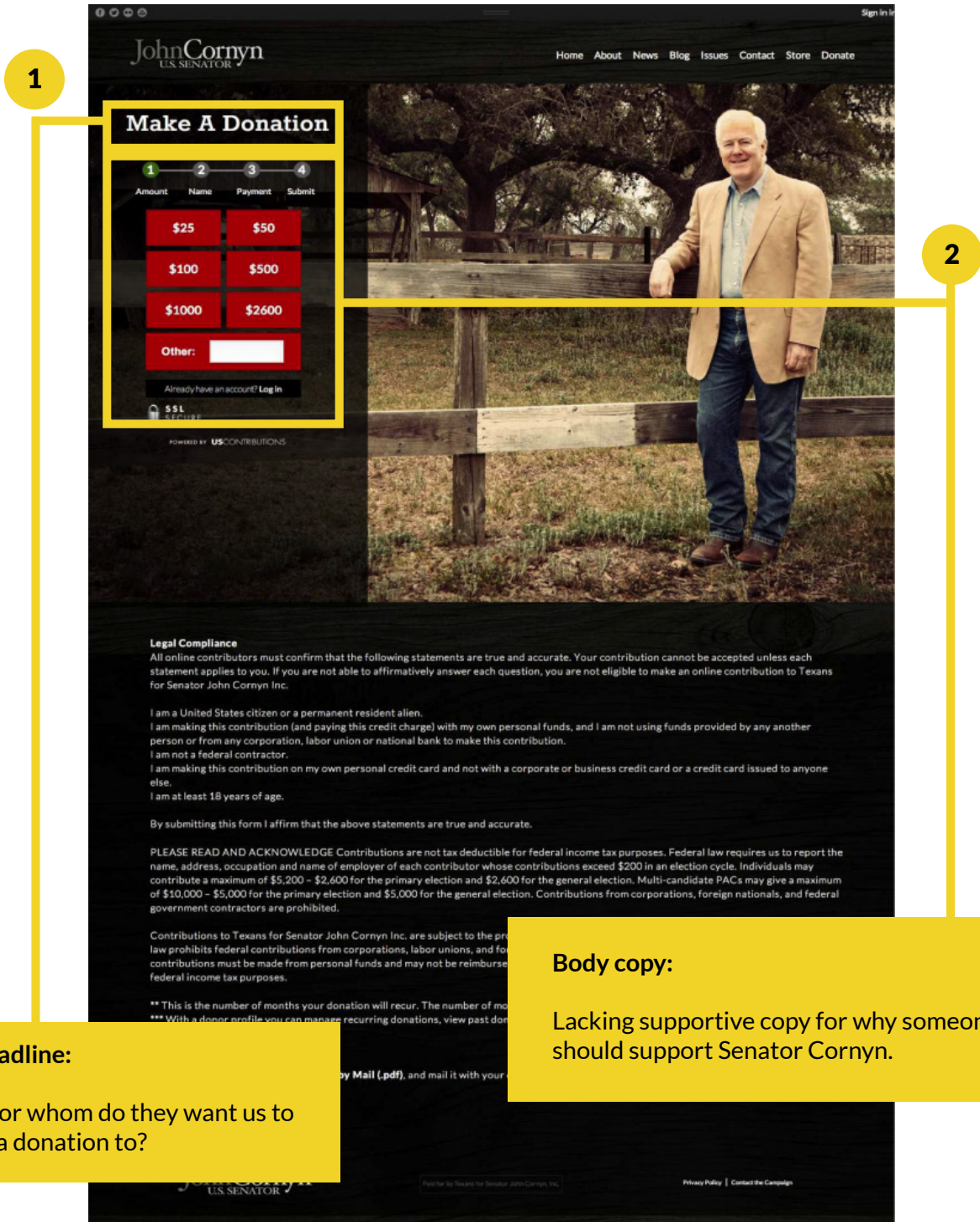
An initial observation revealed a potential flaw that many donation pages make. This page makes the assumption that every person who clicks the “Donate” link in the upper right-hand corner has already been completely convinced that they are ready to give a gift.

Somewhere in the conversion funnel, the organization must answer the essential value proposition question: “If I’m your ideal donor, why should I give to you rather than some other organization, or not at all?” This is the question that every one of our prospective and even existing donors asks themselves many times on an unconscious level. We must anticipate this question and provide adequate evidence and reasons why somebody should continue with the process of giving a gift—because research has shown that most people who click “donate” are not, in fact, ready to give.

Research Question

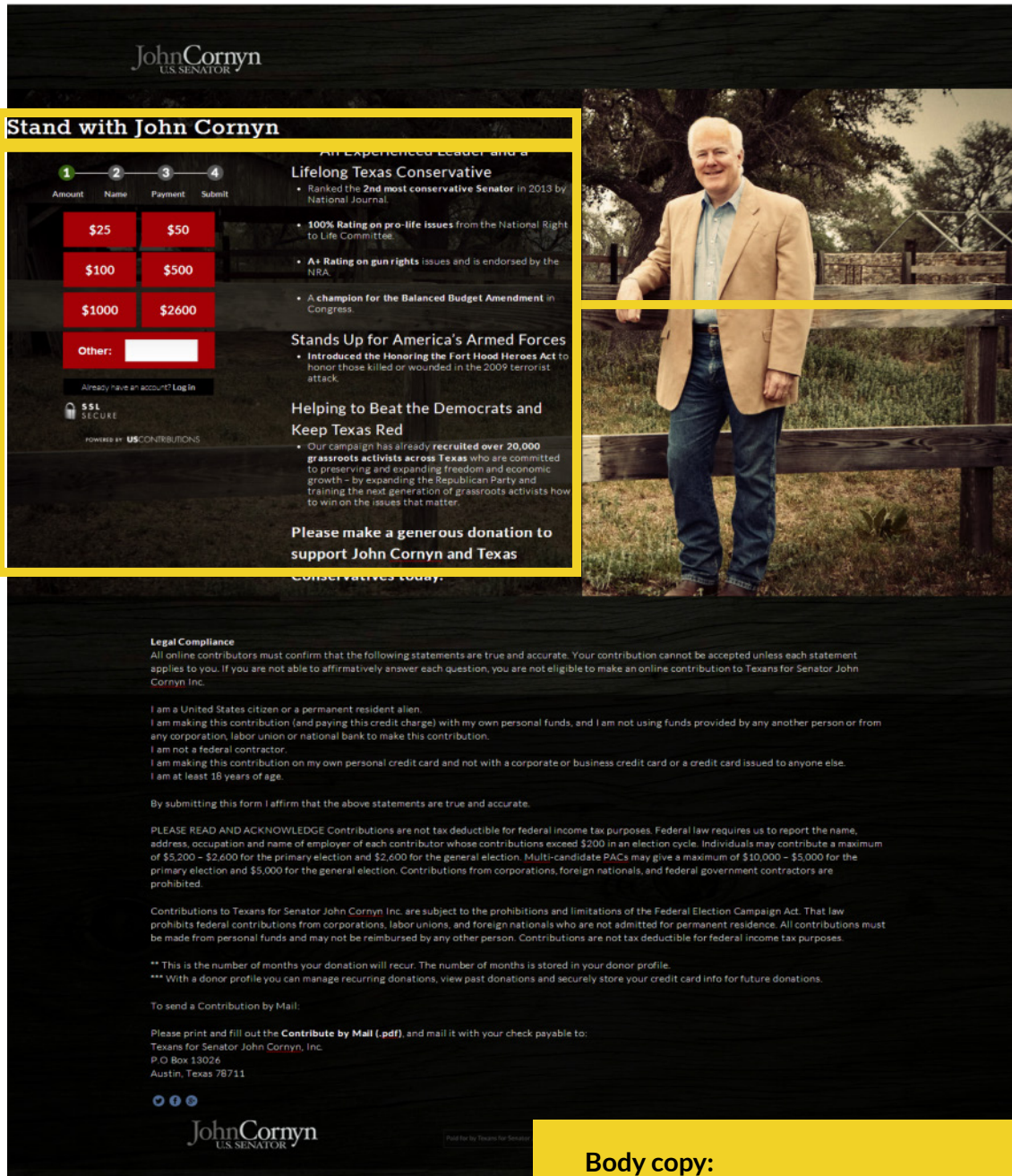
By adding copy that provides a clear and credible reason to give, can we increase both the average gift and conversion rate of the main donation page?

Control: No Value Proposition Language



Test: Value Proposition on Page

1



2

Headline:
Added headline to convey value.

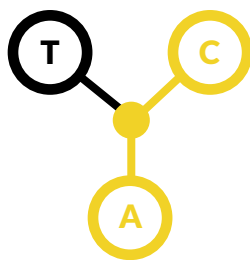
Body copy:
Added additional body copy with reasons why someone should give to Senator John Cornyn's campaign.
Including quantifiable evidence to the body copy reinforced the value proposition.

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence	Average Gift
C: No Value Prop Language	.11%	-----	-----	\$13.00
T1: Value Prop on Page	.38%	258.1%	96.3%	\$328.38

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
 × **258.1% increase in conversion rate**
 × **2,426.0% increase in average gift**

8,946.5% increase in revenue

Key Learnings

The new treatment delivered a 258.1% increase in donor conversion, with a statistically valid sample size. Team Cornyn learned a few things about their donor base through this test:

1. Experience matters.

Even though the donor might be motivated to get to the donation page, they need to be reminded throughout the process that Senator Cornyn aligns with their core beliefs and is worthy of their donation. Donors to Senator Cornyn are thoughtful—they can't be expected to just react to a donation opportunity; they must be persuaded along the way.

2. Design matters.

Simply adding the copy to the page hurts results. Keeping continuity in the user experience throughout the entire donation process is crucial to a positive lift.

Featured Case Study 2

HOW CLARIFYING THE PROCESS-LEVEL VALUE PROPOSITION AFFECTS EMAIL ACQUISITION

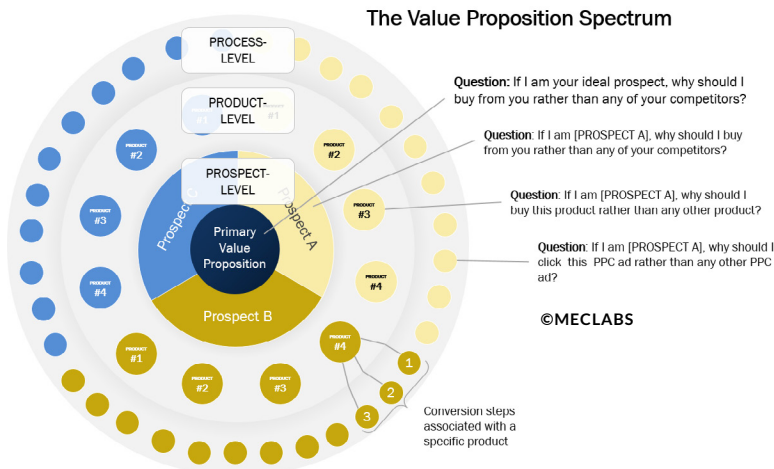
Research Partner: Good of All

Good of All exists to promote the most fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948). Our goal is to advance universal human rights around the world through online public education that is informed by the best legal and academic scholarship.

Experiment Summary — Timeframe: 4/20/2014–4/30/2014

Good of All was marketing a free eBook to grow their email list. With the majority of the traffic to the landing page coming directly from Facebook ads, visitors to the landing page were highly motivated and already converting at a high rate. But as Peter Drucker said, adequacy is the enemy of excellence—so Good of All sought to increase their name conversion rate. To do this, we attempted to strengthen the process-level value proposition by altering the headline, subheadline, and call-to-action.

One of the tools we use when assessing a value proposition is the **MECLABS value proposition spectrum**. This introduces us to the different types of derivative value propositions that exist in our marketing campaigns.



In the center of the wheel is the primary value proposition, which answers the question, “If I’m your ideal donor, why should I give to you rather than somebody else?”

In the next ring out, we accept that the value proposition may not be relevant to all customer segments. So, we develop value propositions for each donor persona. Next is the product level layer, which answers why the prospect should give to this campaign as opposed to any other. Finally, on the outer wheel are the process level value propositions, which answer why the prospect should bother reading a landing page or clicking on an ad in the first place.

Those are the different steps within the conversion process, each of the different stages that a person goes through in that micro funnel, each of the different steps within the conversion process. In this particular experiment for Good of All, we focused just on the process level value proposition, as represented by the headline and the call-to-action of the landing page treatment.

Research Question

What role does self-esteem play in conversion? By modifying the copy to be more inclusive, can we get more people to accept the offer?

What we did

The primary headline said, “What can Martin Luther King teach people of faith about human rights?” The call-to-action read, “Download the free eBook and find out now.” That’s not a bad headline or call-to-action, but our goal as

optimizers is to constantly challenge this thinking and say, “What can we do to make it even better?” We wondered: Are there some that read the headline and feel a bit on their heels as though we’re talking down our nose at them? In order to be “enlightened” and understand what Dr. King can teach them, they have to do some work. That work is communicated through the call-to-action: I need to download the free eBook so that I can find out.

We created a treatment with a new headline and call-to-action. It said, “His world-changing movement began with his faith. How can today’s world-changers learn from the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?” In this particular treatment, we addressed the visitor as a fellow world-changer. The call-to-action then focuses on communicating value, meaning what I can get as opposed to what I need to do in order to get it. We set up an A/B split test to determine a winner.

Control: Download the Free Book

1

Headline:
Comes across as haughty.

2

Call-to-action:
Requires people to do work to get what is being offered.

Test: Get the Free Book

1

Headline:
Empowers people by addressing them as “fellow world-changers.”

Call-to-action:
Communicates value. Tells the person what they get versus what they have to do to get it.

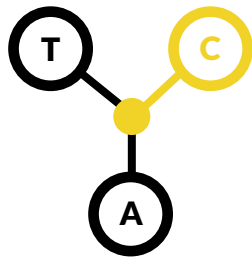
2

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: Download the Free Book	1.3%	----	----
T1: Get the Free Book	3.1%	133.7%	97.9%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
× **133.7% increase in conversion rate**
× **0% increase in average gift**

Key Learnings

By addressing the reader as a fellow “world-changer” and focusing on what the visitor “gets” rather than what they must “do,” the conversion rate improved by 133.7%. We need to remember that visitors to our landing pages are human beings with feelings and emotions. The copy we put forth on our landing pages should be designed to embrace those feelings, and our offers must be framed around the result (what the visitor gets), not the action required (what they must do).

Featured Case Study 3

HOW STRENGTHENING THE VALUE PROPOSITION THROUGH A RADICAL REDESIGN AFFECTS DONATIONS

Research Partner: Hillsdale College

Founded in 1844, Hillsdale College is an independent liberal arts college with a student body of about 1,400. Hillsdale’s educational mission rests upon two principles: academic excellence and institutional independence. The College does not accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies for any of its operations.

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 2/12/2015–2/23/2015

Hillsdale College’s popular Constitution 101 online course is supported by donations from individuals, many of whom donate after taking the course. Immediately after signing up for the course (or any of their other courses), registrants are given the opportunity to donate. The original donation page contained multiple links to other parts of the site, concentrated in two different navigational areas. It also gave them an immediate opt-out opportunity—by clicking the link (in the second paragraph of copy) “I cannot make a donation at this time.” A single line of copy asked the user to support the course, making the assumption that the visitor already understood the value of Hillsdale College. Additionally, the page focused on a premium book, *The Constitution Reader*, and used most of the available language to sell the value proposition of that item.

MECLABS has produced several heuristics that serve as a useful framework for the beginning of the optimization process. These heuristics are not mathematical equations; rather, they’re designed to focus our attention on the specific variables that move people to say yes. In the MECLABS Conversion Heuristic, the first factor that is represented is **motivation**. This is the most significant factor that affects conversion. Why does somebody come to the website in the first place? Visitor motivation can be a bit tricky because we can

try to alter that through the different types of marketing and traffic sources that we use to attract people to our websites.

Visitor motivation is the factor that we have the least control over. The next factor we see in this conversion heuristic is the **clarity of the value proposition**. This is something that we can positively affect. We can communicate the value proposition more clearly on our landing pages by using the right words, images, videos, and other types of media. We can also introduce an **incentive** to the process, which is an appealing element that's introduced at the call-to-action. Finally, there are things like **friction** and **anxiety** that either slow people down or stop them dead in their tracks.

One of the things that we can do is actually reduce the amount of friction that takes place in the donation experience. In this particular example, we focus on three of these factors: the clarity of the value proposition, the incentive, and the friction to increase conversion.

Research Question

Which page layout and value proposition best present the value proposition and minimize friction and anxiety to optimize donor conversion rate?

What We Did

When we looked at the original web page, we made a couple of significant changes. First, we tried to find a way to reduce the big header and move people more quickly into the value proposition.

Then we looked at the social sharing icons at the top of the page. We certainly want people to share the offer with others, but having the sharing icons at the beginning stage of the conversion process may serve as a distraction from our primary goal, which is to get a donation. There were also several tabs at the top of the page offering people the opportunity to visit different pages off of the main website. These are all good things, but good things can get in the way of

the ideal action in this case, with the ideal action being for people to read the pitch and respond with a financial gift.

The copy did a decent job of communicating the value proposition, but it spent more time talking about the incentive that was being offered instead of why someone should make a gift. There was also no picture or image of the book that somebody would get when they gave a gift. Finally, we reviewed the giving form. This particular giving form uses an array of suggested gift amounts, which is great. This has proven in previous tests to reduce mental friction. However, this array used “radio buttons.” Radio buttons can be a bit tricky to select and represent potential friction in the form.

Below the form, the button that a donor clicks to complete their gift was off to the side and didn't look like it was part of the page. Based on these observations, we designed a treatment. The first thing you'll notice is we got rid of the big header and introduced the copy with a thank you: “Thank you for signing up to take this course. You're almost on your way to learning more about the Constitution.” We reduced some of the distracting navigation elements that existed on the page and offloaded those to the next page, after somebody completes the donation process.

We used the copy to communicate more value. It describes the impact of the donor's gift and how it makes a difference. We also added a visual representation of the incentive that's being offered for a gift. We replaced the little tiny radio buttons with big blue buttons and even changed the button copy from “Donate Now,” which sounds more like a command.

The button copy was changed to “Make My Gift,” which is a bit more donor-centric. We set up an A/B split test to determine a winner.

Control: Original Donation Page

1

Header:
Tall header with unnecessary social media icons and tabs.

2

Body copy:
Copy focused on incentive with no image.

3

Radio Buttons

4

Ambiguous call-to-action off to the side

Test: Radical Redesign

1

Header:
Simplified and
shortened header.



Thank you for signing up for Hillsdale College's Constitution 101 course!

Your course is being prepared and will be ready in a few moments.

This course is always free of charge because we believe every American should understand the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and how to defend and restore liberty in America. Hillsdale also refuses every penny of taxpayer-funded government support (even indirectly through student grants and loans) so that we can remain truly independent.

That's why we count on the generosity of Americans who love Liberty and want to see it restored to our nation.

We want to educate 50 million Americans on the Constitution and founding principles through this course and our other programs.

Will you make a tax-deductible donation today to help educate more Americans?

Your gift will help Hillsdale reach and enroll more Americans in the Constitution 101 course.

Special offer: For a gift of \$100 or more, we will send you a copy of Hillsdale's online course companion textbook, *The U.S. Constitution: A Reader*.



Get your copy of the perfect companion textbook to the Constitution 101 course.

Yes! I want to ensure more Americans are educated about our founding principles.

3

Larger Buttons

Anonymous: I prefer to make this donation anonymously

Billing Information

Title:

First Name:

Last Name:

Country:

Address:

City:

State:

ZIP:

Phone:

Email:

Payment Information

Cardholder's Name:

Credit Card Number:

Card Type:

Card Expiration: >

Card Security Code:

Matching Gifts

My company will match my gift

2

Body copy:
Copy focused on why
someone should make a
gift along with an image
of the incentive.

4

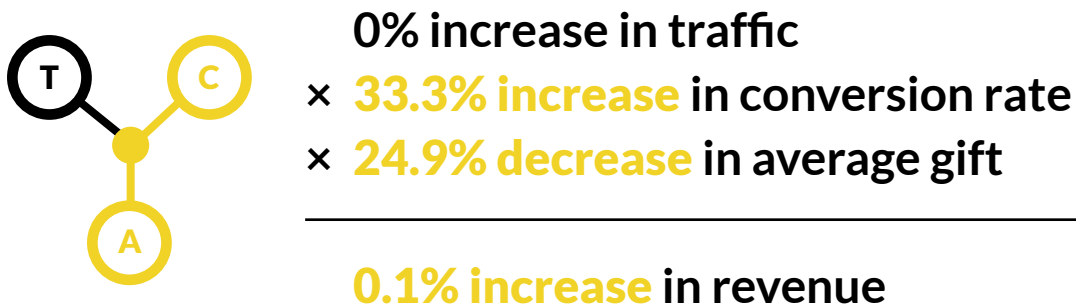
Button center aligned
with form looking like
it's part of the page

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence	Average Gift
C: Original Donation Page	3.1%	-----	-----	\$76.92
T1: Radical Redesign	4.1%	33.3%	95.7%	\$57.75

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



Key Learnings

The two donation forms resulted in nearly identical revenue—but the new treatment led to a **33.3% increase in conversion rate**. Because the primary goal of the page is the acquisition of new donors, the increased conversion rate made the new treatment the winner.

The discrepancy in average gifts between the pages did lead to some interesting observations. After further examination of the individual transactions, we learned that the new treatment was getting lower average gifts than the control. This led us to believe that the three options in the new treatment’s gift array may be too much of a stretch for most people. As a result, they are using the “Other amount” option. This is an example of “unsupervised thinking,” which is leading to the visitors entering lower gift amounts than we would prefer.

FEATURED CASE STUDY 3

As a result, Hillsdale's next experiment will be a test of the gift array to see if lowering the initial ask can lead to an overall increased average gift.

Featured Case Study 4

HOW INCREASING THE FORCE OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION CAN AFFECT DONOR CONVERSION

Research Partner: CaringBridge

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 11/18/2014 - 11/24/2014

CaringBridge receives the majority of their donations through individual site pages. However, we believed there was an opportunity to increase conversion on their main donation page. In its initial state, the donation page was just a donation form with the headline “Give to CaringBridge”.

Research Question

Will increasing the strength of the value proposition through a third-party quote, donor-centric language, increased clarity, and a stronger call to action result in a higher conversion rate?

Control: Minimal Value Proposition Copy

The screenshot shows the CaringBridge website's donation interface. At the top, there is a header with the CaringBridge logo and a photograph of a smiling child with arms outstretched. The word "WonderFull" is written in a blue, hand-drawn font over the photo. Below the photo, the text reads "Your Gift Makes a WonderFull Difference." followed by "Your gift will help people connect with the support they need, right when they need it most." The main section is titled "Give to CaringBridge" and "Donation Amount". It features four buttons for donation amounts: \$70.00 (highlighted in dark blue), \$125.00, \$300.00, and Other. Below these is a text input field with "\$70.00" and a "minimum \$10.00" label. A "Payment Plan" section is visible with two options: "One-time payment for the full amount" (selected) and "Monthly (12 per year) ongoing payments".

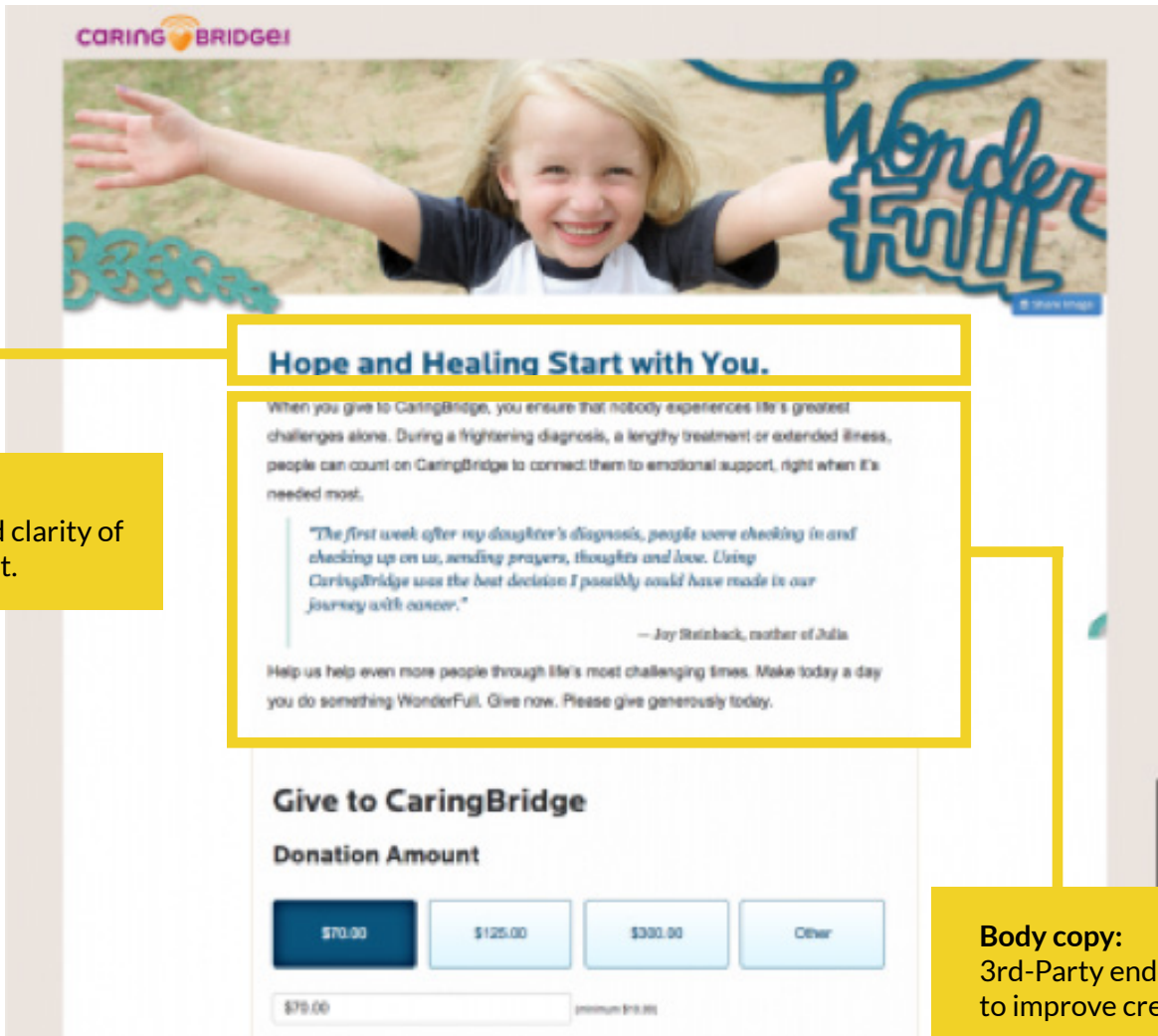
1

Header:
Impersonal and lacking clarity.

2

Body copy:
Personal, but could be stated stronger.

Test: Addition Value Proposition Copy



1

Header:
Increased clarity of statement.

2

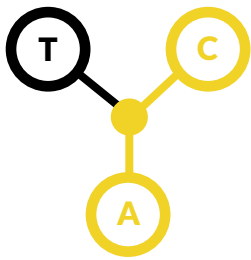
Body copy:
3rd-Party endorsement to improve credibility.
Stronger call-to-action.

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence	Average Gift
C: Original	0.70%	-----	-----	\$65.00
T1: With Value Proposition	1.6%	127.6%	100.0%	\$66.78

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
 × **127.6% increase in conversion rate**
 × **2.7% increase in average gift**

133.8% increase in revenue

Key Learnings

By increasing the force of the value proposition on this donation page, CaringBridge was able to see 133.8% increase in revenue. The major component in this revenue increase is a result of the 127.6% increase in conversion rate.

This shows us that just because someone clicks through to a donation page on our web site does not mean that they are ready to give. Continuing to reinforce the value of giving to your organization throughout the whole conversion process is key to ensuring that donors make it all the way through.

Featured Case Study 5

HOW USING VIDEO IN A DONATION APPEAL AFFECTS RESPONSE RATES

Research Partner: Dallas Theological Seminary

The mission of Dallas Theological Seminary is “to glorify God by equipping godly servant-leaders for the proclamation of His Word and the building up of the body of Christ worldwide.” They strive to help men and women fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, or more simply: Teach Truth. Love Well.

Experiment Summary — Timeframe: 12/28/2014–12/30/2014

Video is often used as a way to increase visitor engagement on donation landing pages. Many organizations assume that creating videos will increase response rate and therefore put a lot of resources into the production process. However, we hypothesized that video might actually distract from the ultimate goal of a donation. To test this, we created an experiment to test an email and landing page with a video against a text version of the same message.

Research Question

Will using text instead of a video allow donors to focus on the call-to-action and therefore increase the response rate of the campaign?

What we did

We took the video from the control, made a transcript of it, and put it on the landing page. The control has the screenshot of the video that exists on the landing page, and it asks recipients to click through to watch the video. The treatment email is text-only and leads to a simple text-based appeal on the landing page. We set up an A/B split test to determine a winner.

Control: Video Email

1

Video:

Included a screenshot of the video that was on the landing page. Video is known to increase engagement, but would it distract people from giving a gift?

Dear << Test Salutation >>,

As we wrap up this year and look forward to 2015, I wanted to send you a personal message to share with you what God is doing through Dallas Theological Seminary.



[Click here to see my special video message.](#)

Sincerely,
Mark L. Bailey, PhD



Mark L. Bailey, PhD
President, professor of Bible Exposition
Dallas Theological Seminary
800-DTS-WORD

Test: Text Email

1

Video link:

Took out the video screenshot and replaced it with a text link. A transcript of the video was made and put on the landing page.

Dear << Test Salutation >>,

As we wrap up this year and look forward to 2015, I wanted to send you a personal message to share with you what God is doing through Dallas Theological Seminary.

[Click here to learn what God is doing here at DTS.](#)

Sincerely,
Mark L. Bailey, PhD



Mark L. Bailey, PhD
President, professor of Bible Exposition
Dallas Theological Seminary
800-DTS-WORD

You are receiving this email because you donated to DTS and opted to receive emails.
[unsubscribe](#)

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: Video Email	6.7%	-----	-----
T1: Text Email	6.5%	-2.9%	69.7%

Key Learnings

With no significant difference between click rates and nearly identical response rates (both are 0.1%), the effort put into the video may not be necessary this late in a year-end campaign.

Featured Case Study 6

HOW VISUALLY INCREASING URGENCY IN AN EMAIL AFFECTS RESPONSE RATES

Research Partner: Dallas Theological Seminary

The mission of Dallas Theological Seminary is “to glorify God by equipping godly servant-leaders for the proclamation of His Word and the building up of the body of Christ worldwide.” They strive to help men and women fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, or more simply: Teach Truth. Love Well.

Experiment Summary — Timeframe: 12/30/2014–12/31/2014

December 31 is the biggest giving day of the year for many nonprofits. As the end of the year approaches, DTS wanted to increase urgency to inspire additional giving. We hypothesized that reminding donors of the limited time remaining to give in the calendar year would increase conversion. We created a treatment that added an animated countdown clock to one of the last emails of the year as a way to visually remind supporters of the approaching deadline.

Research Question

Will the addition of an animated countdown clock to the email increase the urgency in the mind of the donor and increase the response rate of the campaign?

Control: No Countdown Clock

1

Dear << Test Salutation >>,



I wanted to send you a quick reminder to make your online gift to Dallas Theological Seminary today. Your gift is an investment that will produce a return greater than any worldly investment you could make.

Generous donors have already helped DTS meet the Challenge Gift of \$450,000, but it's not too late to make your gift! *Every penny counts* to help DTS equip servant-leaders to boldly proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

Before you help ring in the new year, help lay the groundwork to advance God's kingdom in 2015.

Make your year-end gift now.

Sincerely,

Mark L. Bailey, PhD
President
Dallas Theological Seminary

Countdown clock:
No countdown clock.

Test: Countdown Clock

1

Dear << Test Salutation >>,



I wanted to send you a quick reminder to make your online gift to Dallas Theological Seminary today. Your gift is an investment that will produce a return greater than any worldly investment you could make.

Generous donors have already helped DTS meet the Challenge Gift of \$450,000, but it's not too late to make your gift! *Every penny counts* to help DTS equip servant-leaders to boldly proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

Before you help ring in the new year, help lay the groundwork to advance God's kingdom in 2015.

Make your year-end gift now.

Sincerely,

Mark L. Bailey, PhD
President
Dallas Theological Seminary

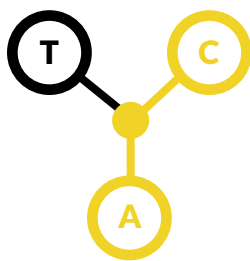
Countdown clock:
Animated countdown clock added to visually create urgency.

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence	Average Gift
C: No Countdown Clock	0.19%	-----	-----	\$892.86
T1: Countdown Clock	0.29%	51.1%	95.6%	\$1,844.62

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
 × **51.1% increase in conversion rate**
 × **106.6% increase in average gift**

212.2% increase in revenue

Key Learnings

The treatment with the countdown clock increased both conversion rate and average gift! This suggests that visually conveying urgency can increase response in campaigns that contain an inherent deadline, like calendar year-end or fiscal year-end. Interestingly, the countdown clock in the email did not actually increase the number of clicks to the landing page, but significantly increased the number of donors who subsequently gave a gift.

Featured Case Study 7

HOW A MORE PERSONALIZED MESSAGING APPROACH IN AN EMAIL SOLICITATION CAN AFFECT RESPONSE RATE

Research Partner: The Heritage Foundation

Founded in 1973, The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.

Experiment Summary — Timeframe: 12/29/2014–12/30/2014

With a little over two days left before the end of the year, Heritage Foundation email subscribers had received six different messages from Jim DeMint—the president of the organization—asking for their support with a year-end gift. “Best practices” suggest that the email signer should be the leader of the organization and should rarely (if ever) change to ensure that donors hear a consistent voice. Heritage wanted to test that theory by sending an email from someone else in the organization.

Would changing the sender and making the tone more personalized increase response rate?

Research Question

How does a softer, more personal tone from a more believable email sender affect email response rate?


What We Did

The control was very formal in its tone and language. It seemed a bit contrived. We don't communicate to people we associate with or our friends like this, so why communicate this way in an email? Additionally, do people get blind to the same sender over and over again? And do they believe that the president of an organization is actually emailing them?

We wanted our treatment to be more believable and casual in nature. We changed the sender from Jim DeMint to Christie Fogarty, director of Heritage's membership programs. We even made the subject line very friendly, "Checking in." Even after a person opened up the email, the casual tone continued. We set up an A/B split test to determine a winner.

Control: Jim Demint Sender

From: Jim DeMint <info@heritage.org>
 Reply-to: info@heritage.org
 To:
 Subject: MAKE THIS BOLD STATEMENT



Dear Fellow Conservative,

With only a few days until the new Congress swears in, now is the time to make a bold statement by standing with The Heritage Foundation.

[Stand with The Heritage Foundation today >>](#)

When you stand with Heritage, lawmakers know exactly what you believe. It means you stand up for your principles . . . it means you do not back down in the face of adversity, or when you're in the minority . . . it means you are well-informed . . . it means you are not one to be swayed from your convictions.


Heritage is successful because of patriots like you. Thanks to you, we've become a leader of the conservative movement, with more than 600,000 members across the country. Lawmakers, the media, and the American people turn to Heritage because they trust our policy research – and because they know you and your fellow Heritage supporters are the most informed, most influential, and most conservative constituency out there.

And all of our work over the past 41 years is meant to make you and your family safer, happier, and more prosperous by fighting for the principles our founding fathers espoused: **free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.**

Help make these principles a reality. Help make America a better place. Help make America the one you want your children's children to be proud of.

[Please, stand with Heritage today and make your year-end gift to support your conservative principles.](#)

Thank you for your support as we defend freedom for future generations.

Sincerely,

 Jim DeMint
 President

The Heritage Foundation | 214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE | Washington, D.C. 20002 | (800) 546-2843

Sender:

From the president of the organization.

1

Subject line and body copy:

Formal in tone and language.

2

Test: New Signer

From: Christie Fogarty <info@heritage.org>
 Reply-to: info@heritage.org
 To:
 Subject: Checking in

Hey there,

I wanted to check in to see if you'll be able to contribute towards Heritage's million dollar goal by the December 31 deadline.

Your gift will go straight to supporting your conservative principles in 2015. We're going to arm and equip the new Congress with the intellectual ammunition they need to win conservative victories. And we're going to work to move more and more Americans to our side.

[You can make your year-end contribution here.](#)

I hope you'll be able to stand with us by the end of the year. Thanks for your support, and have a very happy new year.

All my best,

Christie Fogarty
 Director of Membership
 The Heritage Foundation

P.S. The Heritage Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, so [your gift by December 31 is tax-deductible.](#)

The Heritage Foundation | 214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE | Washington, D.C. 20002 | (800) 546-2843

Sender:

From the director of the organization's membership programs.

1

Subject line and body copy:

Subject line is very friendly in nature.

Body copy has a continued casual tone and language from the subject line to make copy believable.

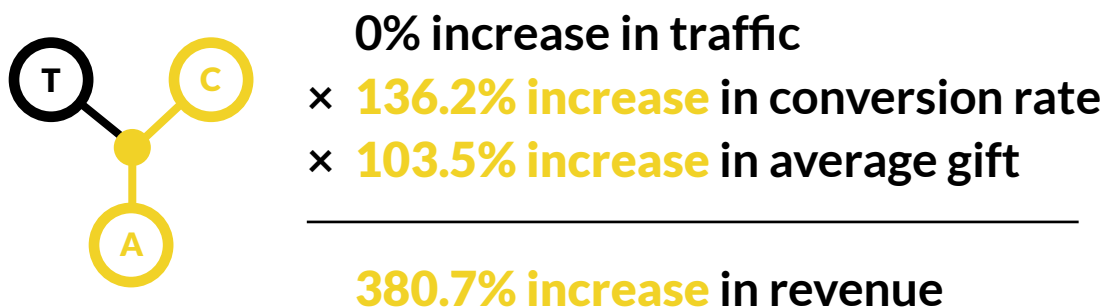
2

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence	Average Gift
C: Jim DeMint Sender	0.03%	-----	-----	\$66.18
T1: New Signer	0.14%	380.7%	100.0%	\$134.70

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



Key Learnings

The treatment delivered a 136% increase in conversion rate and a 103% increase in average gift –for a total revenue increase of 380%! Not only did more people say yes, they said, “Heck yes”! They also gave at a higher level.

This highlights an important principle: People give to people, not email machines. A more personalized message, even if not from the primary organizational sender, can have a significant impact on the donor’s likelihood to give.

Advertising Case Study 1

HOW THE RIGHT PRODUCT-LEVEL VALUE PROPOSITION CAN AFFECT AD TRAFFIC

Research Partner: Texas State Historical Association

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 7/6/2015–7/16/2015

As part of the promotion of their free Battle of the Alamo eBook campaign, the Texas State Historical Association used banner ads across their website to promote the product. The challenge with a banner ad is that we need to articulate why a visitor would want the eBook in a limited area of space. In order to effectively do this, we needed to find the most appealing “product-level” value proposition. Put another way, we need to find what is most unique and appealing about a product that will make a visitor want to click on the ad.

In order to discover this, we tested two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that the TSHA is the authoritative source for Texas history; the alternative was that visitors will want the complete story of the heroes who fought in the battle, not just the highlights they see on TV. We created two banner treatments and split visitors equally between them.

Research Question

Which value proposition (complete history vs. authoritative source) will get the most clicks?

Control: Authoritative Source

1

Copy:
An authoritative message.



Exclusively from TSHA:

Get the story of the Alamo from the most authoritative source for Texas history

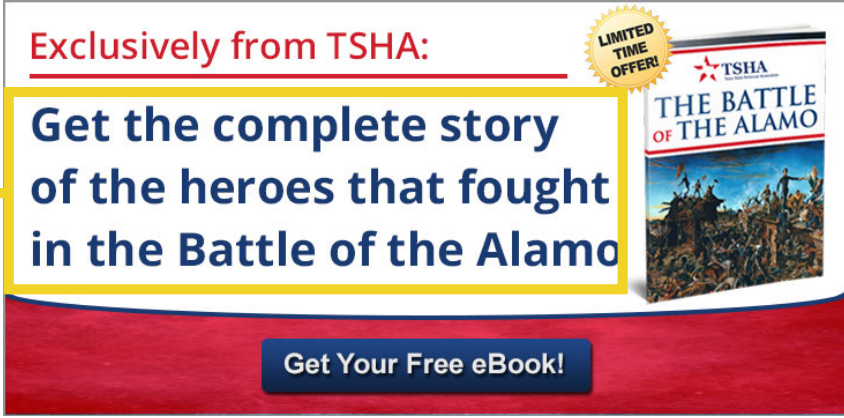
Get Your Free eBook!

The advertisement features a red background with a white banner at the top. On the left, a yellow box contains the text 'An authoritative message.' A yellow circle with the number '1' is positioned above this box. The main banner contains the text 'Exclusively from TSHA:' in red, followed by 'Get the story of the Alamo from the most authoritative source for Texas history' in blue. A blue button at the bottom says 'Get Your Free eBook!'. On the right, there is a book cover for 'THE BATTLE OF THE ALAMO' by TSHA, with a 'LIMITED TIME OFFER!' badge above it.

Test: Complete Story

1

Copy:
Added a new perspective. Making it more personal by focusing on the individuals the eBook was about.



Exclusively from TSHA:

Get the complete story of the heroes that fought in the Battle of the Alamo

Get Your Free eBook!

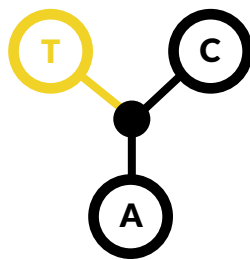
The advertisement features a red background with a white banner at the top. On the left, a yellow box contains the text 'Added a new perspective. Making it more personal by focusing on the individuals the eBook was about.' A yellow circle with the number '1' is positioned above this box. The main banner contains the text 'Exclusively from TSHA:' in red, followed by 'Get the complete story of the heroes that fought in the Battle of the Alamo' in blue. A blue button at the bottom says 'Get Your Free eBook!'. On the right, there is a book cover for 'THE BATTLE OF THE ALAMO' by TSHA, with a 'LIMITED TIME OFFER!' badge above it.

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: Authoritative Source	0.60%	-----	-----
T1: Complete Story	0.81%	34.5%	100.0%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



- 34.5% increase in traffic**
- × **0% decrease in conversion rate**
- × **0% increase in average gift**

Key Learnings

The “complete story of the heroes that fought in the Battle of the Alamo” increased the number of clicks on the banners by 34.5%. There have been multiple books written about the events surrounding the battle but very few discussing the history of those who fought in it. Since this eBook focused on the individuals and their complete biographical history, this was a unique perspective that ultimately proved to be more appealing to visitors.

Advertising Case Study 2

HOW CONVEYING VALUE IN A DONATE BUTTON AFFECT TRAFFIC EXPONENTIALLY

Research Partner: Hillsdale College

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 5/8/2015–5/22/2015

Imprimis is the free monthly speech digest of Hillsdale College and is dedicated to educating citizens and promoting civil and religious liberty by covering cultural, economic, political, and educational issues. It has an audience of more than 2.8 million, so we saw this as a great opportunity to optimize the pathway to a donation.

Historically, the donate button was found at the top of the site with the text of “Donate Now.” We didn’t believe that really conveyed any value or ownership in donor’s gift so we wanted to try two different treatments.

Research Question

Which call-to-action can drive the most visitors to the donation page: “Donate Now,” “Make my Gift,” or “Support Imprimis?”

Control: “Donate Now” Button

1



Donation button copy:

Directs and tells visitors what the organization wants them to do.

Test 1: “Make My Gift” Button

1



Donation button copy:

Makes it personal, but tells visitors what the organization wants them to do.

Test 1: “Support Imprimis” Button

1



Donation button copy:

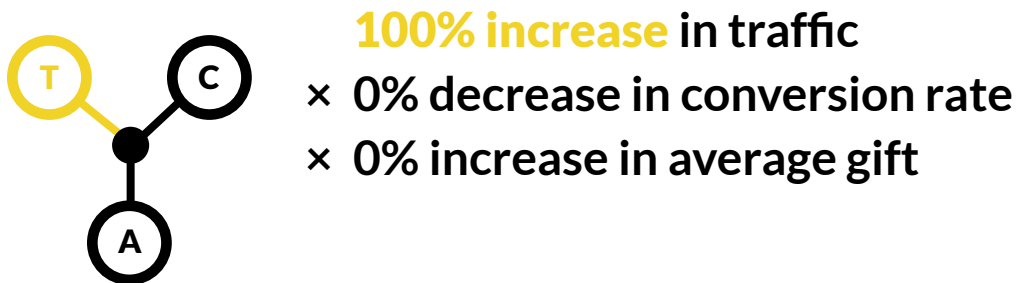
Conveys value and gives context to the visitors.

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: "Donate Now" Button	0.00%	-----	-----
T1: "Make My Gift" Button	0.00%	0.00%	50.0%
T1: "Support Imprimis" Button	0.25%	100%	100.0%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



Key Learnings

None of the other buttons were able to drive a single visitor to the donation page. Upon further reflection, the "Support Imprimis" button was the only one that conveyed any value to the visitors. If they enjoy the publication, this is something that they would be interested in doing. The "Donate Now" and "Make My Gift" are actions that we want them to take, but these do not necessarily provide any value or context to the visitor.

Advertising Case Study 3

HOW THE STRENGTH OF A HEADLINE CAN AFFECT CLICK RATE IN A FACEBOOK AD

Research Partner: The Heritage Foundation

Experiment Summary — Timeframe: 8/1/2014–8/15/2014

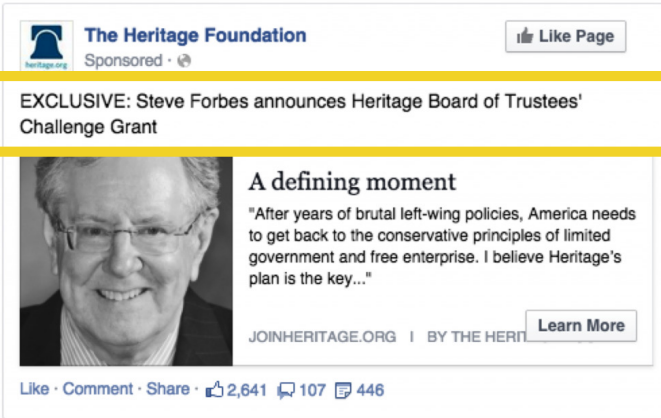
As part of the Board Challenge campaign, we ran Facebook advertising targeted at known donors and audiences who matched the profile of a Heritage supporter. The landing page had a quote from a well-known public figure, so we were able to use that person in the advertisement to help drive traffic. We wanted to discover what messaging approach would allow us to drive the most traffic.

Research Question

Will the more active “challenge” language increase the amount of traffic being driven compared to the more passive “announcement” language?

Control: Passive “Announcement”

1



Facebook ad headline:

Passive messaging with the use of the word “announces.”

Test: Active “Challenge”

1



Facebook ad headline:

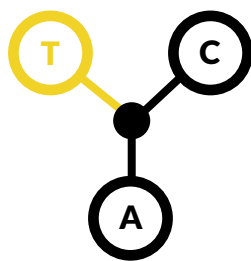
Active messaging with the use of the word “challenge.”

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: Passive “announcement”	3.6%	-----	-----
T1: Active “challenge”	5.3%	45.5%	100.0%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



45.5% increase in traffic
 × **0% decrease in conversion rate**
 × **0% increase in average gift**

Key Learnings

The “challenge” language captured the interest of those who saw the advertisement. This resulted in a 45% increase to visitors to the landing page.

Advertising Case Study 4

HOW CLARIFYING THE CALL-TO-ACTION AFFECTS DONOR CONVERSION

Research Partner: CaringBridge

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 11/20/2014 - 11/25/2014

The Tribute widget drives the majority of CaringBridge's organic site revenue. It is a small advertisement on a patient's journal page that asks the visitor to make a tribute gift. With the volume of CaringBridge's site traffic, improving the conversion rate of this widget would have an exponential impact.

A treatment was developed with the goal of clarifying the purpose of the gift. The idea was that if we can have visitors better understand the purpose of the gift, they will be more likely to make a gift.

Research Question

Will increasing clarity of the call to action while adding language to increase the “fear of loss” increase donor conversion rate over the existing treatment emphasizing the more general ask?

Control: General Ask

1

Header:
Impersonal and lacking clarity.


Make a WonderFull Tribute Donation

Honor Deborah with a Tribute donation and help CaringBridge connect people with love and support when they need it most.

2

Body copy:
Personal, but could be stated stronger.

Add a message to your Tribute donation



255 characters remaining

I'll Help Now

Treatment 1: Personalized Ask

1

Header:
Personal and clear.

Honor Deborah with Your Tribute Donation

Make a gift to CaringBridge in honor of Deborah to make sure that the website that brings them joy on a daily basis stays up and running this holiday season.

2

Body copy:
Strengthened by emphasizing the “fear of loss”.

Wonder Fall

Add a message to your Tribute donation

255 characters remaining

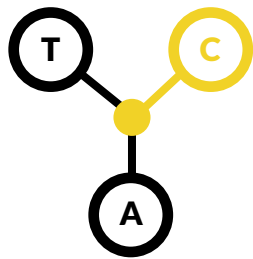
Make My Donation Now

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: General Ask	0.01%	-----	-----
T1: Personalized Ask	0.01%	85.8%	100%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
 × **85.8% increase in conversion rate**
 × **0% increase in average gift**

Key Learnings

The resulting treatment made multiple impacts along the path to conversion. By itself, the new widget language increased the number of clicks by 19.3%.

Not only that but this increased traffic was more qualified than the visitors that the control would drive since they had a better understanding of the purpose of their gift. As a result, the visitors to the subsequent page had a 52% increase in conversion and a 54% decrease in refunds.

The cumulative effect of all of these lifts resulted in an **85.9% increase in donor conversion**.

Donation Pages: Case Study 1

HOW INCREASING THE CLARITY OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION AFFECTS DONOR CONVERSION RATE

Research Partner: Caringbridge

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 5/1/2015–9/23/2015

The majority of CaringBridge’s online revenue comes from an area on each journal page that is internally called the “tribute widget.” The CaringBridge team wanted to see if they could clarify and strengthen the value proposition presented in this widget. The control had a “command” to the visitor and made a lot of assumptions about their knowledge of where the donation went and how to use the widget itself. So they developed a treatment that suggested an action to the visitor, clarified the impact of their gift, and offered a helpful note about how to begin the process.

Research Question

Will increasing the clarity of the value proposition increase donor conversion?

Control

The control version of the donation form features a pink header with the text "Honor Stephanie". Below the header, the body copy reads: "Tribute donations are vital to keeping CaringBridge and Stephanie's Site running." followed by "Join the 10 donors who have made a gift in honor of Stephanie". A text input field is present with a character count of "255 characters remaining". At the bottom is a purple "Donate Today" button.

Header:
Uses command language.

1

Body copy:
Makes assumptions.

2

Test

The test version of the donation form features a pink header with the text "You Can Honor Stephanie Today". Below the header, the body copy reads: "Your donation to CaringBridge keeps this website, and thousands of others, running so it's here when Stephanie needs it." followed by "Join the 10 donors who have made a gift in honor of Stephanie". A text input field contains the placeholder text "Leave a message of support for Stephanie" and has a character count of "255 characters remaining". At the bottom is a purple "Donate Today" button.

Header:
Suggests an action to the visitor.

1

Body copy:
Clarifies the impact of the visitor's gift and offers how to begin the process.

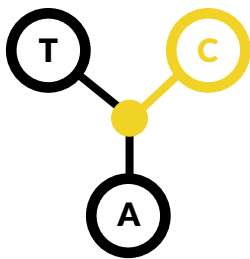
2

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: Control	11.3%	-----	-----
T1: Treatment 1	14.4%	27.4%	99.8%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



- 0% increase in traffic
- × 27.4% increase in conversion rate
- × 0% increase in average gift

Key Learnings

Although the treatment delivered fewer clickthroughs or “starts” it refined and motivated those who did begin the process, resulting in a net conversion gain.

Donation Pages: Case Study 2

HOW THE WRONG VALUE PROPOSITION CAN AFFECT CONVERSION

Research Partner: Dallas Theological Seminary

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 4/10/2015 - 6/22/2015

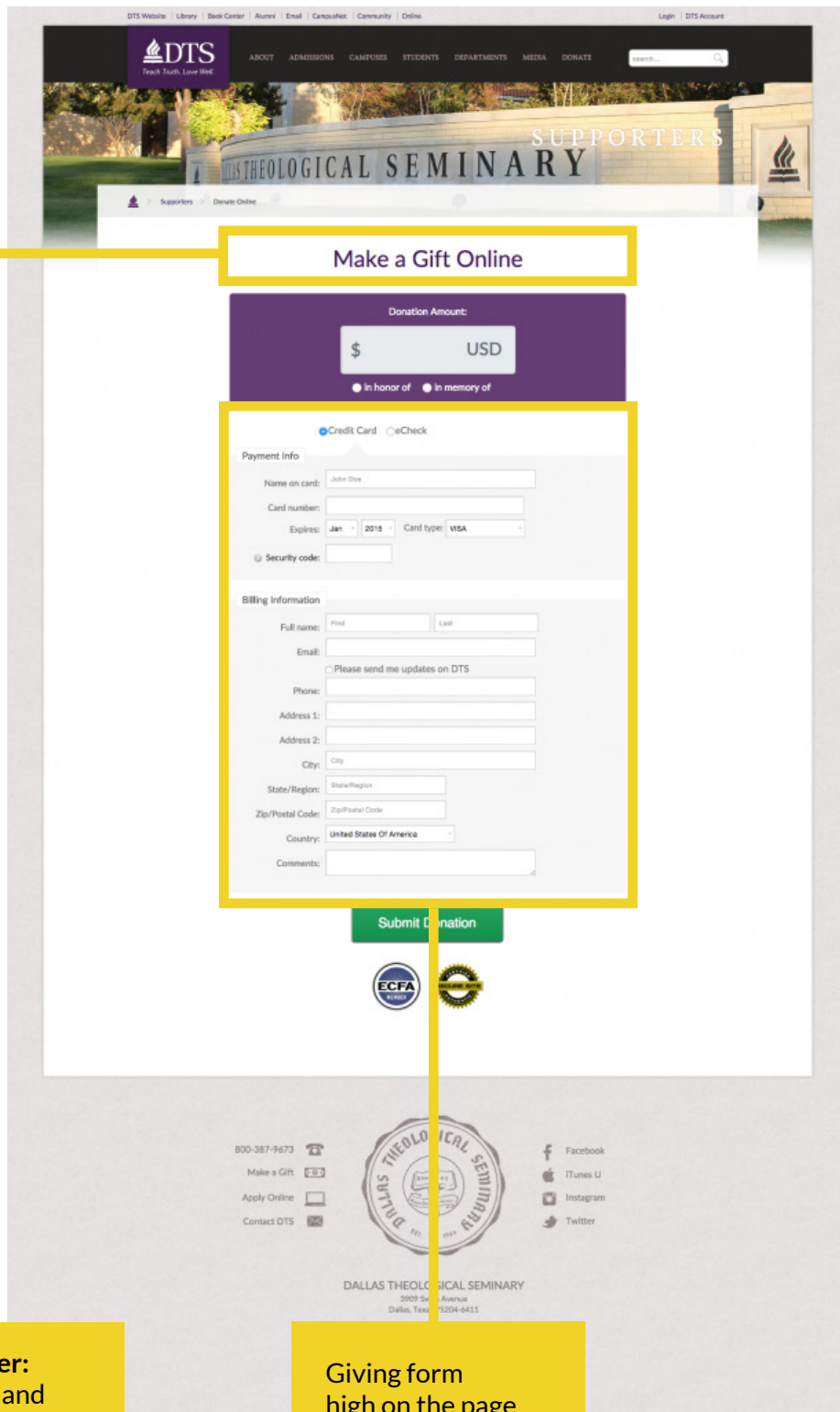
The primary donation form for Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) had remained consistent for the last several years. It was a well-designed form, but it made the assumption that those donors who make it to the page are already convinced to give their gift. This was evident from the lack of any copy or significant call-to-action at the top of the form.

In an effort to increase the perceived value of the donation to potential donors, we decided to create a new treatment. This new page would utilize the same donation form but would add copy to the top that discussed one of the unique value propositions of DTS. It also included quotes from well-known figures in the Christian community supporting the work of DTS.

Research Question

Which donation page treatment will collect the highest number of donors and revenue?

Control: Original



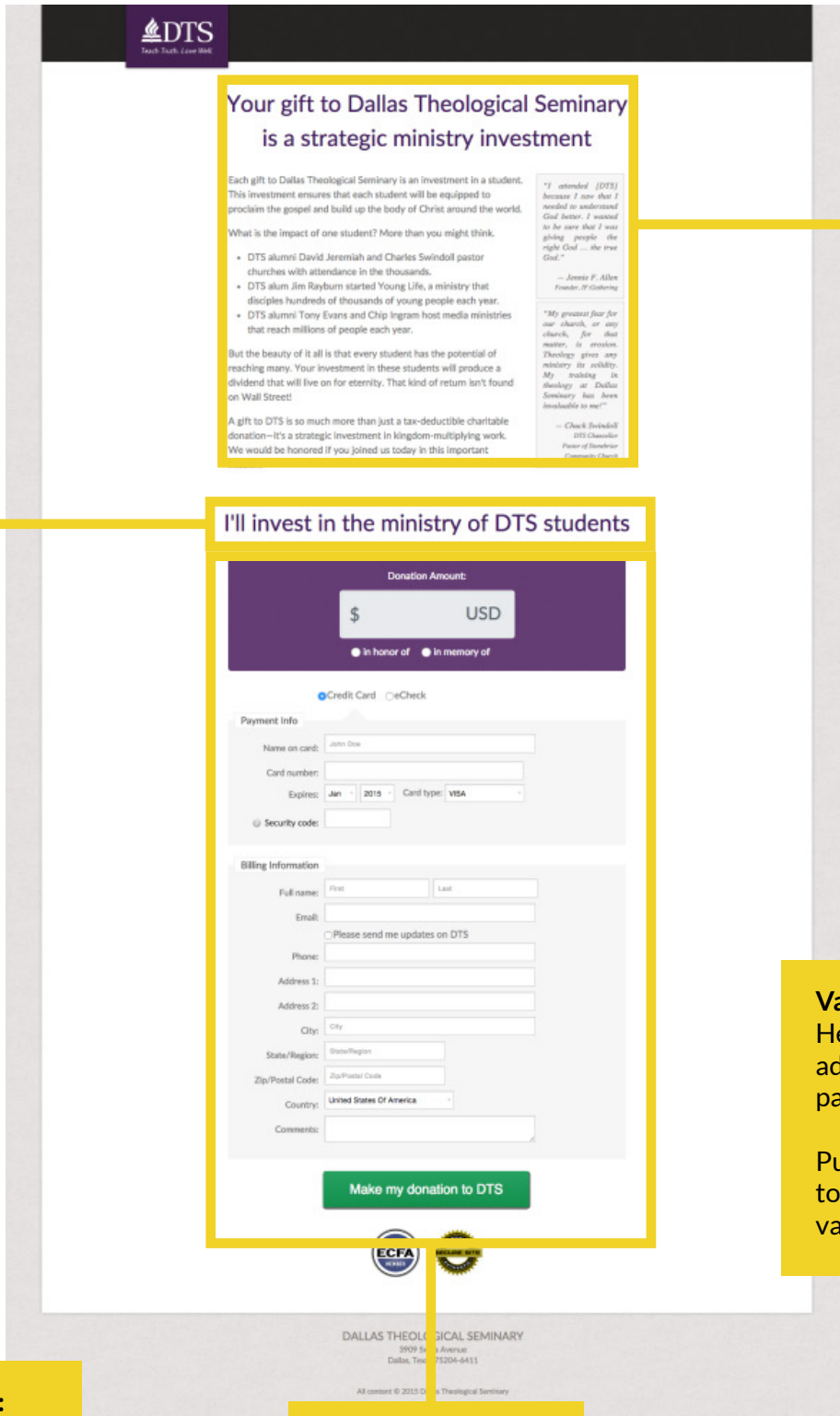
1

Form Header:
Impersonal and direct.

Giving form high on the page with no value proposition copy.

2

Test: Value Proposition with Quotes



Form Headline:
Personal and reinforcing the value proposition.

Giving form lower on the page.

Value Proposition:
Header and copy added to top of the page.

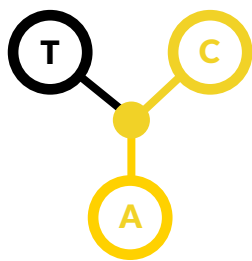
Pull quotes added to reinforce the value proposition.

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: Control	20.0%	-----	-----
T1: Vaule Propostion with Quotes	14.4%	-28.1%	96.4%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
 × **28.1% decrease in conversion rate**
 × **57.5% decrease in average gift**

69.4% decrease in revenue

Key Learnings

The new donation form treatment resulted in a 28.1% decrease in donor conversion. This would indicate that the value proposition communicated on the page did not appeal to the potential donors. Additionally, by adding the wrong copy and pushing the donation form further down on the page, we introduced friction into the donation process. These two factors combined to reduce the donors and revenue to the page.

Donation Pages: Case Study 3

HOW ADDING CLARITY TO THE SIGNUP PROCESS AFFECTS DONOR CONVERSION

Research Partner: Hillsdale College

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 8/18/2015–9/9/2015

The Constitution 101 online course is one of the primary methods for email and donor acquisition for Hillsdale College. This is a free course available in exchange for the visitor's name and address.

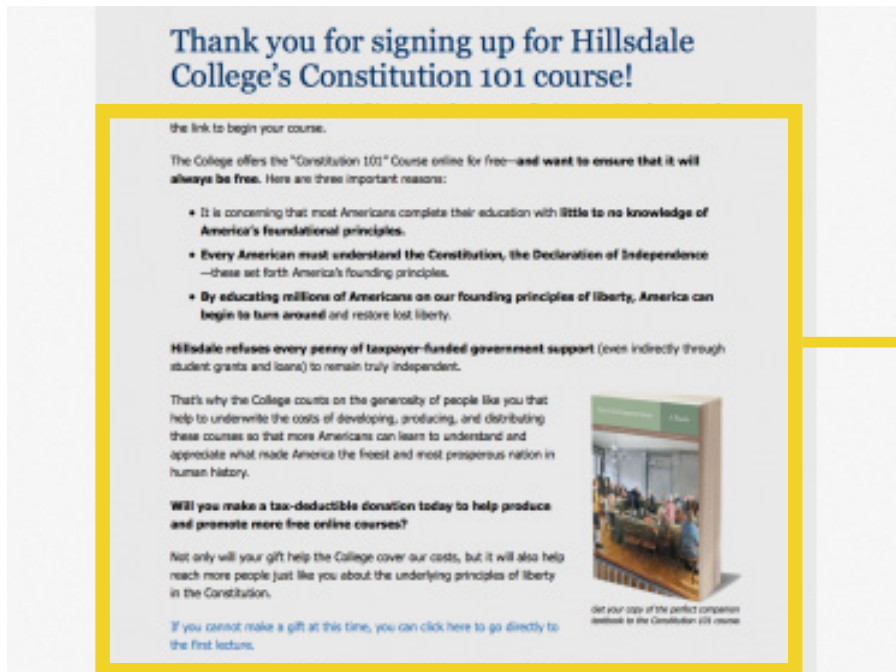
After signing up, the registrants are led to a donation page in hopes of an immediate donor conversion. The trouble with this process is that some participants mistake the donation page as a payment page for the course, which causes some frustration.

We wanted to find a way to clarify that the donation is not required without giving the visitor an immediate exit path. The current control had reduced the number of complaints but had also reduced donor conversion.

Research Question

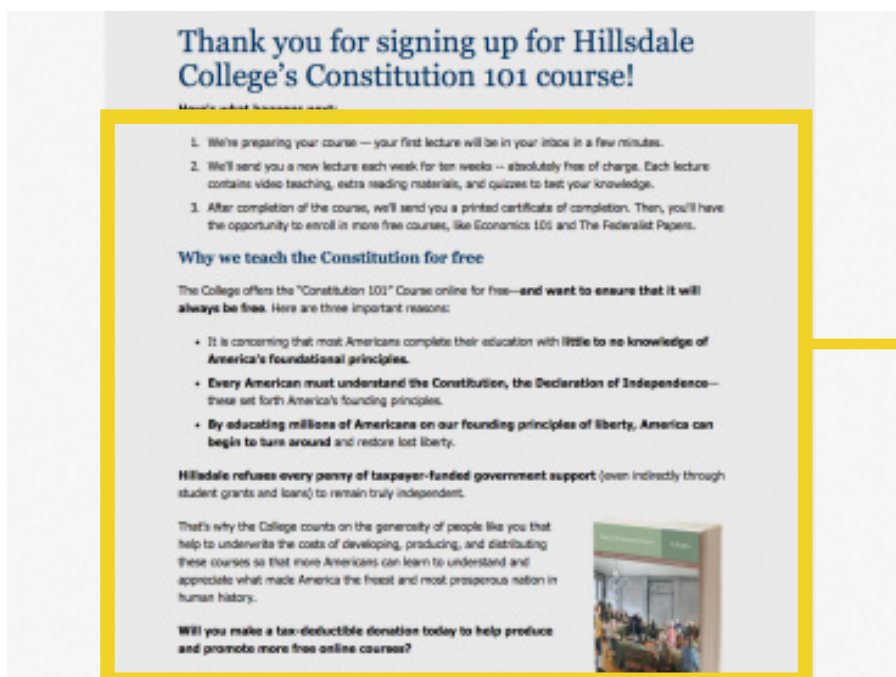
Which donation page treatment will add clarity to the signup process while increasing donor conversion?

Control: Start Now Link



Body Copy:
Straightforward copy instructing users to start now.

Test: 3-Step Language



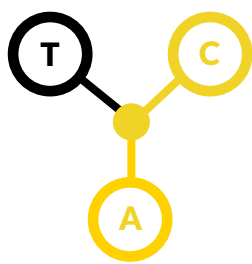
Body Copy:
Copy communicating three steps.

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence	Average Gift
C: Start Now Link	4.7%	-----	-----	\$58.52
T1: 3-Step Language	5.7%	22.6%	98.4%	\$51.30

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
 × **22.6% increase in conversion rate**
 × **12.3% decrease in average gift**

7.4% increase in revenue

Key Learnings

The new treatment resulted in a 22.6% lift to the overall donor conversion on the page. Anecdotally, the number of subscriber complaints did not see any significant increase during the test period either. This leads to the conclusion that this new treatment provided the necessary clarity to the subscribers to ease any potential confusion that may have occurred while maintaining the high visitor conversion rate.

Donation Pages: Case Study 5

HOW THE FORCE OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION CAN BE ALTERED WITH A RADICAL REDESIGN

Research Partner: Texas State Historical Association

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 9/1/2013 - 9/30/2013

The Texas State Historical Association had several initiatives designed to grow their membership base. However, the membership page presented tremendous friction. The experience used a shopping cart, though it was asking for donations. It also presented four different membership options, but did not give distinction between them. And the copy on the page was not very specific, and made unclear and unsubstantiated claims.

The team created a radical redesign with long form copy to appropriately convey the value proposition. They added supporting copy that highlighted exclusivity and credibility, and gave a full explanation of why the visitor should join the TSHA as a member. This page also included evidentials to back up each claim. Finally, the membership levels were quantified and given distinct benefits, with one preferred level preselected.

An A/B test was then launched to determine a winner.

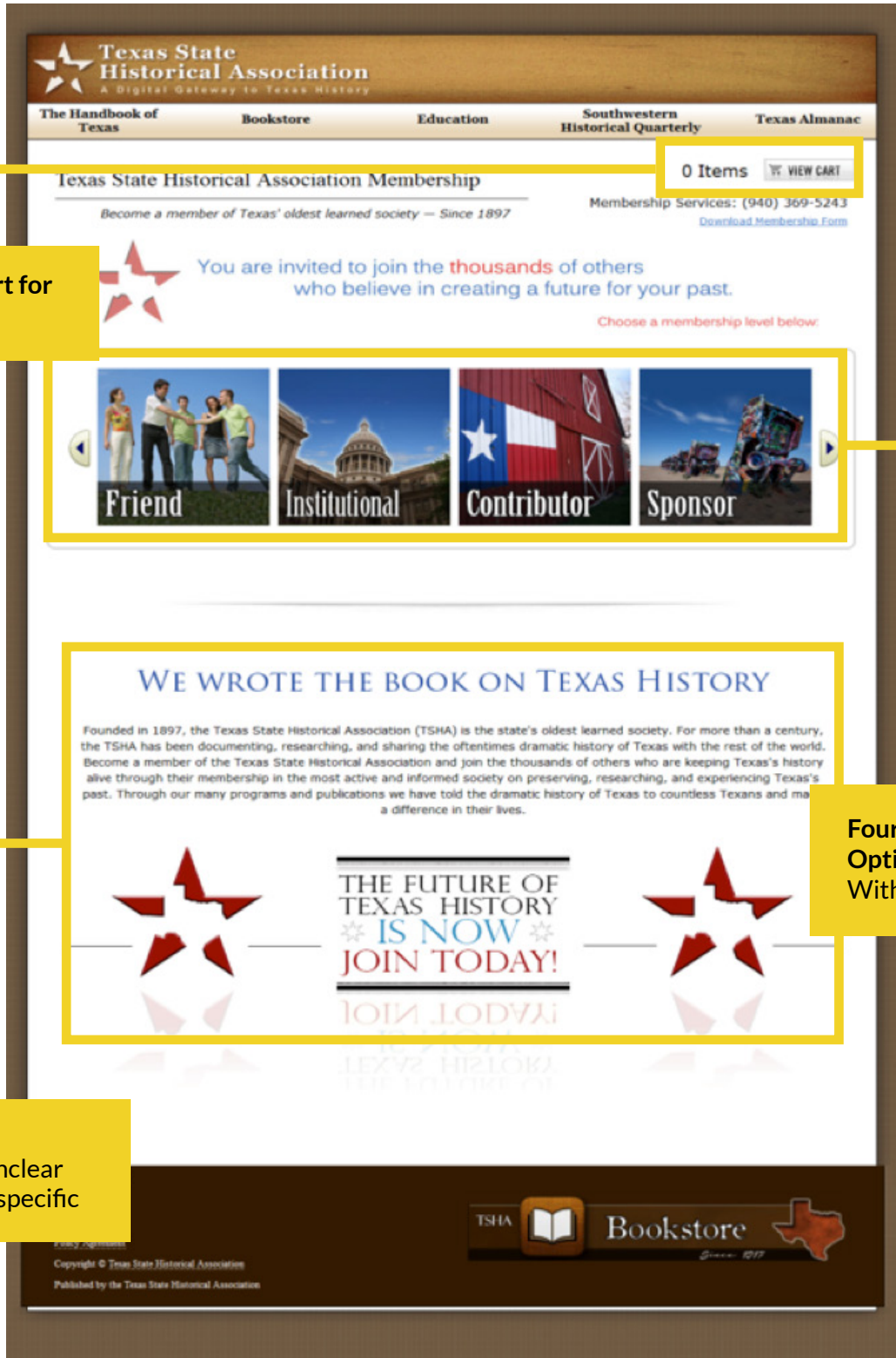
Research Question

Will a radical redesign that reduces friction and dramatically increases the force of the value proposition increase donor conversion?

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
C: Old Membership Experience	1.1%	-----	-----
T1: New Membership Page	2.6%	146.5%	100%

Control: Old Membership Experience



1

Shopping Cart for donations

2

Four Membership Options: With no distinctions

3

Copy: The copy is unclear and not very specific

Test: Radical Redesign



1

Long form copy emphasizing exclusivity and credibility.

2

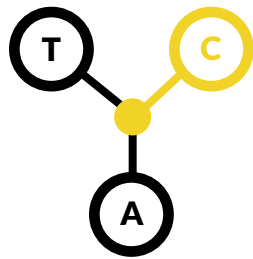
Membership benefits explained with preferred level pre-selected.

3

Shopping Cart replaced with donation form.

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
× **146.5% increase in conversion rate**
× **0% increase in average gift**

Key Learnings

This experiment showed how affecting the force of the value proposition can radically affect donor conversion. Though the underlying value proposition of the TSHA remained the same, the information was presented in a way that caused many more visitors to understand it, believe it, and want to join.

This experiment also revealed that TSHA members are readers, which makes complete sense given their affinity for history. Long form copy gives them more information, refuting the commonly held conventional wisdom that “people don’t read on the internet.”

Donation Pages: Case Study 6

HOW INCREASING CLARITY THROUGH PERSONALIZED COPY AFFECTS THE FORCE OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION

Research Partner: CaringBridge

Experiment Summary – Timeframe: 2/9/2015 - 2/13/2015

Most donations to CaringBridge come through a widget on the journal sites of individual users. Though many people start the donation process using the widget, completion rate falls off on the following donation page. We wanted to add some personalized copy to that donation page to see if we could improve conversion.

To increase clarity and intensify the force of the value proposition, we added a simple paragraph of copy, personalized with the name of their friend or loved one, and placed it just above the donation form.

Research Question

Will personalized, motivational copy increase donor conversion?

Control: No Value Proposition Language

The screenshot shows a donation form for CaringBridge. The form includes a header with the CaringBridge logo, a main heading 'Give to CaringBridge', and a sub-heading 'Donation Amount'. Below this are four buttons for donation amounts: '\$70', '\$125', '\$300', and 'Other'. A text input field shows '\$70.00' with a '(minimum \$10)' note. Underneath is a 'Payment Plan' section with two radio button options: 'One-time payment for the full amount' (selected) and 'Monthly (12 per year) ongoing payments'. The form then asks for a tribute message for 'Kelly', with a text area and a checked checkbox for 'Display this message on Kelly's site'. A final text area asks 'How would you like to sign your message?'. On the right side, there is a purple sidebar with a white box containing the text: 'Thank you for your commitment to CaringBridge. Your donation is safe, secure.' A yellow box with the number '1' is positioned to the right of the sidebar. A larger yellow box with the text 'No value proposition language.' is overlaid on the right side of the form.

Test: Value Proposition Language Added

CARING BRIDGE

Give to CaringBridge

When you give to CaringBridge, you ensure that Kate's safe, protected place to share health updates will always be here. Make a donation now, and share a personal message for Kate. Your support matters.

Thank you for your commitment to CaringBridge.
Your donation is safe, secure, private and tax deductible.

Donation Amount

(minimum \$10)

* Payment Plan

One-time payment for the full amount
 Monthly (12 per year) ongoing payments.

Your Tribute in Honor of Kate

What would you like your tribute message to say?

Display this message on Kate's site.

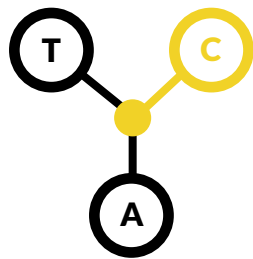
How would you like to sign your message?

Results

Treatment Name	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Confidence
Control	3.6%	----	----
Treatment 1	4.6%	28.0%	99.6%

Flux Metrics Affected

The Flux Metrics analyze the three primary metrics that affect revenue (traffic, conversion rate, and average gift). This experiment produced the following results:



0% increase in traffic
× **28.0% increase in conversion rate**
× **0% increase in average gift**

Key Learnings

While previous tests to add copy to the tribute landing page had underperformed, this test shows us that copy can produce a lift if it is simple and personal. Producing conversion lifts in the tribute donation funnel is the fastest way to increase revenue, so this learning is quite valuable.



WHAT MAKES DONORS GIVE?

ABOUT NEXT AFTER

NextAfter is a fundraising research lab and consultancy that works with cause-driven businesses and nonprofit organizations to help them better understand their customers and inspire their donors to give generously. Over the past four years, we have documented **over 469 online experiments** spanning a total sample of **over 49,640,297 individual touchpoints** with organizations such as Stanford University, iDonate, The Heritage Foundation, Kimbia, CaringBridge, Alliance Defending Freedom, Hillsdale College, Dallas Theological Seminary, Jews for Jesus and others. The impact of these experiments has produced a **cumulative net increase in response of 16,650%** for our clients (as of July 14, 2016). The goal of our experimentation and research is to understand what makes people give so that we can unleash the most generous generation in the history of the world. [Learn more about NextAfter and our research here.](#)

Become A Partner With NextAfter

Would you like to understand your donors better and learn what inspires them to give? Do you want to adopt optimization techniques and increase revenue? You can gain understandings of your donors and achieve significant lifts in your fundraising through a [NextAfter Research Partnership.](#)





INSPIRED FUNDRAISING

ABOUT DOUGLAS SHAW & ASSOCIATES

Douglas Shaw & Associates helps ministries and nonprofits share their stories and inspire their donors. We are relationship-builders who listen to your needs and propel your vision through advanced integrated direct marketing and fundraising programs. As industry leaders, we work joyfully, are results-driven and have a passion for the partners we serve and the good work they do.

