Cultivating prospects for a lifetime of engagement

Using digital channels to acquire and convert activists into donors

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Parachute Digital
Guiding you through the digital landscape

Six Stages of an Effective On-boarding Strategy

1. Who are my best donor prospects?
2. Where do I acquire new donor prospects?
3. How do I on-board new supporters using digital channels?
4. What digital systems do I need in place?
5. What does success look like and what should I track?
6. How to test your strategy with real prospects.

So you need more supporters (& more money)

As the cost of doing business is increasing and the biggest donors (baby boomers) now need to watch their pennies a little more closely and the next generation of donors are more skeptical and demanding - organisations are forced to innovate and change or suffer a slow and undignified - well, you get the picture.

Many organisations are focusing on growth and acquisition now that the worst of the GFC has passed and consumer confidence and spending seems to be on the increase. But acquiring new donors is expensive and time consuming and quite frankly the good ones, who will stick with you, are hard to find, but they are out there!

This paper will focus on how organisations can use digital channels to acquire and "on-board" new supporters and convert them into donors faster and with better results than you're currently getting. An on-boarding strategy is a series of communications to your prospect and is most commonly used to convert newly acquired leads into donors, to upgrade existing cash donors and to convert activists into donors.

1. Who are my best donor prospects?

Here are some questions to get you started thinking about your audience

How do your supporters **think and feel** about your cause?

- We need to target our prospective supporter carefully. People give to causes that match their personal values. Organisations cannot and will not appeal to every person so focus your energies on engaging and connecting with the people who already care about the work that you do.
- If your organisation does advocacy, one great avenue to find people aligned with your cause is through online advocacy. Activists make fantastic donors because by signing a petition they've already put up their hand to say they are interested in your cause! To identify these people we need to first understand how an activist thinks and feels and how their thoughts and feelings might differ from your traditional donor.

Focus on the right people and don't try to appeal to everyone, as you can't win the hearts and minds of all people. By acquiring the right audience you will maintain a high return on investment and a longer relationship and lifetime value of your donor.

Pre-qualify for quality

If you have advanced segmenting capabilities, **try to pre-qualify your new supporters into warm, hot and cold prospects** so that you can segment your database into lists and monitor your on-boarding and conversion process. You might do this with a survey or a phone call - it can also be done by seeding some content into the acquisition process and analysing the user's behaviour (did they engage with this specific content such as signing a second petition?).

The supporters who best fit your ideal donor profile are your hot leads and hopefully your highest converting group. The cold leads, who might fit your profile demographically but whose values are mis-aligned to your organisations, will be expected to convert at a lower rate.

Nurturing supporters through the donor journey

IDEAL POTENTIAL SUPPORTER

What do they think & feel?
What trigger will motivate them to support?

SUPPORTER

What do they think & feel?
What trigger will motivate them to campaign?

CAMPAIGNER

What do they think & feel?
What trigger will motivate them to donate as well?

DONOR (CASH CAMPAIGNS ONLY)

What do they think & feel?
What trigger will motivate them to give regularly?

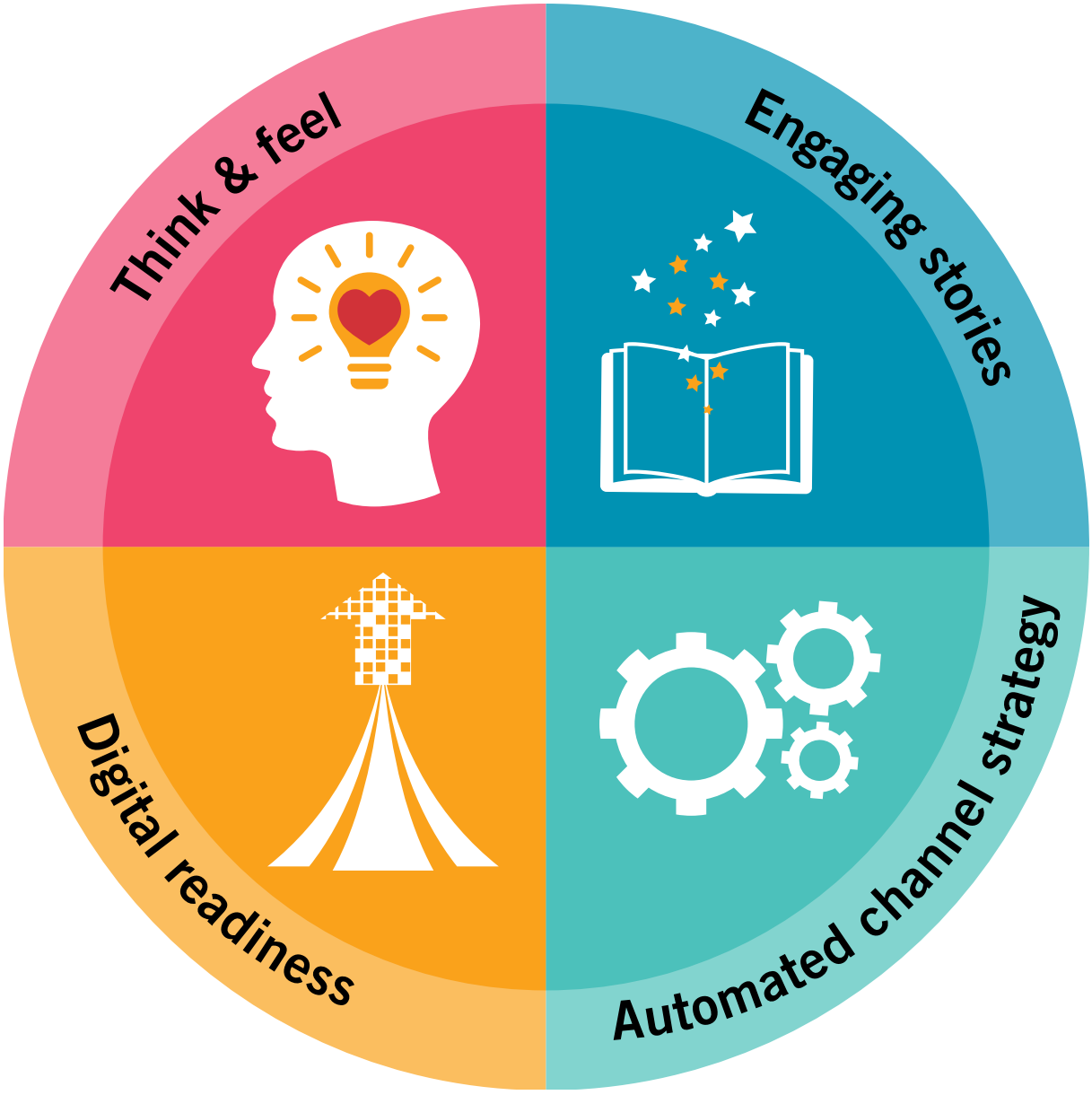
CAMPAIGNER & DONER (RG + CAMPAIGN)

What do they think & feel?
What trigger will motivat them to tell more people about your org?

2. Where do I acquire new donor prospects?

Given today's highly volatile world and the increasing number of social, economic, environmental and health epidemics spreading like wildfire, people are incensed by the behaviour of governments, corporations and individuals and want to lend their voice to causes of injustice. The online environment lends itself well to activism and advocacy in its ability to facilitate the collection of data, the collation of many voices into one message and the infinite distribution of this message through organisations and individuals and their networks.

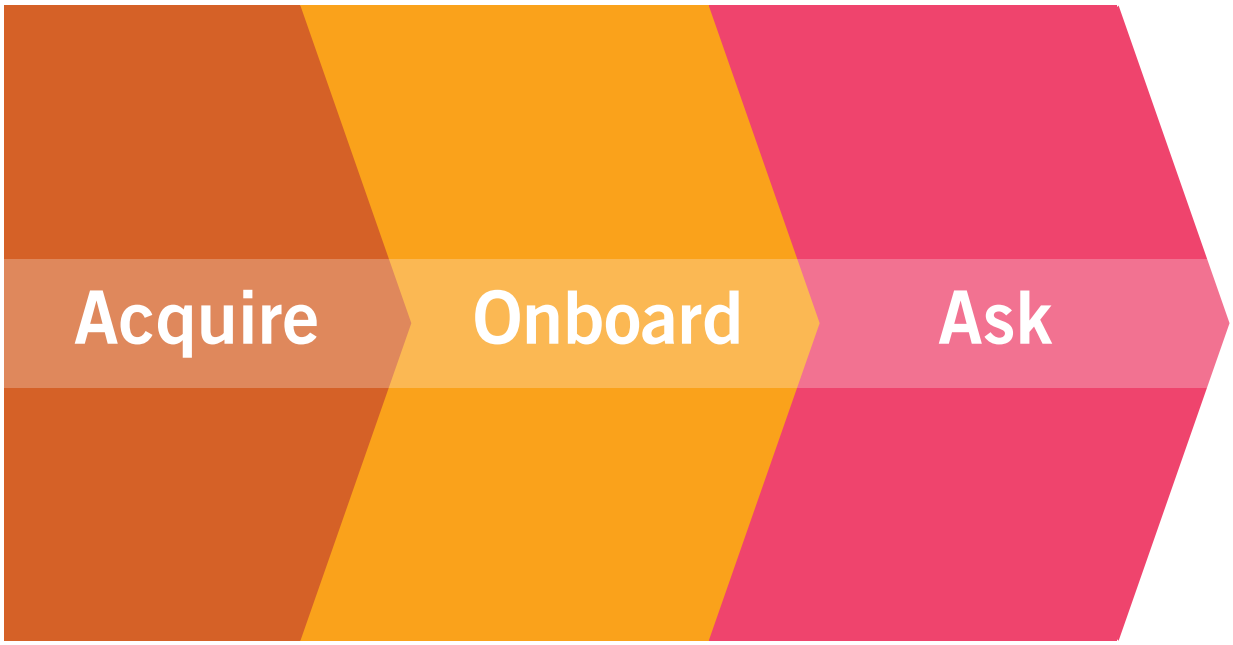
As such, online advocates who share your organisations values and vision are ripe prospects for donor conversion. Many organisations have built their own online advocacy functionality specific to their cause however there are platforms that have devoted their entire business to raising the voices of the masses to influence those in positions of power. These platforms, such as www.care2team.com, provide an option for targeting and acquiring new activists and prospective supporters and donors.



3. How do I on-board new supporters using digital channels?

Our strategy is to convert a low-input supporter into a financial donor over the course of 16 weeks. A variety of action based and financial asks will be sprinkled strategically throughout your communications calendar during the on-boarding period. We do this by using a 3-part process of capturing your new supporters attention.

PART 1	Acquire supporters through digital channels (specifically email, online petitions, SMS and web or video content).
PART 2	Set up timed communications to take the new supporter on a journey of discovery.
PART 3	Ask the primed supporter to make a financial donation.



Low-risk engagement

There is a careful ratio of information and entertaining content, that asks nothing of the supporter only adding value to their lives, as well action-based and financial asks. Generally we start with some action requests that are fairly easy and don't ask a lot of the supporter in terms of time or emotional energy. Then we graduate, using our engaging stories, into a soft cash donation ask as well as some more time-intensive action requests.

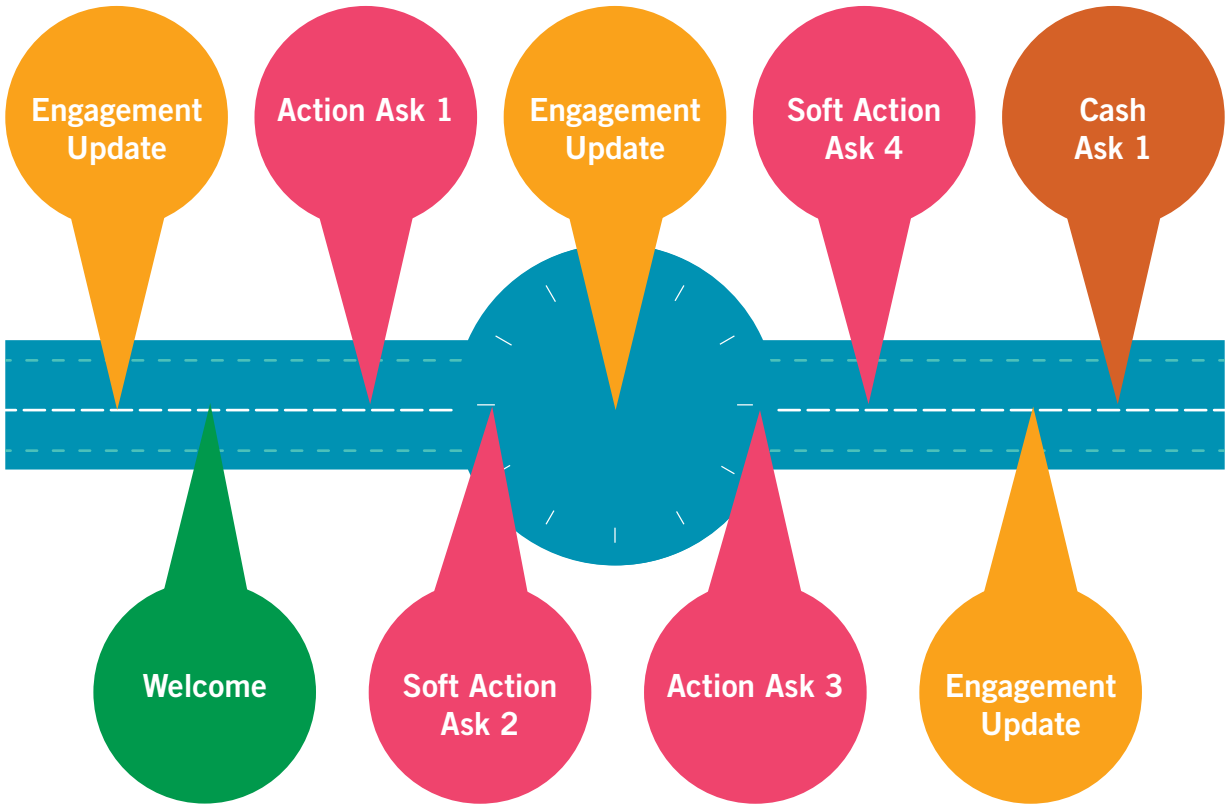
We continue to update them with information about the initial story they responded to and progress that has been made over the last X years. Over the period of 16 weeks we work our way through a couple of asks and nurture our supporters into promising prospects whose engaged behaviour identifies them as a promising donors, ready for a regular giving ask.

Time-based communications

The first two weeks are crucial; because your new supporter is most interested and most engaged at the point of their first enquiry, action or gift. Whatever it was that captured them worked and we need to keep talking to them about that subject before moving on to other topics, which may seem random and unconnected to them.

Then we can automate the on-boarding process, or at least trigger the human contact elements.

It is essential that you start communicating with your new supporter immediately after their first action and don't delay it for weeks as their moment of inspiration has well and truly passed by then, and most of them will never remember it even if you prompt them.



Automation doesn't mean set and forget

This automation isn't magic, we use time-based technologies to trigger and sequence the content we share and via what channel (email, SMS, phone call etc.). We want to create multiple touch-points with the user and allow them to decide how they want to interact with our organisation (on their terms). This gives the supporter options but also provides us with a calendar to follow.

Episodes of the same story

You will get the best results from a multi-layered story (like plots and sub-lots within a TV series) that unfolds over time, through multiple channels and with many supporter touch-points.

You need to be careful in the planning of your stories that they can be understood and stand alone, like individual chapters in a story or episodes in a TV series, as well as part of a bigger narrative.

Many supporters will only see one or two pieces of communication. Each episode of your story needs to be able to capture the supporter's attention and connect with them.

The final piece of the puzzle is to lay out each touch-point you want to have with your newly acquired supporter and decide:

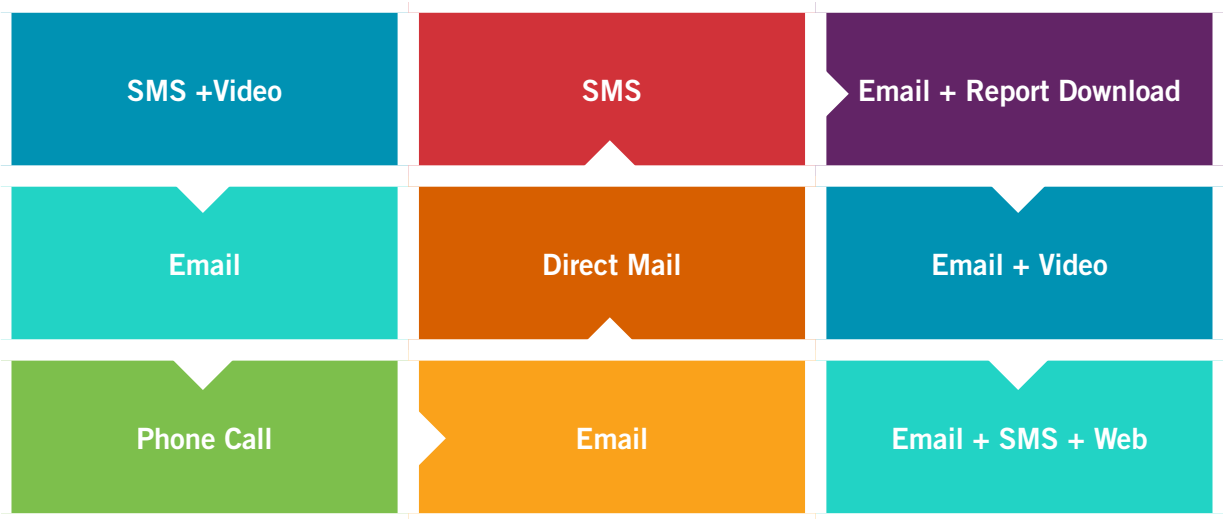
What: The story you want to tell and the order to tell it in

How: The call to actions that will engage the supporter with low-risk actions that will inspire future donations

When: The communication time frames (the time-based triggered emails, SMS and phone call communications)

Where: The channels you will use to communicate the story (sequencing story elements across multiple channels - SMS, email, video, telephone)

Who: The recipients are already decided; they are the new supporters who have been acquired and are triggering this automated on-boarding strategy.



4. What digital systems do I need in place?

While your stories are being fleshed out and the content strategy developed, we need to make sure that your organisation has the systems set up to allow you to implement an automated on-boarding strategy.

When you acquire a new supporter, the system needs to trigger an automatic chain of communications, that are scheduled to be sent to your supporter at set intervals (these are time-based triggers because the initial moment of inspiration and first action is when your supporter is most engaged).

At a minimum you will need an email program, an SMS marketing tool and a video platform (such as Vimeo or YouTube).

Digital On-boarding systems

- A **customer relationship management (CRM)** or email program capable of triggering communications based on time and behaviour
- A spam compliant **SMS tool** that can send text or picture messages to supporters
- A video platform such as Vimeo or YouTube
- A website or **campaign landing pages** with reliable functionality where you can direct your supporters to take their action
- A **secure donation gateway** that is mobile friendly where supporters can make their donations
- A **web analytics tracking system** implemented
- A system to **sync your donor data into your CRM**. Ideally this is automatic, otherwise be sure to get a manual system in place
- A valuable **internal resource** that will drive, manage and measure the success of the campaign.

The effort and investment you make with digital systems will provide long-term savings as a results of the automation of these systems, as well as growth in individual supporter revenue. It falls into the "short-term pain, long-term gain" category. If you need help, this is something Parachute Digital specialises in, so let's have a chat.

5. What does success look like and what should I track?

By **segmenting and measuring the results separately** you know how to improve on your acquisition targeting in the future.

The beauty of online marketing and fundraising is that you can track the engagement, response and success of each piece of communication - but this only happens if you set up the tracking and monitoring of your on-boarding campaign.

Track calendar of communications

Because we are human and we think in time and resources, it's important to build your supporter on-boarding strategy around a calendar or timeline. Time-based sequences make it easier for us to label and index each communication, its content, the ask and to track and report the results against targets.

It is important that we **measure success based on the requested action**. If it is an information update our activity expectations should be lower than if we are sending an urgent action ask. We must report and measure success based on the intention and asks - this is a nurturing campaign and there is value in non-financial actions. For email, you use the Click Through Rate as the engagement measurement of success and the conversion rate as the success metric for the overall communication and ask.

Measure each channel on its merits

The reporting needs to be automatic and reported on by channel and by communication piece. The critical period of the first 2 weeks should be analysed closely so that we can identify the supporters whose behaviour is identifying them as already "primed" to be moved faster through the funnel.

For the bulk of supporters who will continue through the full process of the on-boarding campaign, they should be segmented or "ring-fenced" within the organisation's database and as a general rule should not receive general supporter communications during the period of their on-boarding.

Return on investment over time

Aside from measuring the engagement, interaction and conversion rates during the actual supporter on-boarding campaign, the long-term strategy of on-boarding new supporters is to build a stronger relationship with people who share our values and retain them for longer. Sometimes online activists make a gift right away, especially if they are called, other times they will wait a year or more to make their first gift. It is important to conduct an analysis after a period of 6 months, 12 months, 24 months and 36 months to track this. We do this to understand the giving habits and behaviour of supporters who are nurtured through the on-boarding process and compare it to historical data of supporters who were acquired and rolled directly into standard donor and organisational communications.

We recommend paying particular attention to the lifetime duration as well as the lifetime value of a supporter. You also want to report on how active these supporters are in responding to communications - are they advocates as well as donors?

It is important to measure the value of non-financial support in the early supporter journey and how that may lead to future revenue growth.

What comes next? Numbers & Reporting

As you're about to start planning your online acquisition & on-boarding program, we suggest you start with the below numbers and analysis to make the financial case to your organisation.

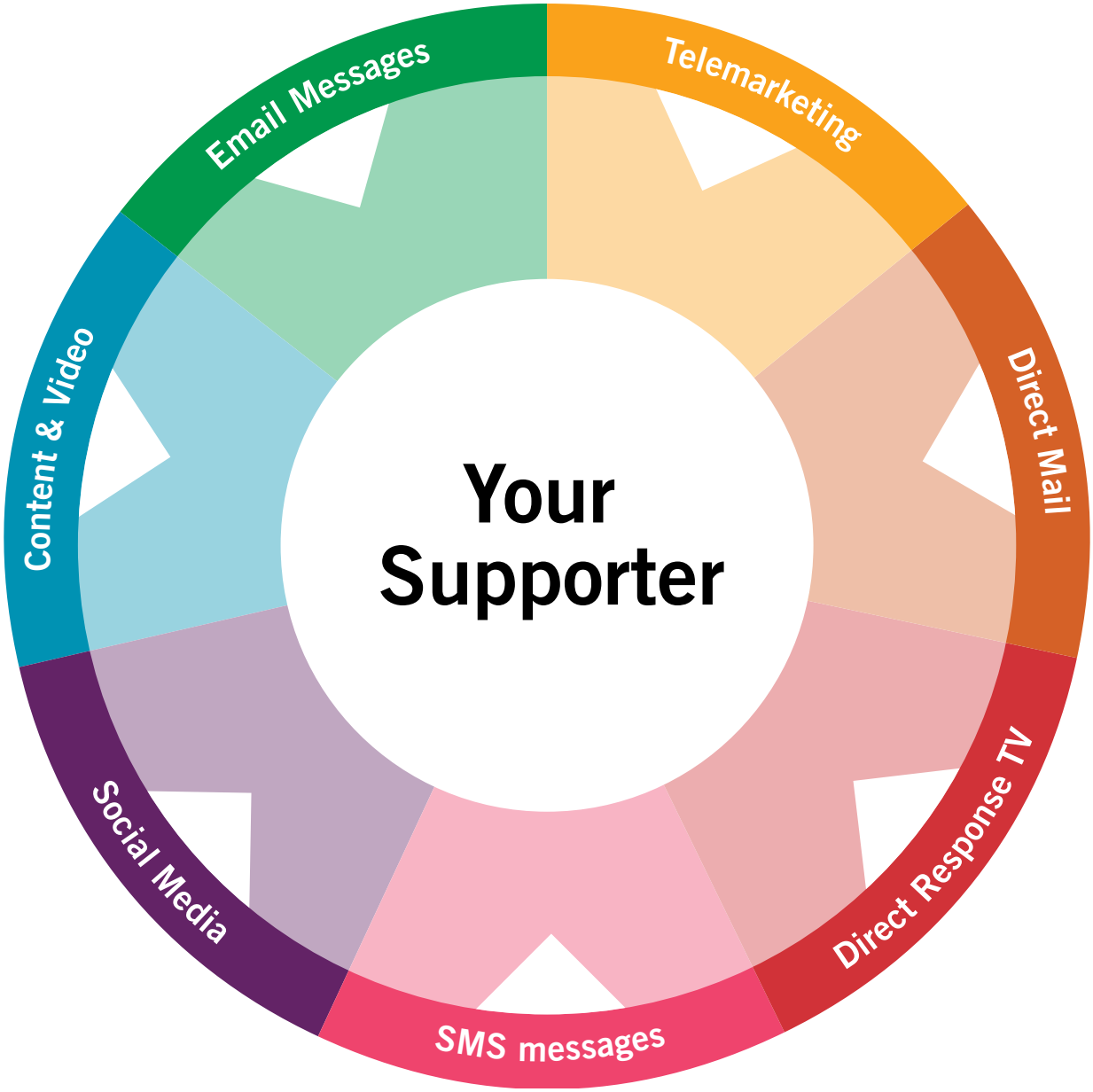
- How many prospects do you need to acquire?
- What is your current retention rate after 6, 12, 18, 24, 36 months of a prospect, cash donor and regular giver?
- What is your current lifetime of a supporter? What is the lifetime value of a supporter? What is the current average gift?
- What is your current conversion rate from subscriber or supporter to donor? From cash donor to regular giver?
- How engaged and active are your supporters currently?
- What is the size of your acquisition campaign - what is the budget?
- What is the current cost per acquisition (CPA) or cost per lead/prospect (CPL)? What is your target CPA?
- What is the current acquisition ROI? What is your target ROI?

Now you know what to do and how to do it, its time to kickoff.

6. How to test your strategy with real prospects.

Now that you've set up your on-boarding strategy, go live, test and optimise based on your supporter's response. When looking at online response, for each email you send, look at the open rate, click through rate, donation rate and unsubscribe rate. You then want to compare this to what you've seen in previous emails sent and adjust. There are an infinite number of things to test. Be sure when you are testing that you isolate the variables and only test one thing at a time.

You're going to love this process and the value to your organisation will be out of this world. Good luck and let us know how it goes!



About the author

Shanelle Newton Clapham

CEO of Parachute Digital www.ParchuteDigital.com.au

Shanelle Newton Clapham likes to call herself a "Digital Adventurer". She does this because it is important to be clear with her clients that what Shanelle is going to offer their business is going to be bold, fun, challenging and might be something they have never considered before. Working with Shanelle and learning to see her view of digital marketing has been likened to a journey into a far off, foreign land.

"I work with the not-for-profit industry to help them make more money online & give their supporters a great experience in the process".

Shanelle's vision for Parachute Digital is to transform supporter experiences online by working with inspired organisations that are making a difference in the world. Shanelle translates a brand's essence into a digital strategy and platform that will deliver a seamless, positive message and user experience at every touch-point – online or offline. Shanelle is adamant that putting the donor first online will always achieve your business goals as well – and she has the results to prove it.

About Care2

Care2.com is an online social action network with more than 25 million members around the world. Since 2000, over 1,500 nonprofits have worked with us to connect with our socially conscious members and recruit new donors, members and activists.

Care2's members make ideal donor prospects for your organisation. Care2 members are mostly affluent college educated women who donate to charities. Care2 has been partnering with Australian charities since 2009.

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