



DONOR EXPERIENCE REPORT

YMCA

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Introduction

Excellent customer experiences are profoundly meaningful. If there's anything Americans are not ambivalent about, it's fantastic customer experiences. We expect it each and every time we interact with a brand.

You might be surprised to learn that in survey after survey, satisfying customer experiences are rated more highly than price and product.

Consistently creating a top-notch giving experience for donors is no different.

Why? Donors have the same expectations interacting with a nonprofit as with a for-profit.

They expect prompt, personalized communications that show genuine appreciation. Equally important, they expect to you to tell them how their gift made an impact.

But what about YMCAs?

This importance goes double for YMCAs. Why? Every YMCA must deliver a good member experience and a great donor experience. Without a satisfying experience as a member, there's no motivation to give.

This Donor Experience Report explores how YMCAs across the country communicate with donors in the most critical time in their relationship—the first 30 days after a new donor makes a gift.



What we researched and why



In this study, we donated \$25 to 50 YMCAs across the US. Our goal? Examine the giving process and donor communications to help YMCAs improve the donor experience. This detailed analysis covers two primary areas: the online donation process and the 30-day new donor journey immediately following the gift.

Our goal is to help you understand how your giving experience compares to your peers and how factors like proper gift acknowledgment and follow-up communications influence donor behavior and repeat gifts.

We reviewed the following areas:

- Was the donor given the opportunity to cover transaction fees?
- Were the transaction fees included without a choice?
- Were multiple payment types offered (Google Pay/Apple Pay/Venmo)?
- Was there an option to pay towards a designated fund?
- Was there an option to give as a tribute or memorial?
- Was there an option to join a newsletter or other email communication?
- Did the donor receive a receipt for their donation via email?
- Did the donor receive a personalized or customized donation receipt?
- Did the donor receive a thank you letter in the first 5, 15, and 30 days after their donation?
- Did the donor receive a thank you call after their donation?
- Did the donor receive a personalized thank you email?
- Did the donor receive a newsletter in the first 30 days?
- Did the donor receive an ask to become a recurring donor?



What did the data show?

In this study, we donated \$25 to 50 disability advocacy nonprofits across the US. This study examined the giving process and donor interactions across this segment to gain insights to improve the donor experience.

Online giving experience

18% A scant 18% of YMCAs in this study offered multiple payment options for donors.

30% Only 30% of YMCAs invited donors to cover transaction fees associated with their gifts.

16% of YMCAs preselected the option for donors to cover the transaction fees for their gifts.



How can YMCAs improve the donor's online giving experience?

For 82% of YMCAs, the most significant missed opportunity in the online giving experience was restricting donations to credit card payments only. Not offering donors the option to use their digital wallet and give via PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, or GooglePay leaves money on the table.

Why is that such a game-changer?

COVID rapidly accelerated digital adoption. In 2019, just 41% of customer interactions were digital and seven months later, in July 2020, a whopping 65% were digital. (Source: RDK Group)

Think about your digital habits for a second. Imagine going to the grocery store, walking through the aisles, picking out all your items, standing in a long line to check out, only to realize you don't have your credit card with you.

If the store doesn't take Apple Pay, you have no choice but to trek back home to retrieve your wallet, while your ice cream melts at the checkout.

Studies show that making digital payment options available reduces donor checkout friction, builds trust, and increases unplanned gifts by 32% and repeat donations by 79%.

Yes, you can increase your donation conversions by 32% just by adding digital wallet options like PayPal, Venmo, Apple Pay, and GooglePay to your donation form!

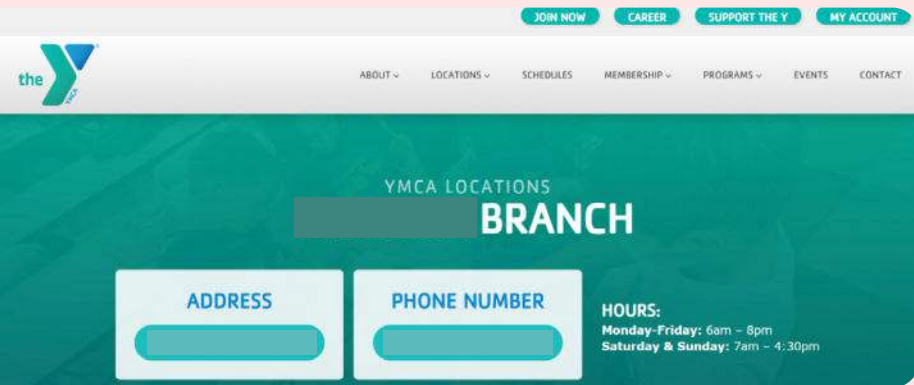
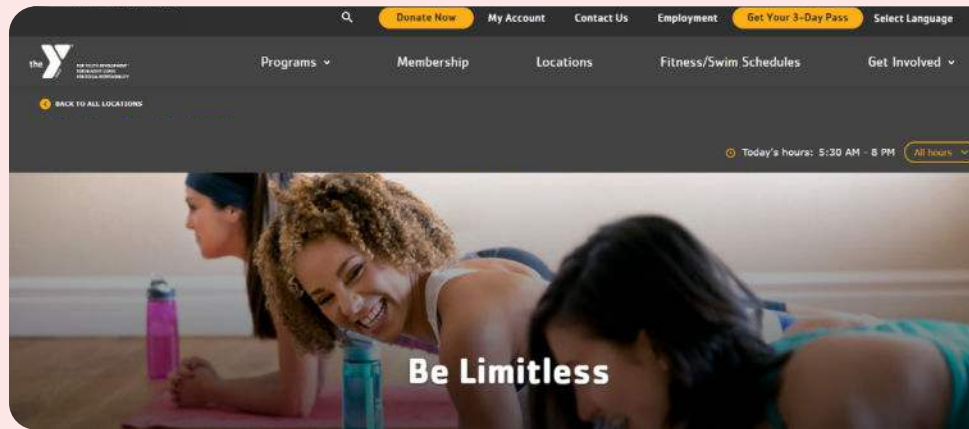
Is the call to action to give obvious on your homepage?

Clearly, offering digital payment options is a must. However, without a brightly colored donate button or popup box to give, website visitors might not notice it.



Case in point, this YMCA homepage, as seen in the screenshot on the right.

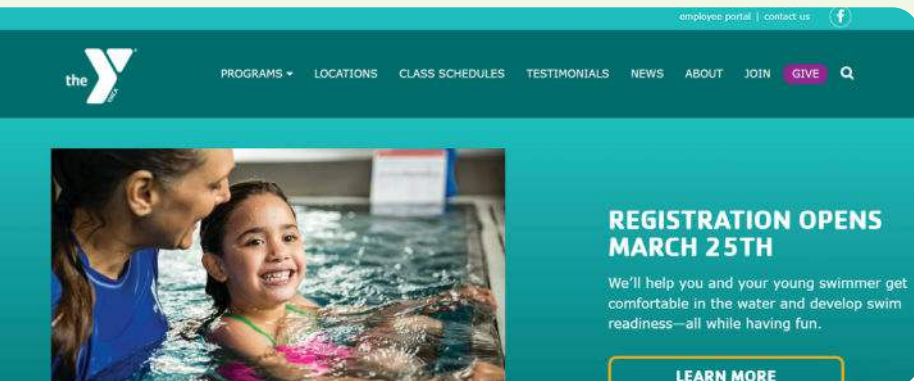
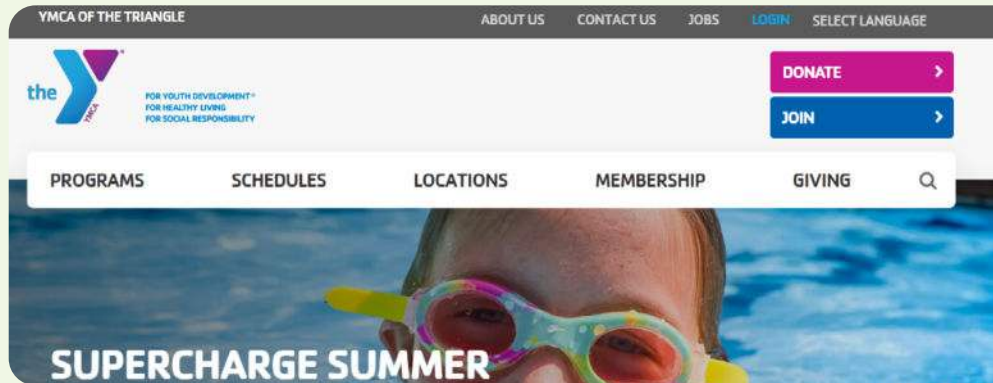
The "Donate Now" button is the same color as the branch name, address, branch hours, and promotions. Your call to action needs to stand out to your website visitor, not get washed out with other news or offers.



This YMCA offers another example. Their donate button is virtually indistinguishable on their homepage, as seen in the screenshot on the left.

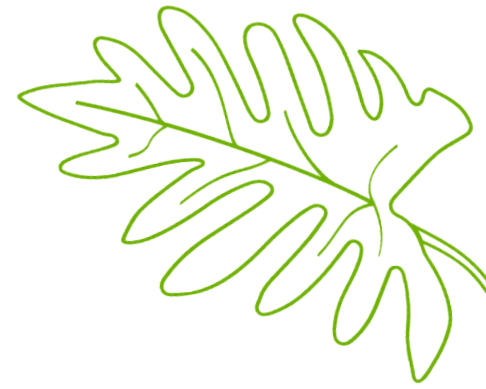


Conversely, note how the YMCA of the Triangle in North Carolina features a brightly colored donate button to stand out on their homepage.



Similarly, Muncie YMCA does a great job having a stand-out donate button in a contrasting color.

Gift designations



64% of YMCAs offered donors the option to make a memorial or tribute donation.

72% of YMCAs gave donors the option to contribute to a specific fund.

How can we improve?

YMCAs are a popular choice for anyone wanting to give a memorial or honorary gift. Not offering donors the chance to make a gift in tribute or as a memorial to another person is a missed opportunity, especially for such a well-known household brand as the YMCA that kids, families, seniors—communities of every variety—know and love.

For YMCAs seeking to add memorial or honorary giving, it's critical you seamlessly capture the recipient's information so that you can properly notify honorees and thank bereaved donors who are giving in memory. The Y in Central Maryland does a great job of this, as seen in the screenshot on the right.

Should we offer gift designation options?

Every YMCA should offer gift designations in memory or tribute, but it's perfectly acceptable not to have a list of designated fund options.

In this study among 50 YMCA branches across the US, one YMCA had nine different options for a donor to designate a gift. Another had 13. The danger? Too many choices, especially those unfamiliar to donors, can overwhelm them and cause them to abandon the gift process.

As long as your donation form makes a clear and compelling case for support, you needn't complicate or add clutter with multiple fund designations.



This donation form makes it easy for donors to make an honorary or tribute donation.

Saying thanks

94% of YMCAs sent a thank you email receipt.

32% of YMCAs personalized their email thank you receipt.

32% of YMCAs followed up with a mailed thank you letter within 30 days.

Kudos to all but three of the YMCAs who emailed the donors a thank you receipt.

When it comes to personalizing the receipt and thanking donors, the YMCAs in this study have their work cut out for them.

Study after study on donor behavior tells us that the communications content that most influence whether a donor gives again is knowing the results achieved by their gift.

While an immediate email gift acknowledgment is essential because it informs the donor that you received their gift, it's only the first step. It's not enough to simply thank a donor. You must report back the donor to tell them how their gift made a difference. This is the key to getting another gift. It's also a critical step to building trust and a relationship with that donor.

How does trust fit into this? In 2023 nonprofits experienced the largest trust decline of any American institution.

It's easy to see how not hearing back after making a gift, receiving generic responses, or not learning the impact your gift made would make donors distrust a charity less likely to give again.

This is especially true for first time donors, 81% of which will not make a second gift, according to research. Yet, if you can motivate a new first-time donor to give another gift, reports show that 63% of them will continue to donate.



How can I motivate new donors to make a second gift?

The answer is simple, and it works for all donors: the greatest gift you can give your donor is the gift of feeling known by you.

Every YMCA should use a first name personalization tag in their email thank you autoresponder.

Even better? Recognize new donors in your thank you letter, as seen in the example below,

"Dear Julia,

We're overjoyed to have received such a generous first-time gift from you, and we're thrilled to welcome you into our donor family."

Again, as stated earlier, following up to tell the donor the impact their gift had is critical to getting a second gift.

However, of the 50 YMCA affiliates in this survey, only 16 followed up to mail an actual thank you letter. Not doing so has a significant impact on revenue.

Studies show that personally thanking a first-time donor within 48 hours—whether with a card, call, or an emotionally effusive email—increases the likelihood of them making a second gift by 300%.

This is a missed opportunity among the YMCAs in this study.

Adding to this lost revenue, YMCAs incur a real expense since acquiring a new donor costs 10 times more than to maintain an existing one.

If you can keep your donors loyal over time, their gifts increase, and they're more likely to name the YMCA in their will or estate plans.



Recommended donor appreciation timeline



The first gift is just the start.

Since donors making a second gift to an organization are 60% more likely to give another gift, it's critical to have an airtight 'new donor honeymoon' for the first 90 days to show your appreciation and how their gift made a difference with personal touches before you make another ask.

Below is a timeline to help, loaded with personal touches to show you care and opportunities to learn more about your new donor, from a quick donor survey to an invite for a tour.

New donor cultivation timeline (first 90 days)



Keep in mind that the invitation is the cultivation. Even if your new donor doesn't come for a tour—and even if you have to leave a thank you voicemail when you call to say thanks—it still makes an impact.

How much of an impact?

Picking up the phone to thank a new donor within 48 hours of their gift increased the odds of them giving again by 400%.

Who doesn't want donors who are four times as likely to give again?

Sadly, only one YMCA out of 50 made thank you phone calls to new donors.

The great news? This is an easy fix!

Summary



Sadly, this study revealed that most YMCAs aren't giving donors a meaningful welcome and thank you, or sending follow-up communications that let donors feel the impact they're making.

The good news for any YMCA reading this report is that you can quickly implement a new donor cultivation timeline to change all that!

Bottom line, it's the actions you take at your Y to deliver thoughtful, meaningful, prompt appreciation and cultivation that determine if donors give more and stay loyal to your cause.



About the authors



Rachel Muir, CFRE

Rachel has worked every side of the Rubik's cube that is the nonprofit sector. When she was 26 Rachel Muir launched Girlstart, a non-profit empowering girls in math, science, engineering and technology in the living room of her apartment with \$500 and a credit card. Several years later she had raised over 10 million and was featured on Oprah, CNN, and the Today show. Today Rachel delivers workshops and offers a monthly membership, [League of Extraordinary Fundraisers](#), transforming people into confident, successful fundraisers. Learn more about Rachel at www.rachelmuir.com.



James Goalder

With almost 20 years of experience working in nonprofit technology and sales and relationship management, James brings the perfect blend of experience for his role as Partnerships Manager at Bloomerang. In addition to his work experience, James volunteers with Project Grows, a community farm in Virginia, serving on the Board and on Volunteer Nights with the organization.

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