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An Allegiance Group + Pursuant Resource

MINIGUIDE

How to Grow Your Nonprofit's Digital Reach Without Losing the Power of Direct Mail

Contents

Introduction	3
The Changing Landscape of Nonprofit Fundraising	4
Creating a Digital-First Strategy That Complements Direct Mail	6
Data-Driven Optimization for Maximum Impact	8
Best Practices for Digital & Direct Mail Synergy	10
Overcoming Common Challenges	12
Conclusion & Next Steps	14
More About AGP	15

Introduction

When's the last time you received a letter or postcard from a friend? It's probably been a while, but think about how you *felt*. **We're willing to bet it meant much more than a text.**

Mailing a letter takes intention — and that intention is felt. Unlike a fleeting email, a well-crafted postcard or letter offers a tangible connection that often lingers longer and means more.

If we, as fundraisers, know that direct mail makes donors and prospects feel good, why are we moving away from it?

Digital fundraising may be dominating, but this doesn't have to be an either-or. You can expand your digital reach *and* still delight donors with a robust mail program.

Balance is key, and it starts within your organization by getting your fundraising and marketing teams on the same page. With these teams in sync, you begin to look at your outreach more holistically. That postcard or letter isn't just a fundraising appeal — it becomes a physical representation of your brand that, when done well, moves donors to interact with you on other channels.

This miniguide aims to help you overcome the challenges of developing a digital-first strategy that complements your mail efforts. We'll also share real-world success stories from clients whose digital and direct mail campaigns work together in perfect harmony.



The Changing Landscape of Nonprofit Fundraising

The last five to 10 years have seen a shift in how organizations think about their mass communications to donors.

There's more competition than ever for dollars among both nonprofits and for-profit businesses. Years of experts preaching the ease and virtues of digital fundraising have everyone following the same playbook — down to the best days and times to send an email.

Nonprofits are increasingly adopting a digital-first approach for several reasons. Postage rates continue to rise yearly, with a [proposed 7.4% bump](#) in 2025. More importantly, this is where your donors are. According to [Double the Donation](#), 63% of donors prefer to give online with a debit or credit card. Direct mail was the second preferred method at 16%.

PRO TIP:
These channels inspire the most giving.



Social media: **32%**



Email: **30%**



Website: **17%**



Print: **15%**



TV or radio ad: **3%**



Phone call: **2%**



Text message: **1%**

Digital channels are also proving to be more inspiring than physical ones, but that doesn't mean you can discount direct mail just yet.

The [State of Direct Mail](#) found that consumers who receive letters or postcards take action: 57% visit the sender's website, 53% search for the organization online, and 20% check out their social media channels.

57%
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53%
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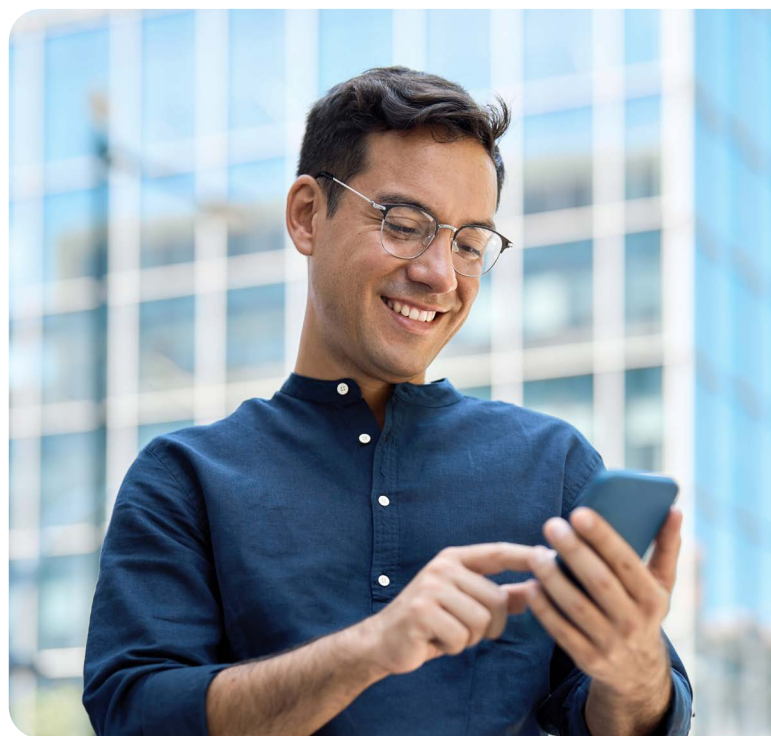


20%
check social
media channels



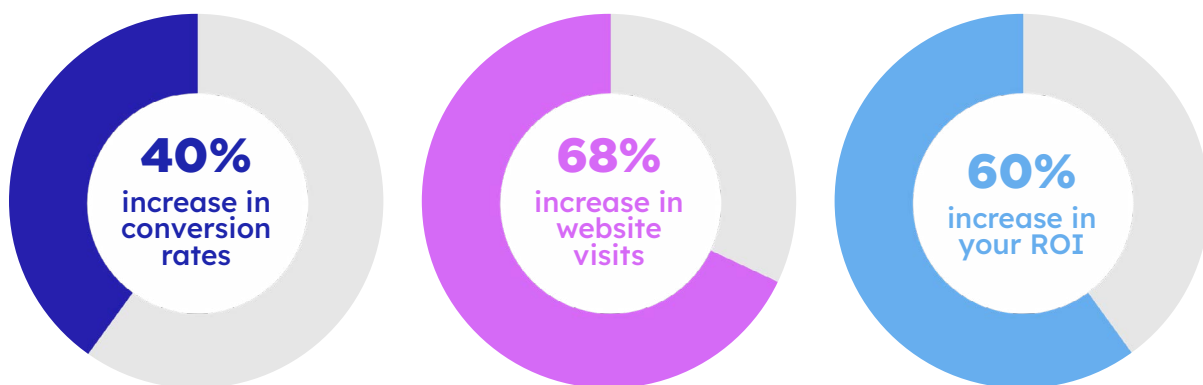
It takes three to five touchpoints to inspire action in a donor, so every channel helps. This is especially true when you consider response rates: direct mail has a [161% return on investment](#) (ROI), higher than any other individual media. Plus, rising postage rates will likely drive more nonprofits away from direct mail. Less mail in the mailbox means a greater chance your piece will stand out.

This is a “yes-and” moment for nonprofits. Yes, you can embrace digital fundraising and still snail-mail out meaningful appeals. Donors want to see a consistent message from you across multiple channels so they can give where, when, and how they want to give.



Creating a Digital-First Strategy That Complements Direct Mail

Combining direct mail and digital yields some impressive results. According to the [U.S. Postal Service](#), you could see a:



A direct mail piece can be a donor's first step into engagement with your organization. Whether it's a letter, flyer, or newsletter, most mail pieces give you the space to tell your story in detail. It's also something tangible your donors can interact with, enabling you to get creative with the format.

The mail piece should include a QR code or campaign-exclusive URL so donors can easily go online to learn more. This becomes a gateway to a cross-channel experience that includes your website, email, paid ads, social media, and texts.

The letter or postcard lays the foundation, and your other channels build the support that leads to a donation.

For instance, say someone scans the QR code and goes to your landing page but doesn't give. You can follow up with retargeting ads to help them get to know your mission, remind them of your campaign, and drive home the impact their gift could have.



CASE STUDY SNAPSHOT: 1,400+ New Donors from Direct Mail



water for people

Water For People used this approach in a campaign to reach new audiences. Research showed that people needed more time to become familiar with

the brand before donating. We developed a full-funnel strategy, including brand awareness ads on connected TV (CTV), Hulu, Meta, and YouTube. The organization also retargeted those who engaged with these channels and its website through paid search, paid social, and programmatic ads.

A direct mail package complemented the campaign, using colorful photography and personal storytelling to educate prospects on Water For People's mission. **The efforts acquired 13,600 new donors over two fiscal years, with 1,473 from direct mail alone.**

For best results, look for ways to integrate digital touchpoints at every stage of the direct mail process.

- » **Before your mail drop**, send a text or email to donors encouraging them to keep an eye on their mailboxes for something from you. This creates excitement and will pique their interest.
- » **During your mail drop**, mirror the imagery and copy on your website, social channels, emails, and digital ads. The goal is to create a cohesive experience that uses each element to tell a story.
- » **After your mail drop**, retarget those who didn't donate with emails and digital ads to renew their interest and remind them of your appeal.

Data-Driven Optimization for Maximum Impact

Businesses have trained donors to expect a personalized experience with every interaction. This includes direct mail — [64%](#) of people are more likely to engage with customized outreach than generic messaging. Data will get you there.

If you do nothing else, address donors by name in letters, emails, and texts. This is a small and easy-to-implement personal touch that makes a difference. About [71%](#) of donors feel closer to a nonprofit that sends personalized content. It makes sense: this may be a mass email campaign to you, but to your donors, it's a message sent from one person to another.

Segmentation is the next step. Look at donors' recency, frequency, and monetary level (RFM) in your file, then separate them out.

- » **Who has donated to this campaign before?**
- » **Who gave to this campaign in the last three years?**
- » **Who has given more than once?**
- » **Who gave \$500 or less? \$1,000 or more?**

TRY THIS:

Each audience segment should have customized messaging that speaks to their precise level of engagement and/or donation amount. Repeat donors who give \$1,000 or more may value seeing their continued impact, while those who gave a one-time gift of \$100 might benefit from getting to know your organization better.

A tool like [GivingDNA](#) can help you segment smarter through predictive analytics. We look at demographic and psychographic information to better understand a donor's profile and the characteristics of a donor base. This includes their income level or affluence, political leaning, age, and even whether they give to other nonprofits.

There are a few benefits of this. First, this deep segmentation enables you to craft appropriate messaging. If your donor base is evenly split among political parties, building communications around rage giving would alienate about half of your supporters.

Smarter segmentation can also help you find and attract new audiences. By better understanding your donors, you can create look-alike audiences for ads and social media posts that mimic your existing donors' attributes. This way, you're reaching people who are more likely to support your cause.

CASE STUDY SNAPSHOT: \$17,000 in Direct Mail Revenue



segmented over 40,000 donors and identified 6,000 who were most likely to engage with planned giving content. We then developed a more personal and customized mailer designed to create a warmer connection.

Data-backed segmentation was critical in our work with the **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**, which wanted to qualify its planned giving prospects. With GivingDNA, we

The mailing generated \$17,000 in direct response revenue — up from \$3,000. It also delivered a 55% increase in qualified planned donor leads that the NAMI development team could follow up with.

Best Practices for Digital & Direct Mail Synergy

Like anything, creating a coordinated digital and direct mail campaign takes planning.

These best practices can serve as a roadmap to ensure your efforts result in a compelling overall experience.

Determine Your Timing and Cadence

One hallmark of a cohesive campaign is that it all rolls out around the same time. Start planning with your mail pieces, which could take days or weeks to print, package, and deliver.

Also, consider whether your mail piece is the first, middle, or last thing donors and prospects will receive. This will help you map out the donor's journey.

Will your campaign kick off with a letter explaining your mission, build on the story through emails and social posts, direct people to a donation site, and use digital ads to retarget those who don't give?

Or

Will you launch the campaign with a live social media announcement, support it with static posts and videos, send testimonials via email, text that you're sending something their way, and finish with a unique and compelling mail package?

Whatever approach you choose, make sure each touchpoint works together to create a seamless and intentional donor experience.



Coordinate Storytelling Across Platforms

With the order and cadence of deliverables decided, you can begin to work out your content. Each piece should lead into another. For instance, you might start with a printed piece introducing an individual you serve. Then, a QR code would take people to YouTube or your website to watch a video about that person. Social media posts and ads can continue the story through Reels or slideshows.

If data is crucial to your story, think of a creative way to communicate it. Visual infographics, interactive slides, real-time impact trackers, and other tools can bring the numbers to life in a way that's easier to understand.

Match Creative and Messaging for Brand Consistency

Each component of your campaign should use similar imagery, colors, and design elements. These elements should, in turn, relate back to your overall brand. Use the same language as well, down to the tone of voice and length of the content.

People should see ads, emails, or social posts and be able to connect them with your overall campaign. There should also be no doubt that it represents your organization. Consistency will keep people moving through the funnel toward a donation. It also signals coordination and competency, building implicit trust in your nonprofit.



CASE STUDY SNAPSHOT: 450% More Dollars + 140% More Donors



In September 2024, **Washington National Cathedral (WNC)** hosted its first Giving Day in concert with its annual Cathedral Day celebration. Because its constituents were familiar with this event, WNC created a campaign that reflected its overall look and feel.

Elements included a direct mail appeal, emails with video and GIFs, a website landing page, voice broadcast, SMS text messages, and social media. **Through this campaign, WNC surpassed its donor goal by more than 140% and its dollar goal by over 450%.**

Overcoming Common Challenges

The digital channels you choose to complement your direct mail strategy will depend on your donors and their preferences. This is one of the most common challenges you'll encounter — donors want to hear from you in different ways. Your data can point you to the platforms they use frequently.

Other challenges will be internal. Specifically, bringing your marketing and fundraising teams together. A holistic strategy in which digital and direct mail efforts work in synergy requires buy-in from everyone involved.

To do this, create meaningful working relationships across your organization. Collaboration is the goal. Talk about how you can work together to make the campaign successful.



- » **What donor information can your development team share with marketing to make the appeals more compelling?**
- » **What pieces can marketing create to build brand awareness and move donors through the funnel?**
- » **How can your leadership team best support your efforts?**
- » **What does success look like for each department, and how will you measure it?**

Having your marketing and fundraising teams set shared goals can make collaboration easier. After all, you both want the same thing: more donors and more dollars.

Balancing your budget between digital and direct mail can also be difficult.

Some experts say 5–10% of your marketing budget should go to print and 20–30% to digital. While this could be a good starting point, it largely depends on your audience.

In general, let data on past campaign performance and changing donor habits guide your spending. Test everything, from images and subject lines to call-to-action buttons. Leave room for flexibility should you need to change course.

Be sure you **understand the donor journey** and how they'll move from one channel to another.



Conclusion & Next Steps

While digital outreach continues to grow, there's still significant value in direct mail.

These steps can help you grow your digital footprint and optimize your mail outreach:

- » Ask for email addresses in your mail communications.
- » Make it easy for people to migrate online to make a gift with a scannable QR code.
- » Use look-alike audiences in social media campaigns to find new direct mail prospects.
- » Use paid social media to collect names and addresses. You could offer to connect people with local advocacy efforts and promise to send them a printed resource.
- » In exchange for contact info, offer an online-only experience that will attract people to follow your work.

Printed pieces bring your mission to life in a tangible way and can create a first impression that inspires both prospective and current donors to act. When supported by a robust digital strategy that continues the conversation, constituents can better understand who you are and how your work makes a difference.



Allegiance Group + Pursuant can help you bring harmony to your digital and direct mail efforts. In doing so, you'll deliver a full-funnel experience that shows donors your change-making story and inspires them to act.

More about **Allegiance Group + Pursuant**



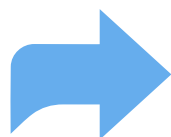
Allegiance Group + Pursuant stands at the forefront of innovation, empowering nonprofits with cutting-edge, tech-led marketing and fundraising solutions. With a legacy of decades of experience in direct mail, digital, web, UX, and advertising excellence, we've evolved into the ultimate one-stop shop for nonprofits seeking a comprehensive, digital-first partner.

Our mission is bold: to inspire action and create a lasting impact. Allegiance Group + Pursuant brings together experts in strategy, fundraising, development, creativity, and analysis. We're not just a service provider; we're your growth catalyst. From expanding your supporter base to enhancing brand experiences and leveraging custom fundraising software, we drive strategic and intelligent growth.

Choose Allegiance Group + Pursuant for Strategy & Consulting, Direct Mail, Web Design & Development, Digital Marketing, Advocacy, Membership Acquisition & Retention, Donation Platforms, Loyalty Programs, and more. Our clients feed the hungry, heal the sick, nourish souls, enrich lives, care for animals, and build minds. You have an important goal, and we're thrilled to leverage our blend of data, technology, and award-winning creative to get you there.

Contact Us!

We'd love to connect to learn more about your mission and the goals we can help you achieve.



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