Finding the Perfect Donor Database in an Imperfect World

Money for Our Movements 2010
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Why Are We Here Today?

- “After people, data is your most important resource.” — John Kenyon.

- A database is your institutional memory.
  - It allows the organization to survive staff turnover.

- A good database helps you work smarter.
What Should You Expect From A Database?

Your donor database should help you:

• Track your activities and assets (donations, events, solicitations).
• Monitor and forecast performance.
• Focus your efforts and work strategically.
• Report to your board, donors, funders, public.
• Better connect with your constituents.
• Remember: Databases Don’t Raise Money, People and Good Business Processes Do!
When to Change?

• Routine reports are painful to produce.
• Critical information is on paper.
• Can’t track metrics or progress.
• Data scattered in spreadsheets.
• Data can’t be integrated across systems.
  – Can’t get 360 degree view of relationships,
• Data is in fundraisers’ heads.
• Your organization is changing.
• Bad vendor or wrong choice last time.
Principles

• There is no perfect database.
• First, decide what you’re looking for.
• Buy-in is critical. Stakeholders must be involved in the decision.
• Structure software demos so you can compare “apples to apples.”
• Make sure you understand all the costs.
• Trust but verify.
What It Might Cost

• Software is often a fraction of the total cost.

• Prices range from free to $$$$$$.
  – Free as in puppies. Conversion, reports, training, & support may cost $$.

• Ballpark starting price for a commercial donor database: ~0.25% to 0.5% of annual operating budget.
  – $1M budget = $2,500 to $5,000.

• Hardware (server(s), desktops, network)?
More Costs

• Additional modules? Interfaces to other systems? Customizations?
• Training – will you need more than the standard?
• Staff time/administration.
• Conversion cost will depend on how much/what kinds of help you will need.
• Annual support: ~20% of retail price.
  – If you can’t afford the maintenance or training, don’t buy the software!
Buying A Database

1) Convene the right team.
2) Specify your needs and priorities.
3) Identify a pool of potential vendors.
   • RFP/RFI
4) Test vendors against your needs.
   • Scripted demos
   • Usability testing
   • Reference checks
   • Site visits
5) Get a detailed cost proposal.
So How Long Might This Take?

• Longer than you think it will.
  – For small organizations, 3 – 6 months to select a system, 4 – 12 months to implement.
  – For large organizations, 6 – 9 months to select, 12 – 24 months to implement.

• Plan for the unplanned.
  – Don’t hitch time-sensitive processes to “finishing” your database.
Surviving the Conversion

How do you convert well, cheap, and fast?

The same way that you minimize your customization costs, your staff time and training costs, and your learning curve and adoption time.

Define success at the start. What’s your priority?
More Questions?

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