

# Finding the Perfect Donor Database in an Imperfect World

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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:  $\sim 0.25\%$  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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