

Transforming Donor Engagement and Event Success at Duke Health with Mongoose

Overview

Duke University, a world-renowned research institution, houses a top-ranked medical school and health system dedicated to medical innovation and community health. Within Duke Health, Duke Children's provides premier pediatric care and research, supported by the Duke Health Development & Alumni Affairs (DHDAA) team, which leads fundraising and donor engagement. Lori Apicella, Director of Engagement for Duke Children's Development, oversees donor engagement, corporate partnerships, and event-based fundraising. Seeking a modern communication tool to enhance outreach and fundraising, Duke Health adopted Mongoose Text, transforming donor engagement and event communication.

Challenge

Before adopting Mongoose, Duke Health relied on a keyword-based texting tool that lacked two-way communication and proactive outreach capabilities. Their previous system only allowed automated responses when donors texted specific keywords (e.g., Text "DUKEKIDS" to 51555), preventing personalized engagement and proactive outreach. Event communication was inefficient, as attendees often missed important updates buried in emails, leading to logistical confusion. Additionally, messages sent from a national shortcode lacked credibility, resulting in lower donor engagement and higher opt-out rates. To address these challenges, Lori Apicella and her team sought a texting platform that could facilitate two-way communication, improve event coordination, and enhance overall fundraising effectiveness.

Solution

After hearing positive feedback from Duke University's Annual Fund team, Lori Apicella and her team selected Mongoose for its two-way text messaging, enabling donor engagement and event coordination. The platform's locally recognizable 919 area code increased credibility and trust, while segmentation capabilities allowed for targeted fundraising and event messaging. Mongoose's proven success within Duke University ensured a seamless implementation process, making it the ideal choice for enhancing communication and engagement efforts. Lori shared:



We needed a tool that could do more than just keyword-based texting. Mongoose gave us everything we needed and more, with the ability to proactively engage donors and participants in a meaningful way.

LORI APICELLA

Implementation & Impact

Since implementing Mongoose, Duke Health has significantly improved donor engagement, streamlined event coordination, and achieved record-breaking fundraising results.

Key Outcomes

Largest Giving Tuesday in 5 Years

In 2024, Duke Health had its most successful Giving Tuesday in five years, with Mongoose as the top-performing donor engagement channel. Dollars raised increased by 47%, while the number of donors grew by 85%, with 29% of donors giving as a direct result of a Mongoose text. A mass text campaign featuring a match challenge generated strong donor response rates. In one instance, a donor saw the text, engaged in a real-time exchange, and personally hand-delivered a \$5,000 check to the hospital. Lori explained:

Duke Health saw an **85%** growth in the number of donors



We never would have secured that \$5,000 check without Mongoose. The ability to respond in real time and make a personal connection turned a casual inquiry into a significant gift.

Strengthened Donor Engagement & Personalized Giving

Real-time donor interaction through Mongoose created more meaningful relationships, allowing for personalized engagement. Donors who couldn't give this year responded with personal messages, enabling compassionate follow-ups and continued connection. Segmentation capabilities allowed Duke Health to target outreach more effectively, improving donor engagement and conversion rates. Lori shared:

Key Outcomes, cont.



We assumed people wouldn't want texts, but the response was overwhelmingly positive. Donors engaged in personal conversations, shared their reasons for giving, and appreciated the direct communication.

LORI APICELLA

Higher Credibility with a Local 919 Area Code

Switching from a national shortcode to a 919 local number increased donor response rates. Donors were more likely to trust and engage with a familiar area code, boosting the effectiveness of fundraising campaigns. Lori added:



When donors saw a local number instead of a generic shortcode, engagement skyrocketed. The credibility factor made a huge difference.

Improved Event Communication & Participation

The "Over the Edge" fundraiser is a rappelling event where participants raise \$1,000 for the opportunity to rappel down a building in downtown Durham. Mongoose texts helped them meet fundraising goals by offering an easy way to pay the difference if needed. On event day, automated reminders ensured timely arrivals, smoother check-ins, and improved attendance, while post-event surveys confirmed their value for last-minute updates and logistics.

The Mongoose Difference

Two-Way Conversations vs. One-Way Blasts

Duke Health moved from automated keyword-based texts to meaningful, two-way engagement, improving donor relationships and fundraising outcomes.

Targeted Messaging for Higher Engagement

By using segmentation and tagging, Duke Health refined donor outreach strategies, increasing response rates and fundraising efficiency.

Outstanding Customer Support

The Mongoose team provided hands-on strategic guidance to optimize campaign effectiveness. Lori noted,



The support we've received has been unmatched. The Mongoose team is proactive, responsive, and truly invested in our success.

Streamlined Event Coordination

Event-day logistics were simplified with automated reminders and live updates, while Mongoose texts improved check-in efficiency and participant satisfaction.

Future Plans

Looking ahead, Duke Health plans to expand its use of Mongoose by:

Enhancing corporate partnerships: Exploring ways to use Mongoose for real-time retail associate engagement during corporate campaigns (e.g., Walmart, Ace Hardware, Costco).

Further segmenting donor outreach: Using Mongoose tags and insights to refine audience targeting and improve conversion rates.

Scaling successful texting strategies: Expanding their Giving Tuesday and event-based texting campaigns to reach even more donors.

Conclusion

Mongoose has transformed how Duke Health engages donors, enhances event communication, and drives fundraising success. By replacing a one-way, keyword-based system with Mongoose's interactive, two-way platform, Duke Health has significantly increased donor participation, improved event attendance, and achieved record-breaking fundraising milestones. Lori concluded:



Texting has become our top-performing donor engagement channel. Mongoose allows us to meet donors where they are, improve response rates, and create deeper connections—leading to our most successful Giving Tuesday ever.

Duke Health will continue leveraging Mongoose's powerful communication platform to foster even more engaging and impactful donor experiences.