

# Bridging the Direct Response x Digital Team Divide

*getting real about collaboration to right-size low-dollar  
donor engagement*



**I'm Elyse Wallnutt.** I founded Agility Lab Consulting and I've been driving results at the intersection of revenue, advocacy, brand, and policy objectives for 16+ years.



## ***What we've always known:***

Direct mail is seeing decline as fewer people engage with this response device.

## ***What we're beginning to know:***

Digital isn't the silver bullet. Results are struggling here, too.

# Philanthropic giving among low-dollar donors is changing.

- Giving Tuesday saw a 10% dip in donors YOY
- Costs to convert are up 80%
- Orgs are sending double the emails to generate flat donor counts

# **Why?** We can speculate:

- The economic outlook
- Changes in donor incentives
- Data privacy challenges

# What your digital team is experiencing on top of this:

- From the ANA: “only 36 cents of every [programmatic] ad dollar ... effectively reaches the consumer”
- Mass abandonment of paid social ads
- From Adalytics: Google’s Search Partner Network running its customers’ ads on explicit sites, impacting most customers’ search inventory
- Google’s adoption of AI in search results is causing a 40% decline in traffic driven to major publisher sites, plummeting display and changing paid search
- Email deliverability rules and rates change daily

What we know with certainty:  
Instability will continue.

So how do we get ahead of this? **Through better cross-team collaboration.**



01

# Getting Solutions-Oriented



*Instead of saying:*  
My vendor/peer group says  
[project idea] will work, so I  
just need the digital team  
to execute.

*Start saying:*  
Can we think about  
multi-channel testing in a  
truly multi-channel way?  
What would that look like  
for you?

# What this looks like:

- Value all teams' insights
- No team passes a plan over to the other team
- No team is a “service provider”
- Prioritize cohort testing that allows you to build the cross-team collaboration muscle
- Example: co-targeting

*Instead of saying:*  
If the digital team won't do it, I'll just do it myself or I'll try to own that channel instead.

*Start saying:*  
I'm hearing frequently that this idea is working well for our peers. What's the stopper for you?

# What this looks like:

- Don't create unnecessary overlap in impressions - measure impact by de-conflicting spend
- Be specific and diligent about matchback files - not for the purposes of perfect attribution but for better valuing opps for scale
- Realize that digital often serves many KPIs by its nature - even if direct response “owns” a tactic, that team will inherit the requests
- Example: CTV buys living outside of other ad investments

*Instead of saying:*  
The digital team is only worried about nonsense like influencers and branding. We need to close our ROI window.

*Start saying:*  
I realize we need to think about upstream impact differently as an org. Can you walk me through your strategic approach on these tactics?

# What this looks like:

- Realize that innovation really isn't an option (and just being in the digital game is not innovation).
- All teams need to value first-party data across channels.
- Learn from colleagues who understand brand engagements - value influencers and thought leadership and the impact they have on building brand trust and audience extensions that will help you when algorithms no longer serve.

# The big idea:

- Addressable audience sizes are shifting rapidly. What worked even two years ago isn't working now. Seek to understand.
- Seek to train, not to own.



# Questions?

Elyse Wallnutt  
elyse@agilitylab.io