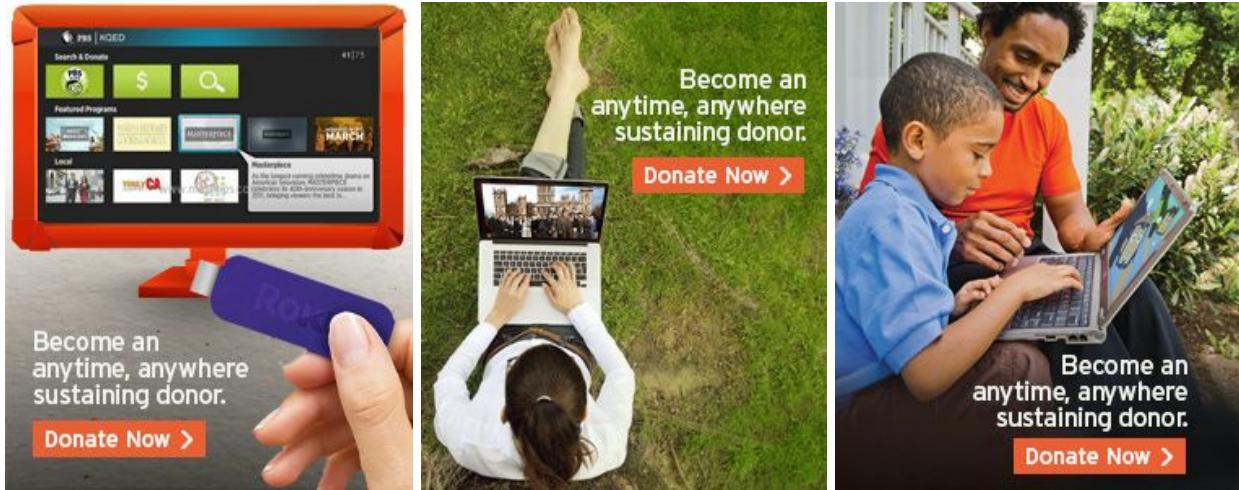


Case Study | September 2015

# Digital Sustainer Acquisition Campaign

## Developing good practices & delivering results

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### Overview

This past July, PBS partnered with 11 stations from the three-year on-air core programming pilot to launch a targeted, four-week digital-only campaign to promote PBS core programming anywhere – anytime on any platform. The goal was to generate sustainable, renewable revenue for local stations. For each newly acquired *[station]* *Anytime. Anywhere* sustainer, PBS provided stations with Roku streaming sticks to thank new sustainers for their ongoing financial support. The results were very encouraging with 467 new sustainers acquired, 8% increase in total number of new sustainers acquired online, above industry benchmarks for email performance, and a 3-to-1 annualized return on investment.

### Situation Analysis

Despite the 55% growth of online sustainers<sup>1</sup> and successful adoption of sustainer programs across the system, online donations represent a small fraction of total

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<sup>1</sup> [2015 Public Television Digital Marketing & Fundraising Benchmark Report](#)

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sustainers. Of the participating stations, only 21% were acquired through digital marketing efforts. Stations' limited resources and adoption of industry "good" practices contribute to the smaller number of digitally-acquired sustainers, and overall fewer number of digital conversions.

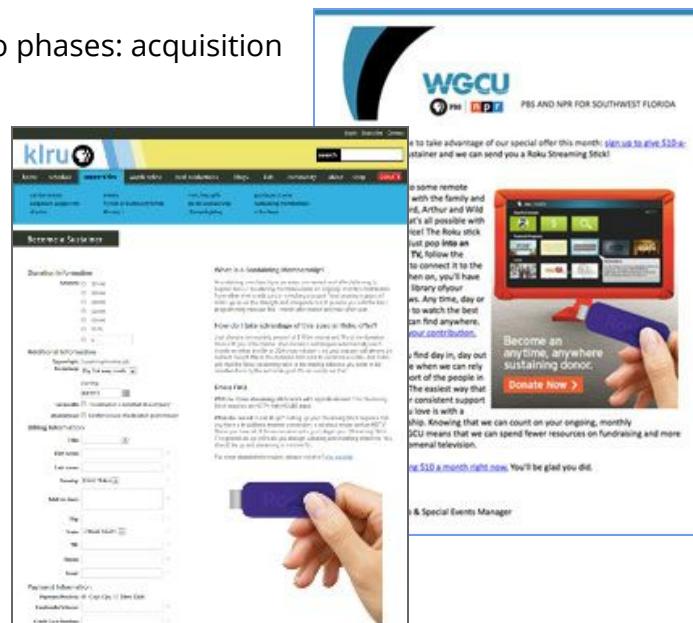
## Objective

The marketing materials combined the concept of ongoing, sustainable support with the programs viewers love to watch. Specifically, campaign sought to combat the resource problem by providing messaging copy, creative, and campaign guidelines. PBS partnered with Vermont PBS, WSKG, LPB, WGCU, Houston Public Media, Nine Network of PTV, KCOS, KNPB, KCPT, KLRU, and WGVU to achieve the following goals.

- Acquire 25 new digital sustainers per participating station prior to August pledge.
- Achieve a 3-to-1 return of investment over a 12-month period.
- Tie together three core messaging themes: consistent content delivery, consistent content quality, and consistent content support.
- Showcase existing streaming benefits to piggyback on existing "PBS Anywhere" marketing efforts.
- Reinforce good digital marketing practices to convert prospects to donors.

## Strategy

The campaign strategy was split into two phases: acquisition and stewardship. Phase 1, acquisition, consisted of a 4-week period prior to the August on-air fundraising window, and included a multi-part email campaign to increase number of new digital sustainers. Phase 2, stewardship, consists of a 12-month period following acquisition that includes an email message to engage



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sustainers, reinforce impact, and increase donors' long-term value to the station.

PBS provided to the participating stations:

- Three-part email appeal series to convert prospects and one-time donors to sustainers.
- Seven-part email stewardship series to welcome, engage, and upgrade new sustainers.
- Six call-to-action promotional images to be used with email, social media, and the stations' websites.
- Unlimited number of Rokus as premium for newly acquired sustainers during July.
- Campaign marketing and fundraising strategy, plus weekly implementation calls.

## Results

The July campaign resulted in 457 new sustainers with an annualized value of \$60,905. The pilot stations saw an eight percent bump in the total number of new sustainers acquired online during the one-month campaign (remove the KLRU outlier and performance increased to 11%). And the seven stations that cross-promoted the campaign on Facebook, Twitter, and their websites experienced a 26% increase new sustainers. Additionally, for the \$45 cost per Roku, the system saw a 3-to-1 annualized return on investment. Lastly, the campaign experienced email open and conversion rates that were above public television benchmarks.

Station Spotlight:  
**Deadlines Drive Action**



KCPT is the logo for Kansas City Public Television, featuring the letters K, C, P, and T in red, blue, and yellow respectively, with a black circular icon containing a white profile of a person's head to the right.

Kansas City Public Television sent their third email on July 29, which resulted in seven new sustainers - bringing their total for the month to 28. However, the team wasn't done. A fourth, and final email, was sent on July 31 resulting in 48 additional sustainers. The timely reminder of the campaign deadline resulted in a **71% increase in the total number of new sustainers** acquired during month.

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Email 1	Email 2	Email 3
# Sends – 171,758	# Sends – 169,939	# Sends – 184,895
# Responses – 119	# Responses – 119	# Responses – 128
24.3 percent open rate	20.9 percent open rate	19.5 percent open rate
<b>Conversion rate = .06</b>	<b>Conversion rate = .07</b>	<b>Conversion rate = .07</b>

### [2014 PBS Benchmark Report](#)

*Email open rate benchmark – 17%*

*Email conversion rate benchmark - .06%*

## Conclusion

The state of public television membership has been stagnant. Although the bulk of donations still come from on-air pledge, these sources are becoming less reliable as audiences continue to make the transition from broadcast to digital streaming.

Digital fundraising strategies offer immense opportunity for stations, allowing them to better prioritize resources, while building and engaging new prospects in a more cost-effective, targeted way. It is important for member stations to experiment with digital tactics to figure out what works best for them, and further engage members around public media's mission in their respective communities.

Following the campaign, station feedback was extremely positive. Stations encouraged the continued investment by PBS to provide the tools, resources, and premiums for stations to acquire new, online sustaining donors. Several stations also shared that the financial investment by PBS enabled them to experiment with the digital fundraising channel prior to pledge by effectively removing the barrier to entry -- costs of Rokus.

*To learn more, please contact [Tracy Ferrier](#), Director, Core Strategies and [Chas Offutt](#), Director, Digital, on the Development Services team.*