



Case Study | February 2016

Stations Grow Email File 64% for Year-End Fundraising Campaign

Fourteen Stations Maximize Year-End Opportunity to Engage Donors

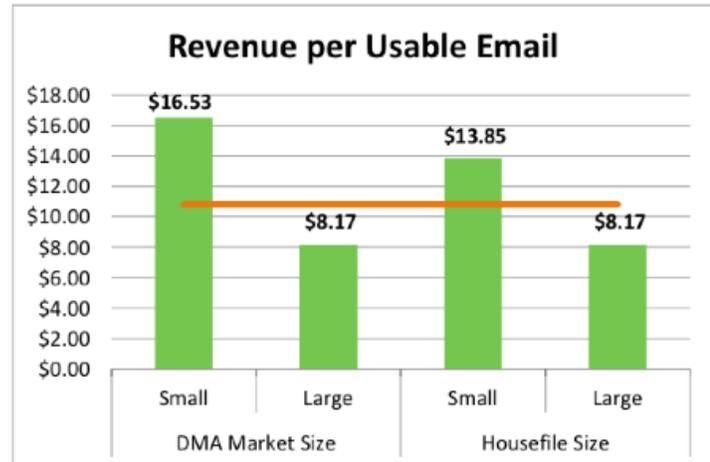


Overview

Emails collected by PBS are a valuable source of station prospects for donor cultivation. When a viewer creates a PBS Account, they are able to manage videos in their Watchlist, keep track of their favorite shows, and watch PBS and local shows in high-definition. The forced localization on most platforms allows for PBS to collect email prospects, match them to their local station, and share the corresponding prospects with stations. Additionally, over-the-top (OTT) invites people who sign up to stream content through devices such as Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, and Xbox to opt-in and receive emails from

their local station. Since PBS started to collect prospective donor information, six million contacts have been provided for stations to download, cultivate, and engage locally.

These emails are made available to all stations. However, as of December 2015, more than 60 stations had not downloaded any emails from PBS Prospect Portal¹ in the last twelve months. Size of email file correlates to total online revenue, and each usable email represents \$11², so failure to download emails for year-end fundraising is a missed opportunity for local stations.



Building on the success of the September Email Welcome Series³, 14 stations opted-in to the 2015 Year-End Campaign and eight agreed to have PBS send fundraising emails on their behalf through email automation for key giving dates including December 30th and 31st. The eight stations that opted-in saw a housefile increase of 64% — more than five times the non-profit industry benchmark.

Situation Analysis

Acquiring online prospects is a resource-intensive investment for all organizations, but different sources of acquisition have varying rates of success. Paid acquisition – often \$2 per name – can have a return on investment within 12 to 18 months. Names acquired organically see a much faster rate of return on investment. In 2015, non-profit organizations who acquired names through paid and/or organic means, such as capturing emails on their website (e.g. newsletter signups, surveys, etc.), event registrations, and direct mail reply devices, saw a housefile growth of 11.82%. In comparison to the broader non-profit industry, the public broadcasting sector experienced 8.59% growth — indicating an opportunity for greater investment and growth.⁴

¹ [PBS Prospect Portal](#)

² [2015 Public Television Digital Marketing & Fundraising Benchmarks](#)

³ [Building Warm Email Prospects: Basin PBS and WLJT Email Welcome Series](#)

⁴ [2015 Luminate Online Benchmark Report](#)

Objective

With limited time and resources, Development teams cannot afford to leave money on the table. That's why PBS provided a turn-key solution: station-branded email appeals written and delivered by PBS on behalf of participating stations, using email leads from Prospect Portal. The emails were automated to maximize key giving dates. Email leads generated by Prospect Portal are an excellent opportunity to grow a station housefile quickly, and begin engaging prospects early for donor cultivation. PBS communications keep the leads warm through station co-branded emails (e.g. newsletters) until the station is ready to message users to support station donor cultivation efforts.



The objective of the campaign was to familiarize participating stations with Prospect Portal. Specifically, the goal was to train staff how to download emails from Prospect Portal, share email fundraising best practices, and supply email messaging copy and creative for a multi-week fundraising campaign aimed at maximizing year-end giving. For the stations that were time constrained, the goal was to enlist PBS Development Services and Digital to handle setup and delivery of Prospect Portal contacts while directing users to station donation forms to transact online.

Strategy

At campaign launch, more than 60 stations were identified as not having downloaded emails from Prospect Portal in the previous twelve months. These stations were invited to participate and take advantage of a combined pool of more than one million names available in Prospect Portal. Fourteen stations agreed to participate in the December fundraising campaign.

PBS supplied the 14 participating stations ready-to-use email templates, training on how to acquire names from Prospect Portal, messaging schedules, and an automated email campaign series. Of the stations that participated, eight (KENW, KMOS, Georgia Public Broadcasting, Iowa Public Television, WFWA, WIPB, WQLN, WYES), opted-in to have PBS deliver co-branded appeals on their behalf to their respective Prospect Portal lists.

Over an eleven-day period, PBS sent the multi-part, co-branded email series to individuals who signed up to receive communications from their local station, and who were accessible via Prospect Portal. None of these leads had received any type of prior communication from their station; all had been sitting idle in Prospect Portal.

The holiday-themed campaign consisted of three emails, and highlighted the important connection viewers have with PBS as a window to the world. The tone was optimistic and the donation deadline of December 31st was emphasized. The messages were scheduled to send:

- Sunday, 12/20, 9am (local time)
- Wednesday, 12/30 9am (local time)
- Thursday, 12/31, 9am (local time)

Results

December is the biggest fundraising month of the year, where non-profit organizations see up to 40% of total revenue occurring during the last month of the year. All non-profit organizations ramp up their efforts to upgrade existing donors and convert prospects to donors. Typically, email communication at year-end increases significantly—often sacrificing performance—to ensure the right message lands in the donor’s inbox at the right time.

Given the highly competitive season, the eight participating stations had a very strong average unique open rate of 16%. The overall unique click through rate was .09%, and the unsubscribe rate was just .01%, well below the industry average of 2%. Together, their performance is a positive indicator of the value of these names with continued cultivation.

More importantly, for the eight stations there was a combined campaign flow of roughly 230,000 Prospect Portal names. This resulted in an overall housefile growth of 64% – five times the industry benchmark for the participating stations.

Email Name	Total Sends	Total Open %	Total Click %	Unique Open %	Unique Click %
2015 End of Year Email #1 - Dec 20th	235,978	43.94%	0.09%	17.94%	0.08%
2015 End of Year Email #2 - Dec 30th	233,908	28.02%	0.10%	13.06%	0.08%
2015 End of Year Email #3 - Dec 31st	232,800	38.07%	0.10%	16.81%	0.09%
Total	702,686	36.69%	0.09%	15.94%	0.09%

Conclusion

With year-end fundraising campaigns developed months in advance, and communication calendars finalized at start of season, it was an essential component of this campaign that stations engaged the names from Prospect Portal to maximize the giving opportunity.

Online fundraising continues to grow across public media – in 2014 online revenue (\$19.32 million) surpassed telemarketing (\$17.72) and represented 8.3% of total giving. During the same period, on-air revenue declined 11%⁵. Given recent trends, it's critical that stations increase the number of email prospects by growing their housefile.

Through more targeted email communications, stations can build out profiles for many of these constituents, and overtime, to convert them to donors. Employing segmented marketing strategies for long-term engagement and donor cultivation can increase online revenue. Emails remain a valuable source of revenue for all organizations and increasing the number of emails has become easier with tools available to PBS member stations, such as Prospect Portal.

To learn more, please contact [Keith Brengle](#), Director, on the PBS Digital team and [Natasha Hilton](#), Senior Associate, and [Chas Offutt](#), Director, on the Development Services team.

⁵ [SABS 2014 Data](#)