



Oklahoma State University Doubles Gift Revenue from Email Outreach

Looking for New Tools

The OSU Foundation has proudly supported the university's fundraising needs for more than half a century. As the private fundraising organization for Oklahoma State University, its mission is to unite donor passions and university priorities to achieve excellence.

Two of its key values are a donor-centric focus, and a commitment to exceptional performance and continuous improvement. To best embody these core principles, the OSU Foundation sought to upgrade its existing email marketing solution, which was starting to show its age.

"We had the same email tool for nearly 15 years, and it was no longer meeting our needs very effectively," said Amanda Davis, Associate VP of Annual Giving & University Programs at the OSU Foundation. "It wasn't able to handle sending out large volumes of messages very efficiently, and more importantly, the content of the emails was not very customizable. That made it difficult to provide the one-to-one feel that we really strive for in our donor communications."

At the same time that the foundation was considering this problem, they were also thinking about their next step in terms of a CRM system – and they saw a role for Salesforce.org Education Cloud, which they knew offered a comprehensive solution for higher ed institutions.

"The thought process was that we could start with Marketing Cloud, and that would be a great way for us to upgrade our communications tools while getting familiar with the Salesforce environment and how we might use other parts of the platform in the future," said Davis.



Oklahoma State University

Challenge

- Existing email marketing tool was showing its age and no longer effectively met needs of fundraising team
- Large volumes of messages were difficult to send out in an efficient manner
- Content of emails was hard to customize, hampering personalization efforts

Solution

- Marketing Cloud is an end-to-end solution for driving personalized engagement with donors and constituents across multiple channels, including customized emails through Email Studio

Products

- Marketing Cloud

➤ Results

 Bring one-to-one feel to donor communications through highly personalized and relevant emails

 Achieve consistently high email open rates and click through rates

 Double amount of gift revenue generated by email outreach

 Quickly pivot content of messages in response to COVID-19 crisis

A Customizable Email Marketing Platform

Marketing Cloud helps higher ed institutions better strengthen alumni, donor and other constituent relationships at scale and deliver a more connected experience. Since deploying Marketing Cloud, the OSU Foundation has been busy using Email Studio, the world's number one email marketing platform.

"Our team really loves the flexibility of Email Studio and the ability to easily configure the design elements and create custom templates," said Davis. "More than that, we appreciate the ability to truly customize a message to an individual donor based on the available data that we have on them. That really wasn't very easy to do before, and now we can create a much more engaging and relevant experience."

Davis added: "I think it's really important for nonprofit institutions to borrow some of the principles from the for-profit world about really knowing your customer and having a customer-centric focus and then combine it with their own strengths around communication and relationship management. I think that combination creates a huge amount of potential."

Increasing Open Rates and Doubling Gift Revenue

Using Marketing Cloud, the OSU Foundation has been able to build smarter, more personalized, and more engaging emails to strengthen its relationship with its constituents, to great result.

"Our open rates and click through rates have been very high – 44% and 7.5%, respectively, with some audiences – which is helping us effectively get through to people in a way that we haven't before," said Davis.

This ability to connect has had a notable impact on fundraising. The school's gift revenue through email has more than doubled over the course of the past year.

The customizability of the emails has also allowed the OSU Foundation to nimbly adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic and tailor its communications appropriately.

"We've been able to quickly pivot from solicitations to messages of solidarity and sympathy, reinforcing that we're all part of one big family looking out for one another," said Davis.

"That messaging has really resonated with people during these challenging times, and I think they appreciate that human touch. We probably wouldn't have attempted to connect with our base in this way with the old email tool – it wouldn't have allowed us to shift gears so quickly and so smoothly."

Even More Ways to Connect

Based on its initial success with Marketing Cloud, the OSU Foundation has decided to move forward with Salesforce as its CRM platform, working with Salesforce partner UC Innovation on the implementation. The foundation looks forward to expanding its use of Marketing Cloud and exploring the larger Salesforce platform.

"We're particularly excited about using Mobile Studio's SMS messaging features to reach out to people, and using Social Studio across social media channels," said Davis. "The ability to then feed that data back into Marketing Cloud and use some of Salesforce's AI functionality to become even more targeted and effective at what we do is incredibly powerful."

Davis added: "What we can do with the Salesforce platform today is not what we will be able to do with this product in the future as we add different functionality and we get more sophisticated in our use of it. Education Cloud is a platform that we can continue to build on as our usage expands across the institution."

Ultimately, the OSU Foundation's usage of Salesforce helps it better connect with and maintain relationships with its donors, supporting the spirit and tradition of Oklahoma State University.

"Oklahoma State as an institution has a reputation as a very warm place and a place where we take care of our own," said Davis. "We use the term 'Cowboy Family' all the time, and we mean it."

"Using Salesforce helps us bring that same level of warmth and care for the individual to all of our interactions with our constituents, whether it's in person or through any other channel."

– Amanda Davis, Associate VP of Annual Giving & University Programs at the OSU Foundation

➤ About Oklahoma State University

Nearly 25,000 students hailing from all 50 United States and more than 100 countries attend Oklahoma State University (OSU). Since its founding in 1890, OSU has evolved to include six academic colleges, plus a veterinary school and an osteopathic medical school. It offers 200 undergraduate majors and options, 79 master's programs, and 45 doctoral programs.