

With Melissa Data's Data Quality Suite, University of Washington is Able to Ask "Why?"

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The Challenge

The difficult economic climate has put increased financial pressure on public organizations—and colleges and universities are no different. To keep tuition affordable while also supporting high academic standards and world-class research efforts, institutions of higher learning have stepped up their efforts to reach donors who are eager to help ease their budgetary burden.

At University of Washington (UW), a multi-campus university and home to a world-class medical center, the Office of Advancement has the responsibility of engaging stakeholders in interactions that foster pride, advocacy, and private support for the university. These efforts have yielded impressive results. UW's most recent fund drive brought in more than \$2.7 billion, a tenfold increase over its last drive. Today, the Office of Advancement accepts roughly \$1 million a day in private, voluntary support.

With an organization as large and diverse as UW, there is information flowing into the CRM system from all points, and at all levels of accuracy. This can include names and addresses input by volunteers during UW radio station pledge drives and data from sales of football tickets—just to name a few sources. To deal with this data diversity, the Office of Advancement's data quality efforts must be top-notch.

"There is really no place at the university that cares about this like the Office of Advancement does, and we are unique in that we really have to put all the pieces together," explains Michael Visaya, director, software, data, and reporting, UW Advancement. "You don't want to send a fundraiser out to meet with someone not knowing that the person's children attend to the university or not knowing that the person just got a new job at Microsoft," says Visaya. "That is a fundamental challenge—getting our data in a state where we have the ability to map all of the pieces together."

The Solution

A key element of UW's data quality initiative is the ability to understand the 'why' in data—to spot patterns in individuals' behavior and see connections to the university that were previously unknown. "We try to take a no-compromise approach to how we work with our data—and choosing Melissa Data as one of our data partners is consistent with that," says Visaya.

To enhance and maintain the high quality of its donor database, UW has—for more than 10 years—relied on Melissa Data's Data Quality (DQ) Suite which offers address, phone, and email verification as well as name parsing solutions. The Melissa Data technology enables UW to barcode each of the three million addresses in its system, essentially reducing each down to a number without regard to formatting or spelling, thus making it easier to identify redundant, conflicting, or overlapping information.

In addition to the DQ Suite, UW uses Melissa Data's advanced record matching and data deduplication solutions, as well as Melissa Data's geocoding service to glean insights regarding location-specific relationships. Melissa Data augments UW's data with metadata for reporting that would not be possible otherwise. For example, the Address Objects component of the suite provides information such as legislative districts, latitude and longitude, and U.S. Census data.

The university has also started using Melissa Data's international address verification. Previously, UW rarely reached out to potential donors internationally because of a lack of confidence in this data. The international address verification software has helped UW improve the quality of its international data, provides additional information that does not exist in current data, and also adds geocoding and metadata.

It is important that with Melissa Data's suite of developer tools, the university is able to host the data onsite. "The Melissa Data suite was attractive to us because we can install it locally, run it on our own servers, and we can build processes that run in real time and can process more data at a much faster rate," notes Shawn Drew, who is the former director of information management for the university's Office of Development and now works in the university's central computing department.

The Results

Bringing revenue into the university is increasingly important," Drew points out. "One of the ways we have increased our investment in understanding people's relationship to the university is through extensive integration of the data across our enterprise. Melissa Data provides us with tools that we use to match and synchronize different data sets so that we can better understand what is important to people in their relationships to the university."

Using Melissa Data's tools, the University has been able to double the size of its constituent base over the last decade. Today, UW's donor database houses data about one million individuals, including the names, addresses, and other key information about students, employees, and alumni, and details about how these people interact with the university. "It used to be that the constituent base that fundraisers worked with was alumni and people who had already made gifts. We did not have data in our CRM system about current students, people who attended events, people associated with the medical center, university faculty and staff, and other groups of people that we knew were associated with the university but whose records were stored somewhere else," states Visaya. "Melissa has allowed us to expand the playing field for the fundraisers."