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UW’s associate director IM, strategic technology initiatives



University Improves Fundraising Efforts Ten-Fold with Powerful Data Quality Solutions from Melissa Data

Company

University of Washington

Industry

Education

Challenge

With state aid falling and other financial pressures continuing to increase, higher education facilities must find ways to optimize revenue sources like fundraising to support their educational and research efforts.

The greater emphasis on fundraising can be seen at the University of Washington. Just fifteen years ago, the university concluded a campaign that raised \$284 million. In contrast, the most recently concluded fundraising effort brought in more than \$2.7 billion – a ten-fold jump.

A key element of the campaign’s success was the implementation of an extensive, pro-active data quality program for its primary donor database – which houses roughly 900,000 contacts including names, addresses, and other relevant information about the people who interact with the university in a wide variety of ways – students, staff, older alumni, people who attend sporting events and so on.

About UW

The University of Washington (UW) is a multi-campus university in Seattle, Tacoma, and Bothell, as well as a world-class academic medical center. The university has 16 colleges and schools and offers 1,800 undergraduate courses each quarter. UW confers more than 12,000 bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral, and professional degrees annually.

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“Our job is to understand the many ways that people are connected to the university,” said Shawn Drew, the former director of information management for the university’s Office of Development (he now works in the university’s central computing department.) “This data is invaluable in our capital campaigns – enabling us to really connect the dots, find new relationships, and capitalize on the many ways our supporters want to contribute.”

Bad Data, Lost Opportunities

That is why improving the size and quality of its database was critical. The university’s fundraising efforts were a huge revenue-generator – but dealing with inaccurate and outdated data held fundraising efforts back from optimal performance.

The university has to contend with information flowing into the central CRM system from a huge array of sources. Data entry errors and variations in the data lead to many duplicate records. Additionally, maintaining accurate records on students was difficult because students are transient (relocating due to job offers and graduation, getting married, changing names, etc.)

Dealing with inaccurate data, outdated addresses and duplicate records were a major concern for the university. If the university cannot maintain communication with students and alumni, it represents a dual loss. First, the waste in postage, production and time spent on trying to send a mail piece that is ultimately undeliverable. Second, the lost fundraising opportunity associated with the inability to communicate with the right person at the right time.

In one direct mail test alone, the university found that eight to nine percent of its mail was not delivered to an appropriate address – resulting in thousands of dollars in waste and lost opportunity.

Solution

To address the issue of inaccurate data and ensure the consistency of the student and alumni records in the central database – the university turned to Melissa Data for its address, phone, and email verification, and name parsing solutions (collectively known as the Data Quality Suite).

To find and prevent duplicate records, the university also uses Melissa Data’s advanced record matching and deduplication solutions, and Melissa Data’s geocoding service to help in analyzing location-specific relationships that lie within their data.



“We had so much data to contend with and knew it was important to bring in an expert in DQ (data quality),” said Mike Visaya, associate director IM, strategic technology initiatives in the advancement department at the university. “We were an early adopter and use nearly all the components in Melissa Data’s DQ Suite. We appreciate their developer support and integration with our own tools and workflow. We see Melissa Data as a trusted vendor that provides good value and superior quality.”

Results

Even though the concept of ‘big data’ has made a huge impact in the business intelligence landscape – the university was more concerned with nurturing what they termed the ‘why data’ – analyzing patterns in alumni/donor behavior to better model current and prospective donors.

For instance, the university wanted to know if Husky football season ticket holders would be inclined to make contributions to the university’s academic programs. What the university discovered – through cleaner data – helped them dispel some perceived notions about alumni fundraising.

“With the breath of accurate data we now have, we have dispelled the myth that athletics donors will not give to academics,” Visaya said.

The ability to make these connections, and dig deeper into their data were a huge benefit to the university. “It’s become apparent that people have multifaceted relationships with our university and understanding these relationships has helped us facilitate more efficient fundraising.” he said.

In essence, improved data quality paved the way to better analytics. “The better quality of data – the better our data makes sense,” Visaya said.

Expanding its Reach on a Global Scale

Improving the university’s data quality also opened up new opportunities. According to Daranee Oakley, a developer at the university, they are using Melissa Data’s tools to improve the quality of the university’s international records.

“Before implementing the Melissa Data solution, we would rarely mail internationally,” Oakley said. “It was a lost opportunity. Our global address data was in poor shape. Now, we’re able to correct and standardize contact information around the world which helps ensure timely and accurate delivery, reduces costs, and improves global fundraising efforts.”

About Melissa Data

Melissa Data is a world leader in contact data verification solutions. Melissa Data’s data quality software, plug-ins, and developer tools verify, standardize, consolidate, enhance and update U.S., Canadian, and global contact data. More than 5,000 companies rely on Melissa Data to gain a single, accurate, and trusted view of critical information assets.

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