

Case Study

Client: International Fund for Animal Welfare

Project: Rapid Donor Cultivation

Type: Innovation in online fundraising

Keywords: email automation, fundraising, honeymoon, evergreen content, new e-subscribers, early engagement

Common Knowledge introduces a new concept in online fundraising – targeted, automated cultivation of new e-subscribers over the first 45 days from opt-in. The program results in 15% increase in average gift size, and an 83% increase in donor conversion.

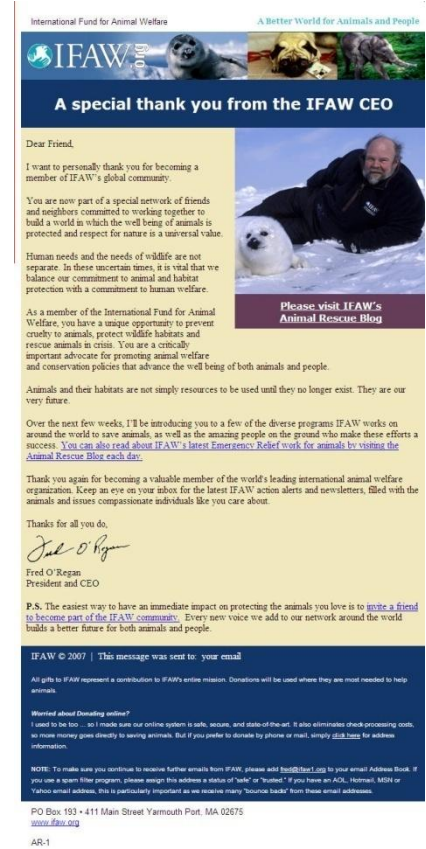
The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) agreed to explore an innovative concept with Common Knowledge—Rapid Donor Cultivation (RDC) program. IFAW is an international animal welfare and environmental organization with operations in 17 countries. Common Knowledge assists IFAW with audience assessment, online campaign strategy, fundraising, advocacy and email list building. Common Knowledge also assists with the consolidation of best practices across the IFAW international network of web sites and online communities.

Project goal: The initial motivation for RDC came from best practices in the online retail industry. There, online customer affinity is typically highest for the first 30 days after the customer opt-in to a catalog list. During this ‘honeymoon’ period, the customer typically has a strong and favorable opinion of the company, and a stronger propensity to engage and buy from the company. In particular, online this high-affinity phase is characterized by new subscribers demonstrating higher email open rates, higher click rates, and higher conversion rates. For IFAW, we hoped to realize gains in both fundraising and cultivation including:

- Elapsed time to first gift
- Size of the first gift
- Reduced cost of fundraising
- Churn (Unsubscribes and hard bounces) reduction
- Increased affinity for the organization and brand

Ultimately, the goal of the RDC program is to optimize IFAW’s email list acquisition investment and produce a reliable, cost-effective revenue stream from individual giving.

Project Description: The RDC program set out to engage IFAW’s new opt-in e-supporters with frequent, targeted, high quality e-communications designed to rapidly cultivate these prospects during the honeymoon period. The most recent version of the RDC program culminates with a fundraising appeal at 45 days after the initial communication; previous versions tested initial asks at 90 days, then at 60 days. In this RDC effort, we increased the frequency to twice a week (from once a week previously). The RDC targeted emails presented selected ‘evergreen’ topics (topics with a long relevancy shelf-life).



This frequency and volume of focused communication to each new supporter is cost-preventative via direct mail, and even online without incorporating the automated trigger and programmed auto-send of the 10-email sequence. That is, to dramatically reduce the program cost, an automated email sequence was implemented using Kintera's standard email scheduling tools. (Note: this same functionality is available in Convio.) Twice-a-week automated emails from the email scheduler send the next-in-the-sequence email to each new supporter. The email system keeps track of which email goes to each supporter each week, throughout the 5-week cycle. Once established, these emails are sent automatically with no work on behalf of IFAW or Common Knowledge. To further reduce the on-going maintenance cost, evergreen issues were used for each email in the sequence i.e. the topic and call-to-action in each email has a long shelf-life - remaining relevant for at least three months.

The results of this program are dramatic:

Higher Average Gift: The average first gift is 15% higher among Rapid Donor Cultivation supporters than subjects not receiving this specialized email stream (these subjects receive the normal email stream from IFAW).

Higher Conversion Rate: First-time donor conversion is 83% higher than control group supporters. The rate of conversion of *subscribers to activists* increased by 110%.

Lower Cost: Common Knowledge estimates that the RDC automated program requires just 10-20% of the resources necessary to build and administer an equivalent manual welcome series. Analytics and reporting of the program results are also streamlined netting additional cost savings.

This work highlights the following:

- 1. Process Innovation:* Common Knowledge's innovation in the evolving arena of online fundraising, particularly in ways that vary significantly from more traditional offline (direct mail, telemarketing) techniques. The Internet, while sharing some qualities with these other channels, is inherently different and presents the opportunity to establish new approaches to generating revenue via direct marketing for individual giving.
- 2. Tools & Technology:* Early on, Common Knowledge identified software technology as a crucial component for cost containment within the RDC program. Automation is essential to make this program logistically and financially practical. By leveraging commonly available features in the eCRM software, IFAW was able to achieve an extremely attractive program ROI.

Platform: Kintera Sphere (Note: this same functionality is available in Convio.)

This paper is part of our ongoing case study and white paper series. To receive future papers, please email info@commonknow.com and request to be added to our list.

