

Fundraising Giant Great American Opportunities Improves Customer Satisfaction with Email Verification



“It is rare something lives up to what it says it will do. In the case of Informatica’s Email Verification, the service exceeded our expectations, bringing our email bounce rate to nearly zero.”

– Drew Pettit, IT Director, Great American Opportunities

Company Description

Fundraising.com and its parent company, Great American Opportunities, is one of the biggest and most respected names in helping non-profit organizations raise money for their causes. Based in the US and Canada, the company offers fundraising options for any group’s needs, including magazine subscriptions, gifts, discount cards, gourmet packaged foods, and many other flexible options.

Business Need

When measuring success, Great American Opportunities starts with customer service. Fundraising.com and its parent companies have millions of customers, including individuals, groups united for a cause, and larger non-profit organizations. Providing a great experience for each one is essential to the company’s competitiveness. “We’re not a business model that has a list of 100 accounts,” Drew Pettit, Great American Opportunities’ IT Director, said. “For example, we work with millions of students, parents, school administrators, and sports teams.” These millions of people with their own

passionate causes coordinate with Great American Opportunities and its divisions to foster what the company calls “do-good-ery.”

With the needs of customers in mind, the company also offers free online fundraising platforms. These tools allow individuals or groups to create their own webpage to raise awareness, promote a fundraiser, and communicate with donors. “We provide the platform to boost their communication through different channels, and email communication is the predominant medium resulting in the majority of our traffic,” Pettit said. Great American Opportunities does not acquire and retain contact data in the traditional sense of email marketing; instead, it provides the tools for its customers to be email marketers while providing support and tools that allow them to realize their goals.

Great American Opportunities puts customers first in everything they do. This means that the company wanted to ensure that when its customers sent emails in support of their fundraising cause, they would reach their destination.



Overview

- Great American Opportunities solves customer support and service issues stemming from poor email deliverability rates from email communications that they were sending on behalf of their clients by using Email Verification from Informatica Data as a Service, creating happier customers and more efficient processes.

Business Need

- Retain high levels of quality customer service
- Ensure that emails sent from the online fundraising platforms reach their destinations
- Avoid re-structuring of existing infrastructure
- Improve data quality practices within the organization
- Cleanse data as soon as it is entered, before it is ever used
- Efficient, stable, and consistent processes for data cleansing that fit into existing systems

Challenges

- Poor email deliverability rates impacting customer service levels and sales
- Protecting the ability to send email, which is the company’s biggest communications channel
- Requirement that a solution will work with existing systems

Solution

- Verifying and cleansing email addresses as soon as they are submitted in real-time
- Cloud-based Email Verification solution implemented across 4 divisions
- No need for ongoing maintenance, and very little upfront development time

Benefits

- Fewer customer support calls
- Measurable customer satisfaction improvements
- 99.5% deliverability rate of emails sent on behalf of their customers
- Development time and costs saved
- Higher degree of trust from customers

Inside the Solution

- Informatica Data as a Service Email Verification

Challenges

Email marketing was a key activity for Great American Opportunities' customers to be successful. The company provides and manages tools for sending email as a service for their customers. Because of this, the contact lists were being uploaded and maintained by their customers, not the company. In the process of testing deliverability for customer lists, it became clear that without a refactoring of their email infrastructure, a solution was needed to clean contact data before it was used.

"We would get reports from customers that certain people weren't receiving their fundraising emails," Pettit said. "Often these reports would show that an email address was undeliverable or invalid, or it may have gotten stuck in a spam filter." Email deliverability was becoming a customer service issue that Great American Opportunities wanted to solve with the best solution possible. While the IT area of the company was leading the problem-solving effort, all areas of the company were invested in a solution. Marketing and sales stakeholders knew that email was the company's biggest channel, and finance and operations supported the decision based on the return on investment from protecting the company's email channel from the risks of bad contact data.

The company integrated Email Verification from Informatica Data as a Service within its Fundraising.com division to monitor results. The division saw drastic improvements with email

deliverability, making this initial test a major success. Before Email Verification was deployed across all four divisions, the parent company Great American Opportunities began to see spikes in their email bounce rates and emails were not reaching their destinations as effectively.

"It was a troublesome problem that impacted us for three weeks," Pettit said, noting that the poor email deliverability rates were impacting customer satisfaction and sales. "That was the right push to nudge us to use Email Verification within other divisions, so we incorporated it more into the full corporate level."

Solutions & Results

Great American Opportunities went from success with Email Verification within Fundraising.com to success with the rest of its divisions after implementing the service throughout the company. "Our experience with assessing, understanding, and testing the service all went very smoothly and quickly," Pettit said. "Email Verification was up and running very soon after getting the contract in place."

Since the release of Email Verification across all divisions, Great American Opportunities' bounce rate fell dramatically to between 0 to 1 percent, with an average rate of 0.35%. "It's extremely easy to adopt Email Verification systems-wide," Pettit said. "The stability and consistency is superior, and it solves a problem while saving you development time and resources."

With a near-zero bounce rate and renewed confidence in their email deliverability, Great American Opportunities is helping its customers reach more donors and create more interest in the causes close to their hearts.

"Since we implemented Email Verification, our overall deliverability is better because our bounce rate is so much lower, and that builds us a better trust level with the email clients," Pettit said. "Email Verification is a tremendously efficient process that allows us to send more than 99.5% deliverable emails on behalf of our customers."

The company also experienced measurable customer service improvements across divisions. With customers able to serve themselves to immediately learn why an email address cannot be reached (before it is ever emailed), this results in fewer customer support calls. From a resource perspective, the company saved development time and maintenance, which was totally eliminated by using Email Verification services.

"Having clean data that is connected throughout your systems is important," Pettit said. "Email Verification acts like a gatekeeping tool that lets you avoid bad information in your data down the line."



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