experian™

Northwestern University improves alumni databases with address validation

Objective

"It's important to demonstrate professionalism with the first impression, right from the envelope," said Becki Randall, Director of Gift and Records Services at Northwestern University.

"Whether you are sending calls for volunteers, invitations to alumni events, solicitations, magazines, tax receipts, or thank you notes, getting alumni information right goes a long way toward establishing good relations."

Randall and her team manage an Ellucian Advance database of more than 300,000 alumni and other key constituents. Maintaining accurate, valid addresses is a challenge. Newer alumni often move and may live in apartments, making address data both complicated and ever-changing. Yet staying in touch with recent graduates is the best way to ensure a beneficial long-term relationship.

There are numerous costs associated with inaccurate addresses in a database. Returned mail gets expensive (in the case of sending glossy alumni magazines) and can cause real difficulty in maintaining good relationships (when you are sending, for example, tax receipts donors are counting on). When mailing gift solicitations, losing even 10% in the mail can seriously eat into a campaign's return on investment.

With a database of 300,000 alumni and friends of the University, accurate data is critical to Northwestern's Gift and Records Services Department. Yet with a high volume of returned mail and cumbersome data entry systems, easy, effective communication with key constituents was a challenge.

Solution

Gift and Records Services staff turned to QAS Pro, which validates addresses against official U.S. Postal Service® records during entry into a database.

Their first priority? Ease of use. "If employees don't like a product, they simply won't use it," said Randall. "We also wanted something that would speed address entry, not make it take longer," she added. "We were spending over a minute entering each customer record, and I knew we could do better."

With implementation in under a half-hour, Experian's solution was truly an out-of-the-box solution for Northwestern.

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Implementation and training

Implementation was "a pleasant surprise," Randall said. "From opening the box to running the software took a half-hour." Because Experian software runs on top of the Ellucian database and operates at the keyboard buffer level, changes to underlying code are minimal or completely unnecessary. Users often don't realize they are using Experian on top of Ellucian Advance because it uses the Ellucian Advance data window.

Training was also easier than expected. "The staff not only uses QAS, they love it," Randall reports. "It makes their jobs much easier."

Results

The first change users noticed was the faster address data entry. Experian provides drop-down lists of valid addresses after just a few keystrokes. Users simply highlight and select the correct address, which enters the database in the appropriate format.

With a savings of up to 75% of keystrokes needed to enter a complete address, data entry is more effective. The team saved one minute per address entered, making data entry much faster.

Address formatting that conforms to USPS® standards reduces returned and delayed mail. "I like that Experian reduces the potential for human error," Randall said. "Address formatting now happens automatically, rather than leaving it up to individuals. The staff not only have an easier job, they are producing higher quality results."

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We helped Northwestern University reduce returned mail and communicate more effectively with alumni.
Let us help you!

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