Comic Relief

Comic Relief partner with Experian to help maximise donor revenue contributions

Address cleaning has enabled Comic Relief to keep track of supporters and to maximize the amount of money it can raise through Gift Aid donations

Maximising donor revenue

Background

Comic Relief is one of the UK's best known charities, with a mission to end poverty and social injustice. Comic Relief was launched live on BBC1 on Christmas Day 1985 in response to the African famine. It staged its first Red Nose Day in 1988, and raised more than £15 million.

Since 1985 the charity has raised over £400 million. Each year, in addition to many other charitable activities, it stages one flagship money-raising event, alternating between Red Nose Day and Sport Relief.

Situation

With over three million supporters, Comic Relief has several key reasons to invest in data quality. It requires a valid address for every donor in order to mail out fundraising kits and marketing material for continued support. It requires data suppression to keep track of supporters who move house so it can safeguard its donations. And data quality is essential to maximise its Gift Aid contribution from the Inland Revenue.

Liz Curry, Comic Relief's CRM Manager, explains, "Our promise is that for every single pound raised directly by the public, a pound goes to help people affected by poverty and social injustice to transform their lives. We are able to keep this promise because the costs of running Comic Relief are met in cash or in kind from all kinds of other sources including Government, corporate donors and individual suppliers as well as through the interest generated on our funds and through Gift Aid."

Comic Relief is able to claim Gift Aid on donations from UK taxpayers. For each donation on which Gift Aid is claimed, the charity receives an additional 28% income. So a £100 donation with Gift Aid claimed would be worth £128. In 2005, Gift Aid on Red Nose Day donations amounted to £7 million.

In order to claim Gift Aid, Comic Relief needs valid name and address data. For donations made over the web or interactive TV, donors are able to confirm their details as they make the donation, and no further action is required. The huge numbers of people seeking to make donations on and around Red Nose Day causes

Comic Relief to recruit call centres from all over the country who give their time for free to take calls from donors on the night. As these are live lines, there is no audio recording of the Gift Aid declaration so Comic Relief is required to write to them to confirm that they agree to 'Gift Aid' their donation. Liz Curry comments: "Over 80% of these donors say yes to Gift Aid, so it's essential we get a letter to them quickly and to a valid address."

It is also vital that Comic Relief makes this process as accurate as possible, as the charity's Gift Aid claims are audited by the Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue requires complete accuracy as it will only provide Gift Aid on donations with full and valid address data. "Whatever percentage of the randomly selected names and addresses are found to be incorrect, that same percentage is deducted from the amount of Gift Aid the charity can claim," says Liz Curry.

> "We need accurate data to fulfil our operational objectives of maximising donor revenue. Address cleaning from Experian Data Quality helps us do this It is easy to use, throughput is quick and it ultimately improves our data quality."
>
> — **Liz Curry**, CRM Manager, Comic Relief

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Solution

Up until 2004, the process for validating addresses to confirm the Gift Aid donations was a manual one. Because of the importance of the audit process, the charity did not want to entrust the task to junior members of staff. Senior managers would 'eyeball' the data looking for any suspect addresses.

Clearly, such a system was far from foolproof as well as time consuming. "It would take senior managers weeks to review the data. This was a complete waste of their time," says Curry. "Now this data cleansing process is fully automated. Our Finance department simply sanity checks a sample of our largest donations, then the claim is sent. We now have complete confidence in our claim."

In addition to verifying addresses for Gift Aid, the tool is also used to clean the charity's three million-strong donor database, so that when fundraising packs are sent out the charity can have more confidence that the packs are reaching their intended target.

The tool cleans and verifies addresses against Experian Data Quality's enhanced version of the Royal Mail's Postcode Address File. It can be used as frequently as required, and provides a cleaning summary after each run, providing a clear breakdown of how many addresses have been cleaned and what types of amendments have been made.

Comic Relief's donor database increases during campaign periods so at these times, the charity will clean its data up to five times a week using the address cleaning tool. Over 400,000 fundraising packs are sent out for Red Nose Day and around 100,000 packs for Sport Relief. In addition, numerous marketing materials are sent to existing and prospective donors to keep them informed when planning for a new charity day is underway.

Comic Relief also uses an online data suppression service from Experian, to screen its database for people who have moved address. Experian Intact compares Comic Relief's data against a range of data suppression files, including Absolute Movers from Experian, to identify records that are out of date. "By removing goneaways and locating new addresses for movers, we stop wasting our marketing money on contacting individuals who can't respond," says Curry.

Results

Being able to verify address details, using address cleaning, has enabled Comic Relief to maximise the amount of money it can raise through Gift Aid donations. "Prior to address cleaning, millions of pounds could be at risk. Now we have a fast and accurate method to keep our data up to date."

Additionally, by removing erroneous address details from the database, the charity has been able to save money on wasted mailing and fundraising packs. "Our reputation is also at stake. We rely on data accuracy to keep us at the top of our field."