

Case Study: Northwestern University



Situation

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 from Experian QAS, which validates addresses against official U.S. Postal Service® records during entry into a database. With implementation in under a half-hour, QAS Pro is truly an out-of-the-box solution for Northwestern.

Results

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.

“It’s important to demonstrate professionalism with the first impression, right from the envelope.”

— Becki Randall, Director of Gift and Records Services, Northwestern University

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,” said Becki Randall, Director of Gift and Records Services at Northwestern University.

Randall and her team manage a

SunGard 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

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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.

Experian QAS

The team turned to QAS Pro to validate addresses against official U.S. Postal Service® records during data entry, in real time.

Their first priority? Ease of use. “If employees don't like a product, they simply won't use it,” Randall said.

“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.”

Implementing and Training

Implementation was “a pleasant surprise,” Randall Said. “From opening the box to running the software took a half-hour.” Because QAS Pro runs on top of the SunGard Advance 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 QAS Pro on top of SunGard Advance, because the software uses the SunGard 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. QAS Pro 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.

“I also like that QAS 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.”

Finally, the department has seen a significant reduction in returned mail. “The time and dollar savings that come from not having to go back and research the correct address for a tax receipt or a magazine is huge,” says Randall. “It makes a difference.”

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