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How Cross Promotions Can Help Your Organization

By Katherine Mackenzie, Consultant, and Jessica Bosanko, Senior Consultant, M+R Strategic Services

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Sharing lists for fundraising outreach has long been accepted as a cost-effective practice in the direct mail world. But list sharing has yet to be applied to online lists in any great numbers. Many nonprofits are held back by fears over negative impacts to their email lists or the quality of the new supporters. Others are simply uncertain about how online cross promotions (or “list swaps” or “list chaperones”, as they’re sometimes called) work. That’s why we put it to the test.

First off, we do want to state for the record, a cross promotion does not involve actually swapping lists, and there is absolutely no spamming involved!

We helped two organizations with similar missions, the League of Conservation Voters and The Wilderness Society, coordinate a cross promotion in July 2007 and then two years later, took a look at the results...

How it worked

An online cross promotion doesn’t work like a direct mail list swap, where two groups literally swap lists. Instead of actually trading lists, the two nonprofits each send an email to their OWN list, promoting a link to the other nonprofit’s web site. Each nonprofit acquires only the names of people who affirmatively opt-in on their web site by taking action.

The image below shows you the email sent by the League of Conservation Voters to their own subscribers, encouraging them to take action on The Wilderness Society’s web site, where the action-takers have the opportunity to opt-in to The Wilderness Society’s email list.

From: "Gene Karpinski, League of Conservation Voters" <lcv@lcv.org>
Subject: Drilling disaster ahead for Yellowstone region?

Katherine - You've been instrumental in helping us in the fight to find real solutions to our energy problems. Now we have a chance to help solve those problems and help protect one of America's most treasured wildlife habitats. The Bush Administration is taking public comments right now on a plan that will drastically increase gas drilling in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, but they can't move forward until they hear from you!

That's why I'm forwarding you important message below, from our friends at The Wilderness Society. Please take a moment to read the message below, and [take action today](#) to help keep the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem GREAT for future generations.

Thanks for all your help -

Gene Karpinski, League of Conservation Voters

Dear Katherine,

The southern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is one of America's most important and spectacular wildlife habitats. Sadly for the elk and pronghorn, it is also one of America's fastest-growing gas fields.

The Bush Administration wants to **radically escalate gas drilling** in Wyoming's Upper Green River Valley - land owned by all Americans. Their plan would effectively DOUBLE the number of gas wells to more than 7,000 - generating huge profits for gas companies at the expense of the American taxpayer, local communities, and wildlife.

Fortunately we have until June 18 to reduce the scale of these projects. Before the public comment period closes, speak up for the **alternative** that includes safeguards for wildlife and air quality.

[Click here to tell the Bush Administration's Bureau of Land Management to choose the conservation alternative for management of the Upper Green River Valley.](#)

The Bush Administration cannot act until it collects comments from citizens like you. Join us in asking the Bush Administration to pursue a sensible management plan for the Upper Green, one that would:

- Set a slower, more reasonable pace for new gas development;
- Cluster drilling infrastructure so it minimizes impact on the land and wildlife;
- Follow seasonal drilling restrictions; and
- Permanently protect certain critical areas from any new leasing or development.

**Keep the Greater
Yellowstone Ecosystem
GREAT for future
generations.**



Photo: USNPS

**Speak up before the
public comment deadline!**

[Click here now.](#)

The results: a net win for advocacy and fundraising

A lot of groups might worry about doing a cross promotion, because if your supporters start getting more email from another nonprofit, obviously they are going to be less likely to take action for your nonprofit. Happily, our study found that the reverse was true!

Two years after the original cross promotion, the LCV and TWS supporters who participated in the cross promotion are actually *more* likely to take action for the original nonprofit than they were before the cross promotion took place. We were happily surprised by this discovery – **not only did the cross promotion have no clear negative effects, it actually increased activism among participants!**

What does this mean for advocacy? In this case, the cross promotion was a win-win. Not only did the original supporters take *more* actions, but each group now had a whole new group of people to support their advocacy efforts because of the list growth from the cross promotion.

What about for fundraising? For this cross promotion, we found no statistical evidence that the cross promotion had any negative impact on the giving behavior of supporters that participated.

While we didn't see the same sort of increase in response rates that we saw for advocacy, the fact that cross promotion participants continued to donate at the same rates as they had in the past was good news. As long as you aren't turning off existing donors, the **cross promotion only improves your fundraising efforts because it increases the number of people from whom you could raise money.**

What's the down side?

Before you decide to cancel all viral campaigns and only pursue a cross promotion strategy for list growth, here are three things to consider.

1. **New recruits tend to unsubscribe at a higher rate.** For each group, the new recruits unsubscribed at a higher rate than the list-wide average, but that increase varied quite a bit. For one of the two groups, those who participated in the cross promotion also had a higher unsubscribe rate in the following two years, meaning they lost a larger portion of this group than they otherwise would have. The difference in unsubscribe rates between the groups suggest the need for a solid messaging strategy. Be sure to send your new supporters your best, most engaging content so they stick around!
2. **No two organizations are the same.** These two organizations have complementary but not identical missions and campaigns. Their results may not hold true for every combination of organizations, so pick your cross promotion partner wisely. You'll have the most success if you partner with a group that is complimentary to yours and attracts donors that care about the same types of things as your donors, but runs campaigns around slightly different issues.
3. **Don't put all your eggs in one basket!** If you rely solely on cross promotions with other groups for new recruits, you will eventually have fewer subscribers eligible for a cross promotion and are likely to get declining results. Be sure to use a combination of recruitment tactics to grow your list with a diverse group of activists and donors.

What was our methodology?

We coordinated a cross promotion with the two environmental organizations in July of 2007. Two years later, we analyzed the advocacy and fundraising response rates as well as the unsubscribe rate for both organizations. We compared the test group (the subscribers from each organization who were offered and accepted the cross promotion) to the control group of subscribers who were not offered the cross promotion and those who were offered the cross promotion but did not accept.

The following subgroups were suppressed from the initial cross promotion and thus not included in either the test or control group:

- Anyone with a single gift larger than \$250 at the time of the cross promotion (for TWS) or cumulative lifetime giving over \$5,000 (for LCV)
- Anyone already on both lists at the time of the cross promotion.

After the cross promotion, those who accepted the cross promotion were treated identically to the rest of the list. They did not receive a special welcome message or other fundraising ask sequence.

How do I run my own cross promotion: six simple steps

1. **Find a partner group.** The first step is finding a partner group with a similar mission to your organization that is willing to participate in a cross promotion.
2. **Decide on an action.** The next step is for each group to find an action that the other is willing to promote. This action should be something that aligns closely with both organizations' mission, in order to guarantee a high response rate.
3. **Draft a written agreement.** A short contract is a critical part to making sure the details of the cross promotion are clear and each group is comfortable with the timeline of the cross promotion. The agreement should:
 - Define the audience each group is going to send the cross promotion message to. *Tip: Be sure that you always suppress subscribers who are already on both lists. Many groups also choose to suppress major donors and subscribers who have joined in the last 30 days.*
 - Include an agreement that both groups will share the final alert copy and test with the organization for review and approval.
 - Finalize a goal for recruits. You should choose a goal that is within reach for both groups. *A helpful hint: You can expect your subscribers to respond to a cross promotion action at roughly two thirds the rate of your standard full list advocacy response rate.*
 - Finalize the date that each group will launch the other group's message.
4. **Dedupe your lists.** You can de-dupe your list by swapping files with your partner organization and matching up your email lists in Excel or Access to remove the duplicates. If you choose to do this you should be sure to have an ironclad confidentiality agreement. Many organizations also prefer a process that doesn't involve sharing records. There are a host of third party vendors who can do this for a fee, but if you have someone on staff with the appropriate Access skills, you can also use one-way encryption to de-dupe lists for free and avoid any actual sharing of confidential data.
5. **Draft the alert copy.** Each group drafts their alert (keep in mind the new audience may never have heard of the issue before) and should then share with the other group for review and approval. After each alert has been approved by the organization, each group should write a brief introduction to include above the alert and should be signed by the person who normally signs their organization's email advocacy alerts.
6. **Set up alerts, share tests, and launch.** After the alert copy is finalized, each group sets up the alerts. Your organization will be responsible for setting up your own advocacy page and then sharing the link with your partner organization. Your partner organization will set up their advocacy page and will send that link to you to include in your message set up. *Tip: Typically, the emails are sent with a plain wrapper and no branding for either organization so as to minimize confusion about who the alert is coming from. See the above email from the League of Conservation Voters as an example.*
7. **Recruit new subscribers.** Each group will launch their alert to an audience that they think will recruit the agreed upon number of new subscribers.

That's it! Do you have more questions on our cross promotion study or how to conduct your own cross promotion? Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

Katherine Mackenzie
Consultant
M+R Strategic Services
kmackenzie@mrss.com
(202) 478-6133

Jessica Bosanko
Senior Consultant
M+R Strategic Services
jbosanko@mrss.com
(646) 624-5053

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