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The Stronger Roots Program

Case Study:
Amnesty International
Hungary

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Moving from the street to inboxes - e-mail journeys from petitions to donating

Amnesty International Hungary had two main objectives: to increase both their social base and the number of their regular donors. The successful growth of the social base was based on new advertising methods, which helped them reach new people. Amnesty then worked to engage the people they reached in the long term, with some of them becoming donors to their human rights work. For this, they introduced email journeys, a personalised communication tool that, based on the interests of the people they connected with, allowed them to get all the relevant information to those who really cared about their causes.

Amnesty International Hungary is a civil society organization that works for the protection of human rights and freedom. They are primarily made up of private individuals who as members, supporters or activists, donate their time and effort to help Amnesty achieve their goals.

From the moment Amnesty was founded, one of its most important activities has been the creation of petitions and the dissemination of human rights messages through them. However, they found that not only are petitions signed by few people, but they only reach a relatively closed circle. To address this, their first idea was to take the petitions to the streets with volunteers. Amnesty hoped this would reach people who had not previously been exposed to Amnesty's work through their other platforms. In addition, this type of contact could go deeper, as people would develop a more accurate picture of the cause and of the work of the organisation in general through discussions with volunteers. However, during their short time on the streets, Amnesty realized that this type of volunteering was less attractive to activists, while passers-by were suspicious of the petitions.

Eventually, this method, and the problems that came with it, were washed

away by COVID-19, forcing Amnesty to stop working with volunteers on the streets. Instead, they opted to use online advertising to achieve their goal. During the redesign, they chose Facebook as the platform to promote the petitions, using Lead Generation type ads. This method was successful in increasing the number of petition signatures, but they still had to find a way to make up for the face-to-face contact lost in the online space. Amnesty decided to use a series of emails to provide the extra information that would have normally been provided by the volunteers. In the successive emails, new information related to a specific case or petition topic was written. They then adapted this by formulating new calls-to-action, each time offering a deeper level of commitment than before. For example, in a first letter, in addition to a thank-you, they would only offer a further reading, an article or a news item on their website. Subsequent letters opened up the space for more active participation, such as completing an online course, signing another petition or even becoming an activist. These e-mail journeys consisted of 3-5 letters, with the last letter always containing a message asking for donations.

In order for these emails to reach their target, in addition to tailoring the content based on monitoring clicks, the first step was to get a high opening rate. What helped most improve opening rates was testing several

different days and times of day, hours of day, and different styles of letter subjects. Though the data would vary depending on the organisation and its audience, the general experience was that reach was best increased when the email was sent out early morning or midday on weekdays. And in the case of items, neither very dry narrating style, nor very impactful, advertisement type slogans performed well.

“In the content of the letters, we saw that thought-out content production made a difference, with messages that were more general about our work capturing readers much less than those that were more closely related to the topic of interest, as personal messages and individual stories have a greater impact than a newspaper article.”

This is true not only for first letters, but also for requests for donations. Conversion rates show that previous involvement in a cause is much more likely to increase donor engagement than a generic message.

“We’ve seen a significant increase in the number and proportion of the people we actively communicate with after contacting us, so we don’t lose the people who don’t specifically subscribe to the newsletter. [...] unsubscribing is minimal, with 0-2 unsubscribers from most mailings, and the

number of people unsubscribing rarely reaches 1% during the entire journey. But it's also true that the opening rate also drops compared to the first letter, with a deterioration of around 5%.”

It is not always easy to find the right message, and in such cases, it is recommended to ask the recipients of the letter what they are most interested in. Also, it requires attention to keep the databases you are working with in order, whether it is a CRM or an Excel sheet. It is also worth taking the processes step by step, looking for steps that can be automated. As for advertising, an expected task that requires constant attention is tracking regular changes to the advertising platform and the advertising algorithm.

To achieve such growth, not only do technical conditions need to be met, but the joint effort of the whole organisation is also required.

“To successfully grow our social base, we have created a growth strategy covering all areas, with each working group setting its own targets. The fundraising team was the driving force behind the project, so we felt it was important to be clear and transparent to everyone about the exact goals of the project and the methods and focus we

were working on within the team. In many cases, it's difficult for the overworked NGO staff to find time for such joint discussions, but the hours set aside always make the collaboration smoother and faster.”

FINALLY, SOME USEFUL ADVICE:

- There are always people you haven't reached yet who will be interested in your work.
- It's never certain that a sure-fire idea will work, just as it's not certain that a no-fire one won't.
- Marketing tools designed for companies can be used with a little tweaking.
- Involve people in the design who are not primarily working in this area.
- Creating automation and templates is important, don't try to skip this step to save time.
- Give your base the space to tell you what they are interested in.
- Don't be afraid of not being interesting enough.
- Learn from others' mistakes, bring in experts.
- Asking for donations won't turn your followers away.



This case study was written as a part of the Stronger Roots Program.

The Stronger Roots Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate. It is implemented by Open Society Fund Prague, the NIOK Foundation, Open Society Foundation Bratislava and Glopolis.

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