



Case Study | February 2018

Stations Pilot Social Fundraising Technology for Passport Instant Access

Fourteen Stations Leverage Goodworld's #Donate Platform to Acquire Members on Facebook

Overview

In October 2017, PBS Development Services partnered with fourteen member stations¹ for a fifteen-day fundraising campaign to pilot instantaneous Passport access from social donations made using Goodworld's #donate technology. The October 22nd through November 6th pilot was the second pilot in the #donate series. Stations created Facebook posts using national assets and messaging for popular Passport titles and asked followers to "#donate \$5 (or \$60)" in the post comments for immediate access to Passport content.

PBS partnered with Goodworld to build a custom Membership Vault (MVAULT) integration for Facebook and Twitter. The Goodworld integration enabled donors to activate Passport immediately within the social experience. The station-branded donation form was hosted by Goodworld and synced donor data directly to MVAULT. At the conclusion of the pilot, stations reported twice as much Facebook engagement than the previous pilot. The high engagement was attributable to heightened awareness, mission-based or value messaging, local Passport content, and Facebook Live activities. PBS also administered national Passport awareness spots from participating stations' Facebook accounts. The PBS sponsored ads reached more than 77,000 station followers and drove 57% of all donations during the pilot period.

The screenshot shows a donation form for THIRTEEN/WNET New York. The form includes fields for Email (llama@tama.co.nz), First name (Llama), Last name (Lugsley), and Zip code (12345). It also features a section for Donation amount (set to \$5.00) with an option to make a monthly donation. Below this is a Card number field (with an example: 4242 4242 4242 4242), Expiry date (MM/YY), and CVC (123). A checkbox for accepting Terms and Privacy Policy is present. A red 'Continue' button is at the bottom. The form is branded with the THIRTEEN logo and Goodworld and PBS logos at the bottom.

¹Participating stations included: Basin PBS, East Tennessee PBS, WVPT, LPB, Montana PBS, ValleyPBS, KUHT, PBS Hawai'i, WCVE, WCNY, ThinkTV, CET, KENW, KSPS

Situation Analysis

The rise in digital streaming has intensified the need to diversify fundraising channels to reflect the continued shift in viewing behavior. There is an increasing sense of urgency for member stations to meet audiences on their terms in order to maximize fundraising potential. The introduction of Passport has been one PBS response to the increase in digital content consumption and online giving. Passport's arrival to the system marks a fundamental change in station fundraising not seen since the advent of pledge, and has created new fundraising opportunities for the 129 stations who currently offer the member benefit. However, as viewing behavior continues to evolve in the digital space, the greatest potential for PBS and member stations will be to continue to meet donors on their terms. Stations must go direct to prospective and current donors with fundraising appeals.

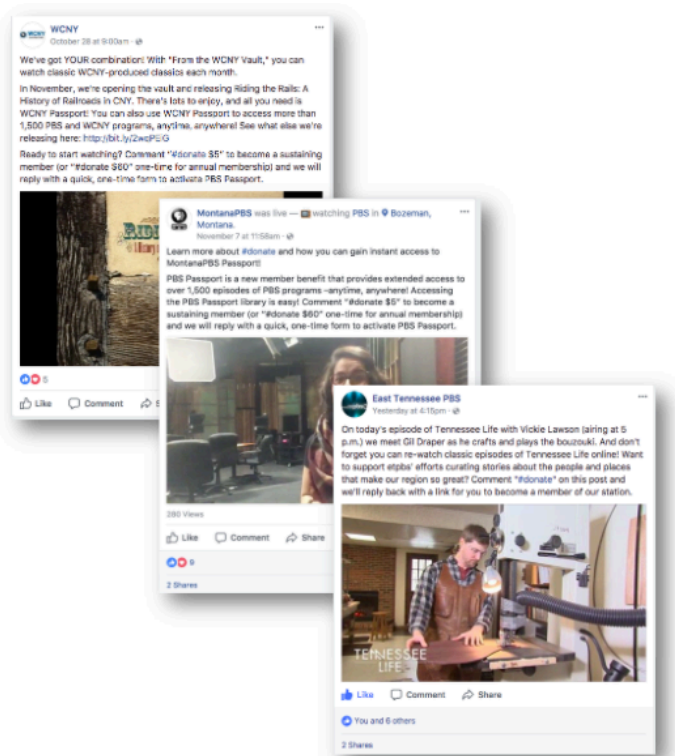
Objective

Stations from the previous pilot reported that Passport would be a good offer to pair with #donate. These same stations also asked that the station brand be elevated in the giving experience. Building on the lessons learned as well as feedback received at the conclusion of the pilot, PBS partnered with Goodworld to integrate their social platform with the Membership Vault (MVAULT) for instantaneous activation.

The goals of the second pilot were to 1) promote the online streaming benefits of Passport to a Facebook audience through the Fall programming pipeline and 2) activate donors instantaneously within the social experience. By creating a streamlined experience, followers can donate to their local station using #donate and gain immediate access to Passport content. To support the initiative, PBS partnered with Carl Bloom Associates (CBA) to administer Facebook advertisements to highlight the #donate giving opportunity.

Strategy

The methodology applied to the pilot followed past cohort-based training and implementation initiatives by PBS Development Services. The condensed pilot timeline was comprised of four phases: (1) recruitment, (2) planning, (3) launch, and (4) reporting. Fourteen stations were recruited from the original twenty-nine who participated in the March pilot, allowing for a speedier campaign launch. All participating stations were familiar with #donate and also had pre-existing Stripe and Goodworld accounts, enabling them to immediately begin processing donations. Stations were asked to concentrate their efforts exclusively on Facebook in order to fully harness the broad collection of Passport and programming assets optimized for the social network's content-friendly environment.



PBS held office hours, encouraged station collaboration in Basecamp, and provided a weekly digest of station practices to promote experimentation. The latter included strategies such as Facebook Live, boosted posts, local Passport content, and local value messaging. Stations also received a refresher on #donate, social media best practices, and a demo of the newly-updated donation flow that includes Passport integration and a station-branded donation experience.

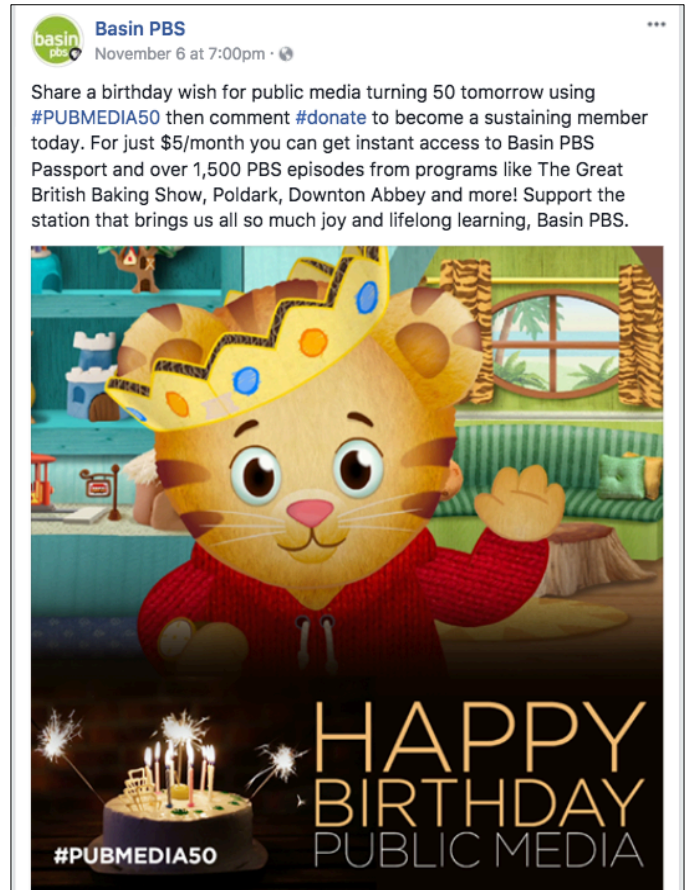
The pilot leveraged existing national promotional assets and messaging to boost engagement and drive donations with immediate access to Passport content. Stations were also provided a toolkit including copy and example posts for popular Passport streaming programs, promotional assets, and additional Passport messaging to use in Facebook posts. This was a departure from a more prescriptive approach taken during the March pilot, when stations were given concrete Facebook and Twitter posts to coincide with six pledge programs airing that month. Instead, the October 2017 toolkit made it easier for

stations to mix and match messaging, use their own voice, and find more creative ways of speaking to their Facebook audience. The campaign included a set of communications to reflect Passport’s own viewing flexibility.

In addition to a malleable framework that allowed stations to create their own Facebook posts, CBA administered sponsored posts for each station using the national Passport “awareness” spot. The spot had already received high engagement from the PBS national Facebook page. These sponsored posts were geo-targeted to stations’ US followers in order to avoid confusion over Passport streaming rights that might occur with potential donors and current members outside of the US.

Results

The earlier March 2017 pilot included 29 stations and spanned 19 days. This compared to a slightly smaller cohort for the October pilot, which included 14 stations and spanned 15 days. Of the total donations, 57% were sourced from the Facebook advertisements. Since social practices and resources at stations vary widely and the cohort size and testing period was limited, any benchmarks for success that hinge on donation volume or dollars raised, are at best, subjective. The fundraising results of the March pilot, therefore, informed the goals of the October pilot. The result was a strategy that tested the efficacy of the newly-integrated Passport donation flow and nationally-curated Passport assets, in order to increase engagement for long-term cultivation, irrespective of station size.



High Engagement

Compared to the March pilot, stations in the October pilot reported twice as much post engagement.² Stations posted an averaged of 12.3 posts each during the two-week window. Higher engagement in the October pilot correlated to deliberate adjustments to pilot strategy following the first cohort, particularly around content and practices. While the March pilot showcased on-air pledge shows, the October pilot heavily promoted popular digital content available for immediate Passport streaming. More specifically, high engagement in the October pilot was directly attributable to: #donate paired with national Passport spots, awareness and value messaging, local Passport content, and Facebook Live. Many stations reported that the Passport-themed messaging, overall, was a better fit than on-air programs for a social media campaign.

To help boost engagement with adaptive, timely content, the October pilot heavily emphasized cross-pollination of practices and ideas through a PBS-created weekly digest and station shared practices on Basecamp. The digest provided an overview of station practices week-by-week, highlighting trending station posts, clever use of #donate banners and creative, station videos, and upcoming content opportunities for #donate, such as public media's 50th anniversary and the November Passport lineup spot. Most stations adopted others' practices. In fact, 80% of stations in the pilot tested or applied other station practices throughout the test period. Stations also leveraged existing cross-promotional opportunities, as 50% of them paired #donate with nationally-curated PBS cross-posts, thus lifting the visibility of their Facebook posts. By pilot end, more than 90% of stations were aware of the cross-posting opportunities available to stations from the PBS social team.

Program type also played an important role in engagement.

During the March pilot one-third of stations reported that #donate posts performed best with content from *Victoria*, *Hamilton*, and *Ken Burns*. This was similarly true of the October pilot, as many stations cited Masterpiece programs such as

Poldark and *Victoria* among the top performing #donate posts aside from local, targeted efforts. A handful of stations also complemented national content with a local edge such as live video or local Passport programming. One such example was WCVE

What Facebook tactics did a handful of stations use to leverage local content and increase engagement?

[Learn more.](#)



How did WCVE boost engagement with Facebook Live and “Sockton Abbey?” [Learn more](#)

² “Engagement” refers to any time a Facebook follower likes, clicks, comments, or shares a organic station post or sponsored post administered from a station account by PBS.

who launched a highly creative “Sockton Abbey” Facebook Live to spur live engagement and incentivize donations. The station also went on to create edited videos from the Facebook Live event for continued awareness and engagement.

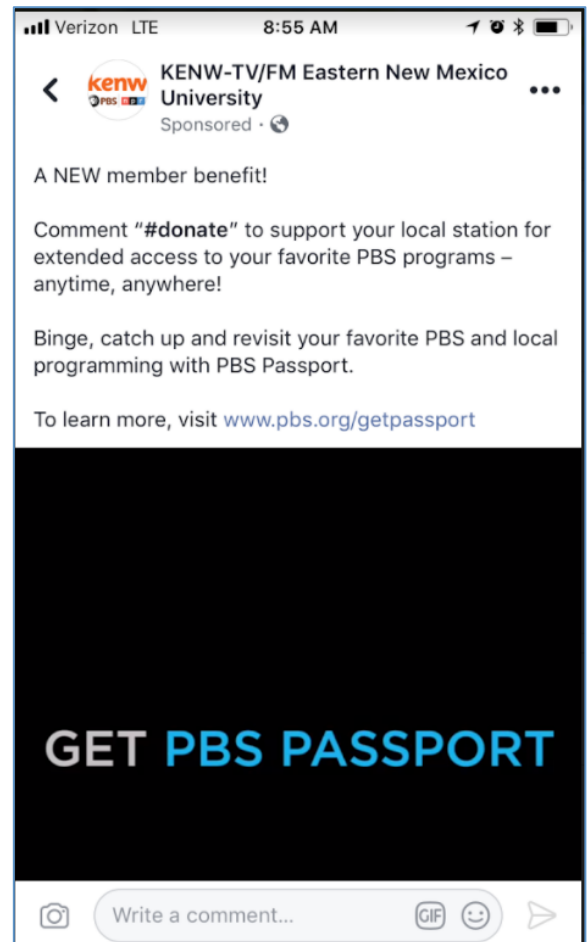
Sponsored Advertisement Performance

To support station posts and allow for content experimentation, PBS simultaneously ran sponsored posts during the pilot period. The sponsored posts were administered by CBA from station accounts and used the PBS Passport promotional spot that had generated more than a half million views earlier that summer from the PBS Facebook page. The sponsored posts were geo-targeted to participating stations’ US followers to serve only those who had opted-in to follow the station on Facebook and also avoid potential issues with those outside the US who may be unable to view Passport.

At a cost of \$.05 per engagement, the Facebook advertisement was an efficient buy—well below Facebook advertisement averages.³ Across station accounts, the advertisement reached 77,418 unique followers, and was seen an average of 8.5 times by station Facebook followers. Of those unique followers, some 48,848 people took action with the advertisement (e.g. clicked the passport link, commented, shared, clicked, etc.), making the advertisement a valuable Passport awareness piece for the cohort. In fact, the advertisement had a 7.5% engagement rate⁴, above the nonprofit post average of 4.6% and public media post average of 3.9%. Little data exists for nonprofit Facebook advertisements, and as such, the engagement rate is measured against benchmarks for unsponsored Facebook posts rather than paid advertisements. Still, the advertisements’ strong, efficient performance brings new opportunities for testing, and can serve as a benchmark for future social campaigns.

The advertisements were served throughout the day but time of day and demographics impacted engagement levels. As expected for social media audiences, the highest engagement levels occurred during early morning, midday, and early evening. Followers also shared demographic characteristics with PBS viewers. In line with the traditional PBS audience, 71% of the advertisements reached women, primarily between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four. Using content that is popular with this audience could help increase engagement and help cultivate potential donors down the line.

Engagement with the advertisements was also tied to donations. The advertisement lifted donations during the pilot period, serving as the source of 57% of all campaign donations. There were also 587 unique clicks made to “www.pbs.org/getpassport”



³ \$0.26 is the average cost per click for Facebook advertisements (*Hootsuite*, 2016)

⁴ Engagement rate is measured by the number of unique clicks/total reach.

which may have also indirectly served as a source of new donations during the pilot. The high engagement suggests there is still room to grow with Passport promotion, as followers are active and interested in the member offer, but may have yet to learn enough about it to give.

Education and Awareness

As a new technology, #donate requires further education and familiarity for followers to fully realize the benefit. Despite high engagement, stations reported relatively few donations during the 15-day pilot period. Including the sponsored posts, the overall conversion rate for the pilot was 22%. This compares to a 34% conversion rate in the March pilot and a 63% Goodworld benchmark. That said, the benchmark is negligible when considering small donation volume. Like the March pilot, conversion rates varied wildly depending on audience size and station practices.

Among the core conclusions of the March pilot, was that social media followers must be engaged before they donate, not unlike any other fundraising channel. Social media donor acquisition using #donate is comparable to other acquisition sources where return on investment can take 12-months. This is also the optimal period for measurement for Goodworld. The pilot's 22% rate of conversion is comparable to organically acquired emails for a nonprofit's prospect list. Unlike the previous pilot where incomplete donations were an issue, nearly all stations in the October pilot reported that they followed up with donors who used #donate but did not go on to complete the donation. Despite high engagement, many cited failure to convert, instead, on fewer donation attempts. This is likely attributable to the relatively short campaign period in which stations needed to educate potential donors on #donate and Passport as a member benefit. Continued integration of such efforts in regular social media strategy could help drive conversions in the future.

Conclusion

Passport has proved a powerful tool in acquiring new members across various fundraising channels, yet social media remains largely untapped. PBS continues to increase investment into Passport promotional activities to further engage and educate audiences about the member benefit. Education and awareness spots from the PBS social media page have not only increased engagement, but have the potential to lift the membership potential of Passport across channels, especially during heightened programming and fundraising periods.



As such, PBS continues to explore opportunities that would allow stations to leverage national promotion of #donate and instant Passport access from PBS national properties, including PBS social media pages. In order for stations to capture donors through #donate for local cultivation like on pbs.org, an integrated but localized donation flow would need to exist.

On the station level, multichannel cultivation efforts in social media will prove increasingly important for stations to maximize donor giving. As a new technology, #donate requires further education and familiarity for followers to fully realize the benefit. With increased investment from PBS national, there is immense potential for stations to use #donate and Passport promotional resources to deepen engagement and promote awareness.

The ability to use a tool such as #donate for philanthropic asks, promotion of local content, and instant Passport streaming gives stations a unique opportunity for personalized, targeted campaigns that speak to station's social media audience. Any PBS station can [set up their Goodworld accounts today](#), download assets developed for the pilot, and begin to leverage Passport marketing opportunities and the programming pipeline to increase engagement and cultivate online audience to become donors.

To learn more, please contact [Natasha Hilton](#) and [Chas Offutt](#) in PBS Development Services.
