



Case Study | February 2019

# WNET Partners with Stations to Engage Nature & American Masters Social Media Followers for Greater System Sustainability

## Fourteen Stations Participate in First Digital Fundraising Campaign Powered by PBS Transaction Vault (TVault)

### Overview

Intent on expanding digital fundraising beyond email, WNET began leveraging both Search Engine and Social Media Marketing through paid and organic efforts. The station's more than 1.2 million social media followers for American Masters and Nature represented a source of untapped donor prospects.

However, roughly 60% of those followers reside in markets outside of WNET. And with no defined business rules or functional means to wage a campaign, social media prospects had been intentionally excluded from outbound marketing.

WNET partnered with PBS and 14 member stations<sup>1</sup> to implement a campaign pilot utilizing Transaction Vault (TVault). TVault, PBS's donation registry platform, would enable WNET to achieve the following campaign objectives; (1) donations and donor information go directly to participating stations and (2) improve the donor experience for social media followers.

WNET's allocation of \$10,000 for the calendar year-end campaign for two national brands, American Masters and Nature, was a first for the station. At the conclusion of the campaign, more than 715,000 impressions were garnered resulting in a total of \$1,480 in revenue from 34 donors.

### Situation Analysis

Following an internal audit of the digital landscape, WNET learned constituents were being excluded from outbound messaging in support of public media. This was identified as a critical flaw of WNET's social media program. WNET has more than 1.2 million social media followers for American Masters and Nature, but roughly 60% of those followers are



<sup>1</sup> Community Idea Stations WCVE, Kansas City PBS, KCTS 9, KENW, KLRU, KMOS, KVIE Public Television, PBS SoCal, Smoky Hills Public TV, ValleyPBS, WHYY, WNET, WTTW, and WVIA

outside of their market. And with no defined business rules or functional means to wage a campaign, social media prospects had been intentionally excluded from outbound marketing. These two properties combined represent a missed opportunity for WNET and member stations from untapped donor prospects.

## Objective

The campaign objective was to leverage national producers' social media followers on behalf of member stations. The goals were to cultivate social media followers for national properties, American Masters and Nature, for increased awareness on the importance of supporting their local member station. To be successful, WNET would also need to establish business rules that would keep the campaign donor focused, but ensure fairness across the system in processing the funds raised.

## Strategy

WNET and PBS identified prospective markets as well as station partners who may be interested in participating in the pilot. Fourteen stations opted in the year-end pilot, October through December 2018. The campaign strategy was shared along with marketing resources for local stations to supplement national promotional efforts.

Specifically, WNET offered a sequence of promotional campaigns in Search and Social from November 5th through December 31st. A testing strategy was established for each property that examined the impact of

imagery and copy (pulling from focus group insights WNET had recently gathered). The campaigns were set up for each local station as well as the collective list of pilot stations, targeted by zip code. And then, every two weeks WNET provided new creative, including #GivingTuesday and Holiday Card specific appeals as well as a program specific video.

Since the pilot participants represented a sub-set of all stations, WNET refrained from promoting the campaign in American Masters or Nature newsletters (unable to ensure targeting). WNET was also not able to leverage their Google Grant to promote the campaign since the program restricts non-profits from adding additional URLs to the account). Lastly, organic posts targeting specific station areas were not approached due to operational challenges.

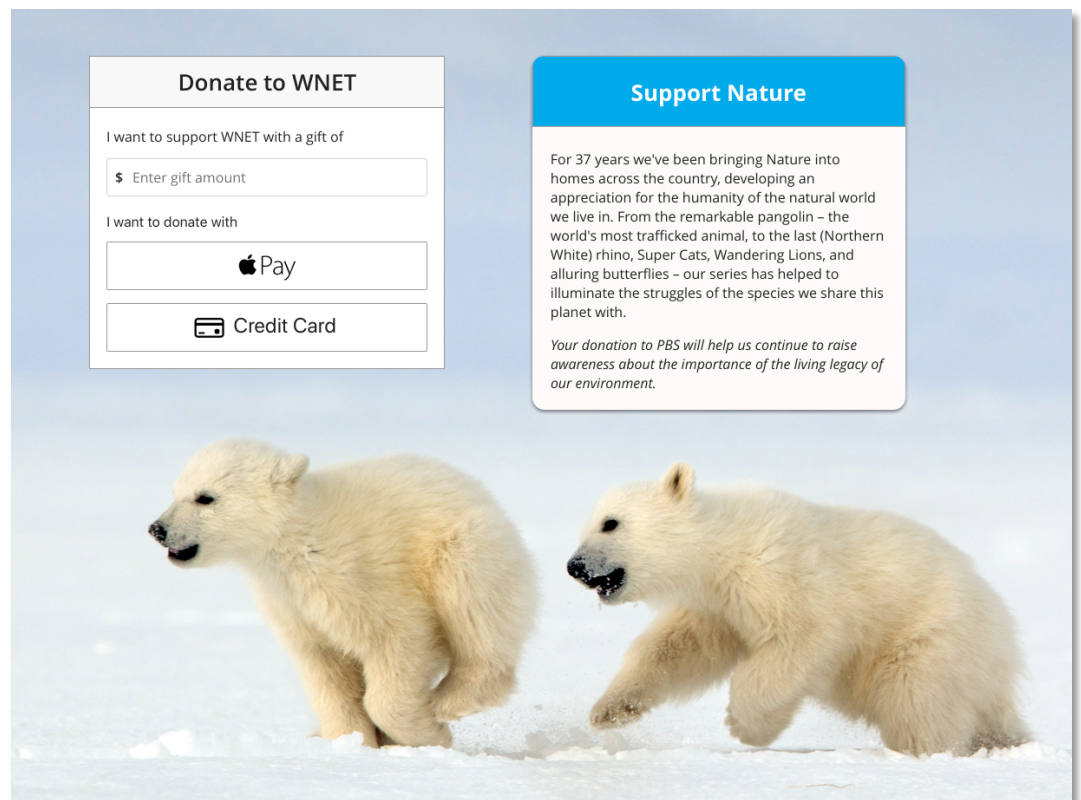


Figure 1 PBS federated donation form localized to each of the participating stations.

## Results

The campaign results were measured by station engagement, TVault beta launch, and national impact. Specifically, WNET allocated a budget of \$10,000 for 14 stations. The fundraising allocation at calendar year-end for two national brands, American Masters and Nature, was a first for WNET.

Awareness of the brands was extended through more than 715,000 impressions during the campaign period. A total of 34 donors contributed \$1,480 in revenue (18 in response to American Masters appeals, 16 in response to Nature appeals).

Constituent engagement was, however, elevated by the use of social videos in this campaign. And during the last two weeks of December, audiences shared more than 2,000 fundraising videos (engagement included 290 Comments and 8 likes).

The additional campaign insights resulted in the following takeaways for WNET, PBS, and member stations.

- The PBS branded campaigns for each local station out-performed the station branded campaigns.
- American Masters and Nature performed equally well in driving donor conversion.
- Perhaps not surprisingly, females responded at a higher rate in Social, males at a higher rate in Search.
- Most donor conversions and engagement occurred in people over 65 (for both the Search and Social media campaigns).
- American Masters offers a treasure trove of brands to potentially leverage (though results vary wildly among them).
- Digital rights are complex and need to be appreciated during the development stage.
- There's a sense that there's much more to learn about the potential in building awareness around Nature – WNET didn't leverage current programming and randomly pulled from approved materials in other media.

## Conclusion

The success of a digital fundraising campaign is often measured by the dollars raised. However, if revenue outcomes were the sole measurement of success for WNET and PBS, the greater opportunity may be missed. For the first time, PBS enabled TVault for WNET to leverage national properties on behalf of system sustainability.

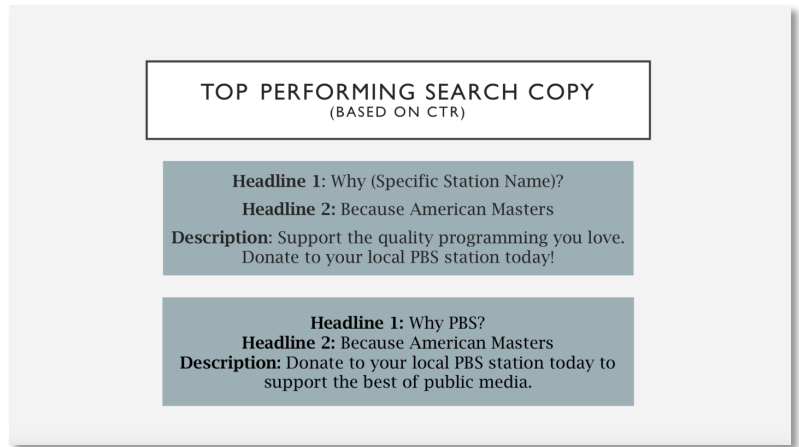


Figure 2 Top performing search copy during campaign timeline.

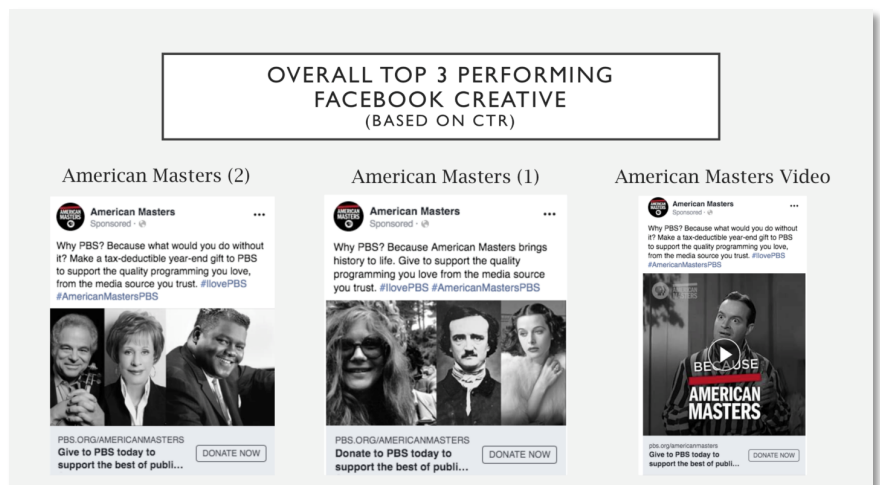


Figure 3 Top performing Facebook creative during the campaign timeline.

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WNET learned paid Search and Social are digital tactics that are fairly restricted. The ideal approach would involve organic Search and Social components, as well as email (and all of WNET's digital venues, including streaming and via applications). WNET was also not able to track promotional efforts by specific tactic, a requirement for digital fundraising and a capability necessary for any campaign. Another challenge in the short term with TVault is that the donor data was made available as a download, falling short of integrating directly with each station CRM (functionality estimated Summer 2019).

The additional insights and overall recommendations for member stations include –

#### **Continue the cultivation**

- Across the System, social media followers represent an ideal donor prospect source – often inspired to connect with us through a friend or a specific brand. Building awareness among this constituency offers a direct path to raising more money online.
- Avoiding in-platform processes (like Facebook Donate, which isn't timely and keeps key constituent data from benefiting charities) is something to avoid. The prospect of PBS donation forms and TVault offers a solution that serves both the donor and the Station.

#### **Create more sophisticated business rules for the System for Social Media and Search marketing**

- This is an appeal for fair geo-targeting across digital channels to avoid poaching from other stations. In digital, it's easy to develop a following of people beyond your DMA, but it's also important that we direct their support to where it's needed most — at their corresponding local station.
- Additionally, for this pilot WNET intentionally excluded station territories that overlapped. Ultimately, WNET believes it's in the best interest of the system to agree to a revenue sharing approach that appreciates how to handle revenue generation in shared territories. Finding a way to facilitate that online that prioritizes the donor experience is critical to future success.

#### **Establish logic for supporting national campaigns that extends beyond American Masters and Nature**

- There are specific costs associated with raising a dollar that should be shared when waged on another station's behalf. There are several ways to approach this (like agreeing to a percentage of the funds raised or a flat participation fee).

#### **Serve the Development pipeline surrounding a national brand**

- The system needs to create business logic for those entities that produce nationally distributed content to cultivate pipeline support. A means to identify and cultivate (if not share) Patron and Major level supporters around a specific brand or program offering is essential to sustaining those offerings. There are a number of models in place that address this, though none have a clear digital application.

#### **Take care to appreciate and strategize around digital rights**

- The licensing around a brand or product in the digital arena is getting increasingly complex. The system needs to take care to orchestrate those rights where stations can at the content creation level (the origin) as well appreciate them at the campaign appeal level.

To learn more, please contact [Todd Whitley](#), Senior Director of Digital Fundraising, at WNET.

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