

Case Study: *Cornell Lab of Ornithology*

THE CLIENT

Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a world leader in the study and conservation of birds. The Lab uses science, research and technology to advance the understanding of nature and engage people of all ages in learning about birds and protecting the planet. A unit of Cornell University, the Lab is a distinct nonprofit environmental organization which depends on the support of individuals, its 100,000 members, donors and friends, as well as research and other programs, to fund its vital work.

The Lab is home to several citizen science programs—e.g., Feeder Watch, Nest Watch and eBird—which engage more than 400,000 participants. It also manages dozens of interactive and educational websites, including All About Birds, which attracts over eight million unique visitors a year.

As long-term partners, the Cornell Lab and Schultz & Williams (S&W) have worked together to advance a donor-centric, multichannel direct response program that encourages interaction with donors and supporters. By connecting donors emotionally with birds and providing access to tools and resources, the Lab encourages people to see the direct impact of their actions and their generosity. Our work together has yielded important analysis and an understanding of what motivates and engages the donor.



HIGHLIGHTS



FLYING HIGH

Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a world leader in the study and conservation of birds. The Lab depends on its 100,000 members, donors and friends, as well as research and other programs, to fund its vital work.



BUILDING ON SUCCESS

With 100,000 committed and engaged donors, improving on this success requires collaboration and a forward-thinking client partner that is willing to invest in calculated, targeted risks to find breakthroughs for growth.



WORKING TOGETHER

Over several years of testing and analysis, S&W utilized an aggressive direct mail acquisition strategy with creative social media, digital engagement and list-building—plus a compelling website. S&W focused on increasing mail volume, selecting targeted lists and employing predictive models, helping to grow the base of support and enlarge the pipeline of mid-level donors.

THE CHALLENGES

Improving an already committed and engaged donor base requires collaboration and a forward-thinking client partner that is willing and even eager to invest in calculated, targeted risks to find breakthroughs. Cornell Lab and S&W continue to challenge each other to find innovative ways to engage the community, increase revenue to the organization and enhance the donor experience.

THE SOLUTION

• **Hitting a milestone** – Achieving the goal of 100,000 supporters was the result of a commitment to build a community of support through a comprehensive multichannel strategy. Working with the Lab and its other partners, we combined an aggressive direct mail acquisition strategy with creative social media, digital engagement and list-building—plus a compelling website that uses technology and interactive resources to elevate the conversation about birds. Building on several years of testing and analysis, S&W focused on increasing volume in direct mail acquisition; selecting targeted lists and employing predictive models to identify the most qualified donors; and developing compelling creative communications to appeal to and convert diverse audiences.

• **Enlarging the pipeline** – Over the past couple of years, we have worked with the Lab to cultivate and expand the Golden-wing Society (GWS), the Lab's mid-level giving program, to both deepen donors' connection with the Lab and enlarge the pipeline to higher levels of giving. Through a consistent, strategic and aggressive renewal, invitation and upgrade cycle; scheduled cultivation efforts; additional appeal and solicitation touches; and online stewardship, we have improved retention for this cohort. Over the next year, additional invitation and renewal touches are planned in order to encourage increased upgrades from the donor pool into GWS and expansion of the overall membership in the program.

